I Am the Space Where I Am:  
An Exploration on the Effects of Place and Space

By

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April 3, 2006

Date
Art is a habit of the intellect, developed with practice over time, that empowers the artist to make the work right and protects him...from deviating from what is good for the work. It unites what he is with what his material is. It leads him to seek his own depths. Its purpose is not his self-enhancement, his having fun or feeling good about himself. These are byproducts. It aims solely toward bringing a new thing into existence in the truest manner possible. It is about truth and, as such, has to do with ultimates and, as such, posits self-sacrifice and consecration.1

Over the course of three years I have focused my creative endeavors on exploring the concepts of the internal verses the external, and how these two entities evolve when exposed to the ideas of travel, movement, body, and world. My work focuses on exploring the veil between the exterior action of an individual and the interior thought process of the individual’s mind. I have explored these concepts through the development of wearable structures, vessels, and objects that are used to capture or carry. I view these sculptures as extensions of the body, external documentation of interior thoughts, “baggage”, and life experiences. Just as the individual reveals thoughts through actions, such as body language, my sculptures extend the interior into an exterior form. This concept is based on the idea that the human mind is an expansive vessel, which in turn, dictates our actions through our experiences and the thoughts that we carry. The sculptures and drawings I have produced follow these ideas as a guide or general thesis of thought. In addition to the concepts, each object carries a level of craft, which becomes integral to the outcome of the object. I endeavor to attain a level of beauty in form and craft of each new object, which embody the concepts that I strive to convey. In order to properly discuss the evolution of my concepts and forms it is important to discuss the roots of my exploration.

In the summer of 2003, I, along with two companions, hiked The Vermont Long Trail. The Long Trail is the oldest maintained hiking trail in the United States, stretching three hundred miles from the Canadian boarder to northern Massachusetts through the Green Mountains of Vermont. This experience compounded with my subsequent journey to Georgia for graduate school, increased my awareness of the ideas of nomadic travel, the specificity of place, and how these factors affect the interior mind and the exterior body. I found great inspiration from the physical challenges encountered while on the Long Trail. For one month our bodily actions were driven solely by survival, based on what we carried on our backs and the distance we could achieve on a daily basis. The act of nomadic travel increased my awareness of body and mind. While the body was being exerted the mind could choose its actions. At times the mind and body worked as one at others they were two separate entities, striving for different goals.

My journey to the South was a similar experience, but on a larger scale. The act of uprooting and moving one’s life brought forth issues of a modern nomadic lifestyle. It questioned the importance of place and how we as humans react to different environments both physically and mentally. Working from these two experiences, I decided to create a new body of work with the desire to convey ideas of travel, place, interior, and exterior. I believe that there have been many artists that have found similar inspiration from the act of travel. One artist who I will reference throughout this thesis is Martin Puryear, who stated in an interview, “I think of moving as a saving grace”.² There are numerous literary references I have discovered, which examine the values of movement, place, space, and how these affect and activate the ideas of interior and exterior.

² Benezra, p. 25
One such volume is *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard. Early in the book, Bachelard discusses the merits of travel and the inspiration that follows.

Each one of us, then, should speak of his roads, his cross roads, his roadside benches; each one of us should make a surveyor’s map of his lost fields and meadows. Thoreau said that he had a map of his fields engraved in his soul.³

My own thoughts of travel developed into a group of work that directly dealt with body and mind, the interior and the exterior, which guided me for the next three years. As Bachelard states: “The inversion of interior and exterior is experienced so intensely by the poet that it brings about an inversion of objects and reflections”.⁴

The first group of work that related to these newly discovered ideas was based directly on and around the body. The work strove to enhance the physical body and the hidden mind. In the sculpture, *A Home is Heavy* (Fig. 1), a direct relation to the image of a house and the weight of material is played out. At once the object looked manageable, while at the same time it became a physical challenge due to the weight of the material. It was at the moment that the body became an active participant with the sculpture that the dialog between the mind and body occurred. Building on this concept, I created *Ideas of a Box Man* (Fig. 2), which draws inspiration from, Kobo Abe’s novel, *The Box Man*. This sculpture explored in detail the relationship between interior and exterior, both in the physical and mental realms. The participant of the sculpture was surrounded by text related to the intimate and private space created while wearing it, thus accentuating the separation between interior and exterior. This isolation from the “outside world” engulfed the participant in an interior space. Puryear utilized this play on space in various works, such as *Confessional* (Fig 3). As stated by Margo Crutchfield in, *Martin Puryear*:

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⁴ Bachelard, p. 87
This dialogue between interior and exterior, and the dichotomies between open and closed, visible and invisible, protected and exposed, are at the core of Puryear’s art... In sculptures such as Congessional, the perforated surface is at once solid and porous, impenetrable but partially accessible. With the kneeling stool placed in front of its colossal head, Congessional would seem to encourage self-disclosure and, like much of Puryear’s work, offers not a declaration but an invitation.⁵

My initial body of work culminated in the creation of, The Distance Between Us (Fig. 4). In this sculpture two participates were required to activate the sculpture. Entering the sculpture raised questions of body, sexuality, and communication. The sculpture heightened the awareness of one’s own body, while confronting the mind with the presence of the other participant. In this case, the essence of the sculpture was the interaction of the mind and body. Germano Celant touches upon this when talking about Anish Kapoor’s work:

Rift is transformed into fusion, the body becoming a shining star around which instantaneous radiations of molecules gather to become form and volume. The body being the central theme, the body being the vessel, in which the transformation takes place.⁶

Building on the foundation of these initial body activated sculptures, I began to explore traditional methods of carrying and storing objects. These interests lead me into a fascination with woven vessels and nets.

Having explored wearable objects that implied utilitarian use, I felt it was also important to explore utilitarian objects that implied the act of wearing. I found inspiration for this in the traditional woven baskets used in many different cultures. The basket seemed to lend itself well to the idea of a utilitarian object, which implied the use of the

⁵ Crutchfield, Margo. Martin Puryear. (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Art, 2001), p. 9
body. When one thinks of a basket, its use and scale separates it from other vessels, such as, pots or cups. This idea was supported by the wealth of images that I discovered representing the basket and body. These images became the foundation for my next body of work, starting with a group of drawings (Fig. 5), and then evolved into a group of basket related sculptures.

The first sculpture in this group was, G A P I NY (Fig. 6). In this sculpture the traditional method of weaving was utilized around non-traditional metal frames. The three baskets established a narrative of transportation and communication. The materials woven into the baskets—telephones in the two flanking baskets and maps in the center accentuated these ideas. The concepts addressed were how travel and separation affect the merits of communication. A sense of loss and absurdity is created by the use of the telephones and shredded road maps. There is also the hope that the viewer may attach new meanings to the objects. Just as the viewer was asked to place themselves into the concept of the backpacks, the baskets were intended to encourage the viewers to place themselves into the dialog of the sculpture. By engaging the viewer there is the hope that the sculptures will continue to maintain a life outside of my own concepts. On many levels I am interested in Martin Puryear's approach to these concepts in his work.

In Puryear's art meaning and significance are intentionally ambiguous, leaving it wide open to interpretation. Many of the allusions in his work—to organic or animal forms and to an array of man-made objects such as vessels, huts, nets, hunting implements, and tools—become metaphors for universal ideas and fundamental human concerns. Vessels, containers, or shelters hold or enclose space, suggesting protection, survival, fullness or emptiness, sanctuary, or captivity.

7 Crutchfield, p. 7
I strive to create sculptures that contain, both the specific and the ambiguous. This approach allows me to create a personal attachment to the sculptures, and give them a life beyond my control.

This was an important aspect in, *Early Morning Waking to the Sound of an Alarm* (Fig. 7). In this sculpture, the traditional technique of weaving was combined with metal fabrication and glass slide projections to create a ghostly and dream-like sculpture. While the initial intent of the sculpture was to convey critical thoughts on the ideas of violence throughout history, the sculpture also became a starting point for many different dialogs. *Early Morning*... also branched out from an exploration between interior versus exterior. It became a sculpture that functioned as if the entire focus was on the interior. This was achieved by removing the walls of the exterior (the outside of baskets, etc.), and exposing the interior in both object and concept. The notion of an exposed interior lead me to explore ideas of time, space, and place in the next group of work, which focused primarily on performance and issues of object versus non-object. Martin Puryear once said that he aims...“to activate space while leaving it open. Usually sculpture is more or less closed, secret. I am interested in describing form without hiding the interior space”.

In my performance work, my goal was to describe the interior while activating space through the use of body and object. In this group of work, the ideas developed from the merging of the backpack sculptures and the basket sculptures. My intention was to create a group of performances that raised issues of the specificity of place, interior and exterior, mind and body. I found inspiration for my performances from artists such as, Rebecca Horn, who stated:

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8 Crutchfield, p. 54
The figure provides an instrument of communication for the participants. This central focus, the concentration of everyone’s attention on the body, creates the sense of an initiation ritual. The actual performance is preceded by a process of development in which the chosen performer participates. The performer’s desires, ideas and projections determine the manner in which he presents himself. The “garment” is constructed and made to fit the body of the wearer. Through the act of fitting it and wearing it time after time, a process of identification begins to evolve, an essential factor for the performance. During the performance the person is isolated, separated from his everyday environment, in order to find extended forms of self-perception.9

My performances stress the use of the body, sculptural objects, and after effects. In *Timeline Bookstack 1980-2004* (Fig. 8), I examined issues of the mind, body and time.

The performance consisted of stacking selected books specifically related to my knowledge or past, which ultimately created a column of books that represented my specific height. Each book represented either a personal or historic event from each year of my life. This was intended to raise the awareness of both physical and mental growth. The artifact of the performance was a sculpture that represented the physical nature of my being, as well as the intellectual aspects that have, thus far, shaped my life. In *Timeline*, I attempted to expose an aspect of my interior while creating a physical documentation that represented my exterior form.

Expanding on the ideas of body, object, and place, my subsequent performance included the creation and use of sculptural tools to generate a temporary environment or, as the title states, *A Sense of Place* (Fig. 9). In this work, the creation, documentation, and eventual natural destruction of the “drawing” were all crucial aspects. The performance became a ritual activity, in which I created a discourse on creating one’s own space through controlling and becoming aware of one’s surroundings. The ensuing “sand drawing” referred to topography and Zen sand gardens. Both document and represent

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knowledge of land and space. I found inspiration in the words of Anish Kapoor when he stated:

I began to be very interested in the whole idea of landscape; what is formalistic landscape, what is the energized idea of external space, which is the equivalent to the energized idea of internal space, one of the most important areas is the garden. I began to look at very reduced gardens, of course sand gardens, but perhaps the most important influence was from Persian carpets.\(^\text{10}\)

Once the “drawing” was erased by wind, natural causes and human interaction, the performance then became an experiment in the use of documentation as an art form. This raised questions of preservation and the sacred nature of retaining memories, ideas, and precious objects. In many ways this piece marked a change in direction, leading me to my most recent body of work.

This group of work developed out of a desire to continue my exploration of interior, exterior, and specificity of place and space, while exploring the notions of preservation and growth. The concept of preserving objects and ideas first developed in the sculpture, *A Dollar and a Dream* (Fig. 10). In this work I explored the imagery of containment, vessels, and preservation through the use of blown-glass. The resined nets became a representation of the cerebral mind, while the pennies contained and preserved in the glass became a representation of captured dreams, wishes, and desires. In *A Dollar and a Dream*, I began to explore the conceptual and physical possibilities of blown-glass. I found inspiration in Marcel Duchamp’s, *Air de Paris* (Fig. 11), in which he captured and preserved an aspect or notion of a specific place. I was drawn to the idea that one could preserve and capture the essence of a place within a small fragile object. Building on this, I attempted to create a sculpture that preserved my space within these fragile objects, while creating an environment that protected the glass.
In *A Place to Gather* (Fig. 12), I utilized an interior and exterior relationship, which accentuated the idea of being protected and exposed simultaneously. Here again, the glass became a tool for preservation, building on Duchamp’s ideas from *Air de Paris.* Instead of air, however, I chose to use the earth that I have been connected to for the past three years. The use of Georgia clay became an embodiment of the growth and evolution that I had experienced over the course of my education in the South. Surrounding this earth are woven forms, not baskets, but more reminiscent of the human body. In this sculpture I discovered a way in which I could utilize the concept of a basket, while letting the forms and ideas evolve beyond a true basket. In *A Place to Gather,* the exterior is necessary to create an atmosphere for the interior. As Bachelard states, “The exterior spectacle helps intimate grandeur unfold.”

This notion of an exterior spectacle and an intimate grandeur also lead me to create my most recent sculpture, *The Flower is Always in the Almond (After Bachelard)* (Fig. 13). The title itself is taken from *The Poetics of Space,* in which Bachelard remarks:

The flower is always in the almond...For there is no more compact image of intimacy, none that is more sure of its center, than a flower’s dream of the future while it is still enclosed, tightly folded, inside its seed.

Using this statement as a starting point I attempted to capture this powerful notion of potential and growth, while using the concepts developed from *A Place to Gather* and *A Sense of Place.* *The Flower is Always in the Almond* is an exploration in the potential of growth based on one’s location and place. Half of the seed forms contain Georgia clay, symbolic of the here and now, while the other half contain black earth, symbolic of the past. On both sides the potential for growth exists. The seedpods and earth represent the

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10 Celant, p. 22-23  
11 Bachelard, p. 192
potential of fertility and evolution. Germano Celant talks of the potential of evolution within a void when discussing Anish Kapoor’s sculpture, *Hole and Vessel II* (Fig. 14):

As the locus—the feminine locus—of mystery and enigma, the place where the wonders and secrets of all metamorphosis converge, place of the unmanifest and the unknown, the vessel is the *absolute* space. That void—wellspring and abyss, maelstrom and fullness of being—is presented as the maximum of unknown intensity.  

In *The Flower...*, the use of familiar imagery is pushed to draw the observer into this dialog of growth, change, and place. If the observer of this sculpture can enter into the idea of the seed, then they can allow themselves to explore and imagine the possibilities of the specificity of place and change, as it relates to the earth on which they stand.

Bachelard speaks of these merits by stating: “To give unreality to an image attached to a strong reality is in the spirit of poetry”.  

It has been my desire over the past three years to learn from art, literature, nature, and life in order to evolve as an artist and individual. I endeavor to approach each new project with an inquisitive eye and an open mind. It is my intention as a professional artist to maintain the values and ideas that I have developed and continue to enrich them as I evolve as an artist. Bachelard discusses the values of space and intimacy, and the growth, which ensues when he highlights the poet Rilke:

“Through every human being, unique space, intimate space, opens up to the world...” [Bachelard adds]. Here space seems to the poet to be the subject of the verbs “to open up,” or “to grow.” And whenever space is a value—there is no greater value than intimacy—it has magnifying properties.

As the ideas of space and place continue to influence my work, it is my intention to explore these aspects of our world and draw inspiration from them. I would like to end

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12 Bachelard, p. 24  
13 Celant, p. 27  
14 Bachelard, p. 51  
15 Bachelard, p. 202
this statement on my work with two quotes that I have and believe I will continue to draw

inspiration from in coming years. The first is from the *Poetics of Space* and addresses the

importance of one’s own history.

Great images have both a history and a prehistory; they are always a blend of
memory and legend, with the result that we never experience an image directly.
Indeed, every image has an unfathomable oneiric depth to which the personal past
adds special color. \(^{16}\)

The final quote is taken from Germano Celant, and speaks of the importance of the artist,
in history, myth, and life.

The artist has a central place in the history of culture because he has the power to
give new forms to matter, endowing it with new character. His ability to produce
a continuous metamorphosis of the universe, on a microcosmic but greatly
symbolic scale, makes him an architect, a director, of the generative processes.
His prestige stems from the creativity with which knowing and feeling evolve.
Moving between sign and symbol, the artist connects himself integrally to myth. In
touch with the exemplars and archetypes of history and life, and always inventing
new representations of them, he is an initiate. \(^{17}\)

\(^{16}\) Bachelard, p. 33
\(^{17}\) Celant, p. 1
Bibliography


Figure 1
A Home is Heavy
Steel, Vinyl, Straps
4' x 2' x 2'
2003
Figure 2
Ideas of a Box Man
Steel, Vynil, Text
4' x 3' x 3'
2003
Figure 3
Martin Puryear
Confessional
Wire Mesh, Tar, Wood
77" x 97" x 45"
1996-2000
Figure 4
The Distance Between Us
Steel, Vinyl, Mono-print
3' x 4' x 1.5'
2003
Figure 5
LongTrail #3
Relief Print, Paint
2' x 3'
2004
Figure 6
GAP I NY
Woven Strapping, Used Telephones, Maps
5' x 6' x 2'
2004
Figure 7
Early Morning Waking to the Sound of an Alarm
Steel, Woven Vinyl, Altered Found Objects, Glass Slide Projections
8' x 22' 2.5'
2004

Detail of Glass Slide Projection
Figure 8
Timeline Bookstacks 1980-2004
Performance, Stacked Books
6' x 1' x 1'
2004
Figure 9
A Sense of Place
Documentation of Performance
2004

Detail of Sand Drawing
Figure 10
A Dollar and a Dream
Resin, Fabric, Blown-glass, Pennies
9' x 16' x 2.5'
2005
Figure 11
Marcel Duchamp
Air de Paris
1919
Figure 12
A Place to Gather
Woven Fabric, Steel, Blown-glass, Georgia clay
6' x 5' x 6'
2005

Blown-glass Detail
Figure 13

The Flower is Always in the Almond (After Bachelard)
Woven Fabric, Steel, Georgia clay, Black Dirt, Glue, Varnish
2.5' x 14' x 14'
2006

Detail
Figure 14
Anish Kapoor
Hole and Vessel II
Polystyrene, cement, earth, acrylic, pigment
95 x 163 x 109 cm
1984