The Shape of Time

Michael Flint Buchanan

Bachelors of Fine Art
Georgia State University
1997

A report submitted to the Lamar Dodd School of Art
of the University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ART

Athens, Georgia 2001
The Shape of Time

Michael Flint Buchanan

Approved

Major Professor: Larry W. Hubbard

Date: May 3, 2001
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee for their persistent faith. They have shown me things that I would have never seen.

Larry Millard
David Koffman
Carmon Colangelo
Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii
LIST OF FIGURES iv
PREFACE 1
INTRODUCTION 2
THE WORKS:

PENDULUM #2 5
PENDULUM #3 7
PENDULUM #4 8
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1............. Pendulum #2, 2000, on display at the Georgia Museum of Art.

FIGURE 2............. Pendulum #2, detail.

FIGURE 3............. Pendulum #3, 2000, on display at the Georgia Museum of Art.

FIGURE 4............. Pendulum #3, detail.

FIGURE 5............. Variation on a Theme, 2001, on display at the Georgia Museum of Art.
PREFACE

Concerned with modern detachment, a paradox in the age of communication, I find the nature of the individual insulated; removed from the implications of their own choices and freedoms-being both master and servant to conditions that are constantly changing.
INTRODUCTION

I view the world, created by humans, to be one of shifting realities, completely dependent on choice, action and reaction. It is this that is the foundation of my work.

I present my work to raise questions about the world we inhabit and the implications of the choices that we make. I create my work to formulate questions in the most cogent manner I can. My opinions and aesthetic have been formed by my own experiences and also the work of Richard Sera, Anish Kapoor, Anselm Kiefer, Bill Viola, and Glen Onwin. Although there is a large body of art historical reference for the use of the materials I use, I have chosen them because of their material characteristics, such as strength and rigidity, rather than their art historical context. The objects presented should be seen as allusion, not illusion.

I have created work that should be viewed as installation rather than as autonomous objects. They are meant to be engaged by the viewer on a personal and individual level. I believe that allowing the viewer to engage the work on a physical level gives a stronger, more intimate experience than could be achieved otherwise. The viewer is meant to be made aware of the interactive component through cues of design. One piece might have a handle affixed, which could be interpreted, as a location for touch. In another, a particular action/reaction might only be available if the piece is engaged physically.

-swinging the piece strikes a bell.
My work requires the participation of the viewer to function. I do not include outside power supplies, motors, sensors, etc... to operate my pendulums because I believe that would present the viewer and the space with an autonomous object, an object independent of the viewer, and giving the indication of functioning without the viewer. With these mechanisms I am not attempting to create an illusion of life, such as an object which recognized the presence of the viewer, but a representation of the effects of living.

The interaction and engagement of a multitude of individuals separated from one another by physical barriers - this is the human condition. I need my mechanisms to be dependent upon the viewer, to show interdependence. If the pieces are not engaged, then there is not an artwork, simply an object.

Sound-The path of the pendulum, if traced on a sheet of paper, is of a wave, an oscillation. One of the reasons for the use of sound in my work is that it is a physical implication of oscillation. Sound waves, if graphed, would appear very similar to the path of the pendulum. I use sound to engage the environment around the objects. The sound permeates the people, and objects, and might create a sympathetic response from the viewer. Sound also acts as a constant, which seems to change as the viewer engages the mechanisms.

The actual sounds that are presented are taken from our environment. They are a mixture of naturally occurring radio waves from the atmosphere and the recordings of historical radio broadcasts. The choice of these particular sounds may seem haphazard but reflects the nature of the miasmic energy, which surrounds us constantly. By choosing to include historic broadcasts, such as the announcement of the death of Hitler, along with
radio waves recorded from the planet Jupiter, I make connections between history, space, choice, and implication.

The pendulum is a metaphor for time, time only being real when measured. The traditional western image of time is linear, that the universe has a beginning and an end; the eastern perspective is of time as a cycle, with each end being a beginning. The pendulum is the best metaphor, both linear and cyclic. The pendulum, as it passes through space, traces the path of life. There is the sensation of returning to our origin, living things over and over, but with a finite temporal structure.
Pendulum #2

Suspended from the wall, reaching nearly ceiling to floor, a structure hangs from a pivot. A pendulum, with cross members, triangulated braces strengthening it gives overt references to construction techniques. At the base of this armature is an attached brass bell one foot in diameter, with a speaker set into its center. A cord snakes up from this bell and joins an obvious power source in its journey to the top of this structure. There, one can discern the edges of electronic devices, controlling the sounds emanating from the speaker below. In front of the pendulum is a pedestal, supporting a television monitor and VCR. The monitor shows the pendulum behind it, passing back and forth, never succumbing to the natural forces, which would slow the pendulum to stillness. The pedestal stands directly in front of the speaker, creating a barrier visually and aurally to the structure behind, but occasionally the image of the pendulum on the monitor matches the pendulum behind, as if there was a pane of glass separating the two.

The viewer is faced with a visual choice. The pendulum suspended on the wall is one reality, while the image of that same pendulum on a monitor is another. Both the image of the pendulum and the suspended pendulum are a measure of time, but I want the viewer to be the judge of their validity. Time, being only real when measured, which of these is the true measure?

The speaker at the bottom of the suspended pendulum broadcasts sounds gathered from our atmosphere, old radio broadcasts, radio images of the ionosphere and planetary signals that bombard us day and night. This aural element presents another level of
reality, which exists just outside our level of perception yet still affects us in very real ways. When the viewer actuates the suspended pendulum, the sound shifts its presence in the space, causing the actions of the individual to affect the realities of other viewers.
Pendulum #3

While this piece is movable, the viewer is called into repetitive action as the pendulum. As one approaches the speakers, intersticed within the pendulum, the sounds they had hear begin to break into their component sources. Each “voice” becomes discernable, and so the harmony of the “conversation” becomes lost. In addition to the movement of the pendulum, the movement of the viewer to and from the piece is the desired oscillation that is this piece.
Pendulum #4
(Variations on a Theme)

This work reverses the structure of traditional pendulums and addresses the lyricism implicit in such structural orders. The pendulum supported from the floor, sways delicately across a projected image. The structure of the pendulum bifurcates the image. As it sways it reveals more of one side, and less of another, all the while striking “bells” suspended from the ceiling. The sounding bells signify the passage of the pendulum, and the presence of the viewer. The viewer is also seen in their shadow cast upon the wall as they interrupt the stream of the projected image. This structure acts again as a critique of choices and their consequences, here in the disruption of the video stream by the hand, the gnomon, and the disruption of the silence by the announcing gongs.