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## RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE

**Rediscoveries: Modes of Making  
in Modern Sculpture**  
Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas  
September 29, 2012-January 13, 2013

*Rediscoveries: Modes of Making in Modern Sculpture*, the recent show at the Nasher Sculpture Center, is glorious. Piece by piece it steals your attention until you find yourself at the epicenter of a metaphorical canopy from which you're unable to escape. And why would you want to? You discover you've been irrevocably placed at the center of things. By "center of things," I mean the show triggers a reorganization of space — the elegant and infinite space to which physicists and shamans refer — and your orientation to it. One example is Richard Long's "Midsummer Circles," which, although constructed in 1993, is primordial. In fact, it's fitting that it's made of slate, a material so ancient that it predates dinosaurs and all but the most elemental of plants. Stated differently: slate is about 600 million years old and, to put that in perspective, Stonehenge — with which Long's artwork shares a great deal — is spanking new, having been erected a mere 2,500 years ago.

When I say Stonehenge and "Midsummer Circles" are similar, I mean they both grant ingress to the metaphorical axis around which all things circulate. This, obviously, is no ordinary event. As part of our glorious human narrative, it extends our experience such that the magical is encompassed in the mundane. Thus, art — especially this art — becomes a venue for participating in hallowedness and, in so doing, all things are made new and the worlds above and below are conjoined. It's the universe showing off and disrobing. Or, in the words of Mircea Eliade, the Romanian historian of religion who wrote in the early 1900s, it's a demonstration of hierophany, a sense of the sacred.

The exhibition proves this can be done in multiple and equally lovely ways. Another example is Richard Serra's "Inverted House of Cards." It cordons off space in quadrants via the use of huge, rusting steel panels. We're given all four cardinal points and, thus, we're remanded into the cosmic order with four new vectors and the implication of yet another center into which to retreat. To articulate the obvious, this is an extraordinary form of geometry; it coaxes us into an understanding of how we occupy the world and how we perceive things in relationship to all other things.

To understand how powerful this show is requires the ability to "stand" some place and be cognizant of what that means. Thus, it's helpful to contrast "standing" or "dwelling" with a term coined by Ortega y Gasset: "topophobia." In "The Tragic Sense of Life" he wrote that we pass our "lives running at top speed from one place to another... which is one of the forms of despair." Consequently, the "running" is a fear of being still with the topography at hand; ergo, it's topo-phobia.

Both Long's concentric rings, rendered from hewn slate, and Serra's steel panels give us the ability to enjoy the not-so-subtle shift from topophobia to dwelling, to dispense

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PHOTO COURTESY OF NASHER SCULPTURE CENTER

**On the Cover:**  
Claes Oldenburg, "Typewriter Eraser," 1976

Henry Matisse, "Two Negresses (Deux Nègresses),"  
also called "Two Women," 1907



with watches and clock-time, and understand that our world is many things — but homogeneous is not one of them. Even the Latinate word for temple means “to cut.” In other words, a temple is a place set apart. Well, so is a museum. And when we’re fortunate enough to see stellar art, it reworks our relationship to the world. It’s a miniature moment of flight, of exodus from the quotidian and, within that moment of searching, lay most everything we love.

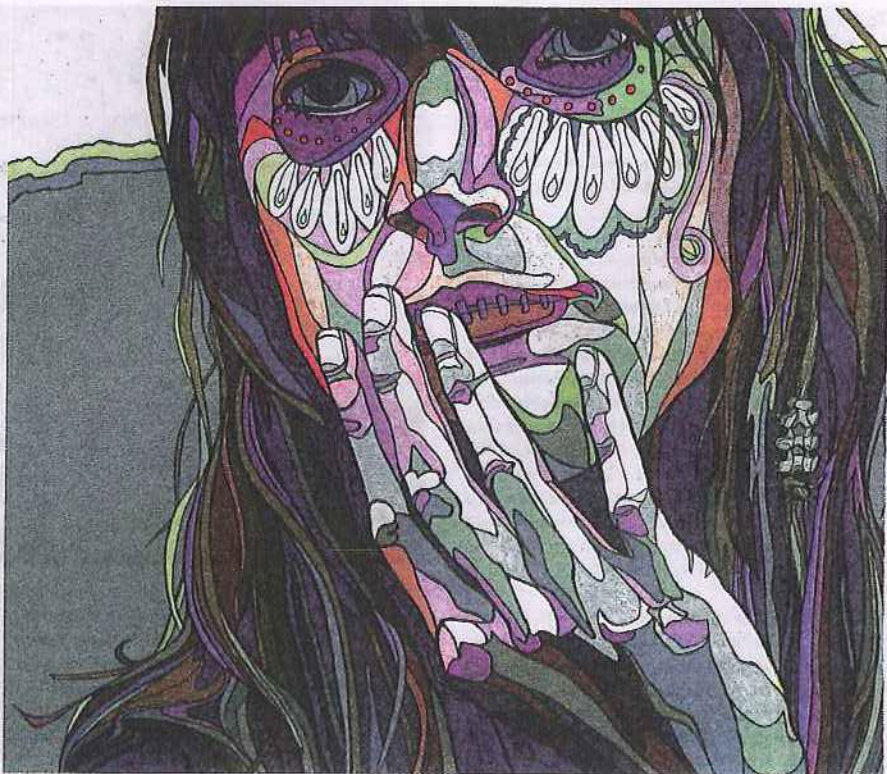
One more (literally) soaring piece in the show is Ellsworth Kelly’s “Untitled.” It’s a pared down and elegantly curved bronze staff that invites a totemic response. It’s tribal. It denotes a place where it seems likely that thunder will strike the ground. It’s also utterly gorgeous and reminds us that to pick a point, to choose a destination, is an act to which the world must acquiesce. Orbits will form and circulate in the spheres that we devise — or those that sculptors devise for us. Again, it’s a direct and geometrical conjoining of what’s above to us below. And the multifarious arcs subsequently circulating and set in motion belong to all of us.

Not all the pieces, of course, are angular. Many suggest the roundness of human forms. One is Jean Arp’s “Torso with Buds (Nu aux Borgeons).” It’s a perfect segue from pieces that invoke a contemplation of space to human-form-as-axis. Its obvious verticality, when juxtaposed with Kelly’s piece, makes it operate on dual levels. It’s, again, a bridge between above and below and the allusion to buds in the title could recall Genesis and the Edenic tree. It swells with meaning and offers an intimation of fecund human life. “Buds,” of course, are about “beginnings.” Again, we’re lobbed into the realm of ritual, initiation and a narrative of space and human habitation. Other pieces include works by Giacometti, Matisse and Naum Gabo. The latter’s “Constructed Head No. 2” was made in 1916 and carries a jolt of cerebral vibrancy delivered with the power of an electric transformer. It’s both eerily mechanistic and phenomenally gorgeous. It’s heavy, yet rounded, and its harshness is mitigated by its gasp-inducing loveliness. It also moves us further down the previously established timeline that begins with archaic considerations to human fecundity to (now) a looming Constructivist head.

The show can be viewed hundreds of ways but one I find interesting is this demonstrable movement from inchoate beginnings toward an increasingly intellectual manner of approaching the world. In fact, we can end this linear syntax with a contemplation of man-made things and their curving or angular shapes. The “Machine” is certainly given its due in the street-end space of Gallery 2.

John Chamberlain’s “Zaar,” interestingly, is a new language (Zaar is a group of Chadic languages spoken in Nigeria) of crushed and colorful metal. He detested being associated with crashed cars and junkyard discards; however, it’s hard to divest yourself of the seemingly obvious. One curator at the Guggenheim paralleled the rise of Chamberlain’s work with what might be termed “mechanical America.” Similarly, Raymond Duchamp-Villon’s “Large Horse (Le Cheval Majeur)” is another venture into the technological era. The natural curvature of a horse’s haunches and neck are morphed into elements of a machine. It exhibits a fascination with beauty in all its aspects, including power and speed. If Long’s piece calms the air surrounding it, this work whips it into a frenzy. However, you’re still at firmly fixed at a center — albeit this time in a storm. Isn’t it lovely?

— PATRICIA MORA



Melissa Hays, “Sigue Viviendo (Keep on Living)”, 2012

**26th Annual Dia de los Muertos Exhibition  
Bath House Cultural Center, Dallas  
October 13-November 10, 2012**

The Bath House Cultural Center at White Rock Lake threw its annual *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) show opening reception and over 600 people showed up. This show, an annual favorite in its 26th year, is one of the longest-running Day of the Dead visual art shows in the country. Sixty artists contributed to the show this year, curated for the fourteenth year by Enrique Cervantes Fernandez.

Dia de los Muertos celebrates All Saints Day and the Mexican tradition of decorating with flowers and altars to remember departed ancestors. The actual altars in the show are some of the most personal and tender pieces. One of my favorites is a small traditional one by Marie Pugh, “Anna” — a butterflies and flowers decorated box with a photograph of a grandmother, beads, and a pair of small white dress gloves.

The altar also gets an update in some work, this year including an elaborate altar (“Honeybee Altar” by Brandon and Susan Pollard and Janet Reynolds) to the Dallas honey bees who lost their lives in the West Nile spraying; “Viva la Pelicula! (Long Live Film),” an imaginative altar re-using old Kodachrome slides and a projected light by Sharon Neel-Bagley; and a funky altar with skeleton troll and Pinocchio figure in Jacques Forsher’s “Jokers, Smokers, Midnight Tokers.”

What would a Dia de los Muertos show without a couple of Poe-inspired paintings? “Vanitas” by Mary “Strange Blossom” Morris is a standout. Morris paints a spiritual skull resolutely resisting the pull of being forgotten in this gorgeous, animated, and colorful abstract. Yoanna

Martell’s “Untitled” is a beautiful oil about the cycle of life, hope, tradition, roots, and soul.

Sugar skull motif, anyone? The show includes a number of great ones with two outstanding and imaginative examples. “Sigue Viviendo” by Melissa Hayes is a sensitive and beautifully rendered portrait of a pensive woman who just happens to be, shall we say, “un-alive?” And Linda Nolan, in a whimsical “Mermaids Remind me of my Dogfish” finds both a sugar skull and skeleton delicately dancing with the kelp in her aquarium.

There are some great sculptures by Dan Dudley, Jan Byron, and Laura Dudley, and a carnival sideshow illustration by Duke M. Horn. Also mosaics, stained glass, assemblage, photography, and a disassembled chair-skeleton by Kate Schatz.

What I admire about the visual art shows at the Bath House is the variety of work shown. From hobbyist to professional and everyone in between, from traditional media to outrageous, from whimsical styles to realistic to contemporary, the Bath House exhibitions truly represent an eclectic living community. Also at the Center this month is a photography show you won’t want to miss: *Lass Blumen Sprechen* (Let Flowers Speak) by photographer Hans J. Schnitzler.

Schnitzler serves as a research photographer for the Dallas Arboretum after a long career in the international hospitality industry. He’s exhibited photographs locally as well as in his homeland, Germany, and in Russia and the Republic of Georgia. *Let Flowers Speak* is an humble title for these vivid photographs of flowers — they sing.

— KENT L. BOYER