

Line, Form, Shadow: an installation by Daniel Clayman

Fuller Craft Museum

Brockton, Massachusetts

May 13 – October 1, 2006

by Michael Cochran

Within the philosophies of both Western and Eastern cultures, duality is thought to be a fundamental component of our existence. It is known to many as, the light and the dark, the yin and yang, and is the eternal balance of life. This duality or internal dialogue can be seen in Daniel Clayman's early glass work and now is particularly conspicuous in his new large-scale installation, entitled "Line, Form, Shadow," in the Alma & Morton Tarlow Gallery at The Fuller Craft Museum. This seventeen feet high sculpture brings the dualistic nature of his work to the forefront of his creative process by separating his familiar singular forms into two large sculptural elements.

In the cast glass sculptures that Clayman created over the last twenty-five years, material has played an essential role. Each meticulous form has been elegant and precious, sometimes soaring upward with grace and simplicity, other times cradled gently in an organic bronze cocoon. In all of his previous works, the dualistic relationship between top and bottom, inner and outer, were represented by glass and bronze and were usually of secondary importance to the elegance of his form and the seductiveness of the materials and elaborate casting processes. His new installation might outwardly appear to be an enormous career departure and yet, knowing Clayman's earlier work, it is definitely seen as a natural progression. By focusing on light as the basic substance of all his cast glass work, Clayman has chosen for this installation another translucent and light-conducting material, trace paper, to communicate the deeper philosophical meaning of his work.

The increase in the scale of his work and transformation of the entire Tarlow Gallery into a large spacial installation utilizing ambient and projected light and two very large paper and wire forms, has enabled Clayman to expand upon the very concept that has always existed in his earlier works; that concept being the duality within the relationships of his forms and the dialogue between their specific materials. In one of Clayman's earlier cast glass and bronze works entitled, "Endure" (2003), the two elements of the form combined to create a graceful, upwardly moving sculpture. The glass radiates from the ambient light while the bronze element remains dark and self-contained. In a more recent work, "Strait," (2006), Clayman actually developed a more overt dialogue within

his work by separating the elements while concurrently creating a small study for his current installation.

Light has remained a constant element in the evolution of Clayman's work and it is a substance that has a primal fascination to everyone. When walking into the spacious cube-shaped gallery, the viewer becomes an interactive participant, feeling the compulsion to walk into the giant cone and become instantly bathed in the warm golden light streaming down from above. By extending the large conical form into the skylights in the ceiling of the gallery, Clayman captures that light and channels it downward through the translucent form. Having the options to move into the enormous cone or remain outside as an observer enables the duality to be played out even further as the experiences inside and outside are quite different.

The curled cone's companion form, a very open spinnaker sail-like shape, is positioned closely to the cone but reaches upward only to the open beam rafters. Clayman has anchored both forms to the floor with curved aluminum bars that secure the paper-supporting cables. Both elements attach at the floor level as graceful curves; the cone tightens its curve inward as it moves upward but its companion unfurls outward until it becomes a flat plane near the ceiling. It is like watching a pas de deux at the ballet as the two elements aesthetically imply their graceful movements... one open and closed, the other closed and open. As in the ballet, the prima ballerina twirls as her male counterpart stands closely to her in support of her beautiful pirouettes.

The basic shapes of the forms are defined by the thin supportive cables that ascend directly to the upper regions of the gallery. Small individual sheets of the architectural trace paper, which is slightly thicker than the tracing paper that the general public is familiar with, are attached to the cable supports using a spray adhesive. Carefully overlapped and trimmed, the yellow planes of paper create a grid-like pattern that maintains a horizontal reference to the floor yet conforms to the upward direction of the taunt cables. The grid is not a predominant element of the forms but provides a subtle and underlying sense of structure and strength that has always been integral to Clayman's work.

Clayman's years of experience as a theatrical lighting designer guided his masterful placement of flood and spot lights to bathe the two forms in soothing supportive light. The ambient light that streams downward from the skylights adjacent to the entry point of the cone is also extremely important to Clayman. That light reflects off the yellow trace paper and, depending upon the time of day and the weather outdoors, coats the gallery walls with constantly changing

subtle color. The proportions of the space have definitely played an important role in defining the shapes of the seventeen and sixteen foot forms and by balancing the light in the gallery, the space plays a stronger supportive role in the presentation of these large objects. Just as a theater director would design a stage to support its players, Clayman has created an elegant theater without being overly dramatic or obviously theatrical.

When artists work with a particular material, it is natural to think of others who also use that material and the phenomenon of light is no different than bronze, marble or even glass. Artists such as James Turrell, Nancy Holt, Maria Nordman and Michael Asher come to mind as their work has focused on light as a specific substance in the creation of installations. Like Turrell, et. al., who draw upon their life experiences to guide their creative endeavors, Clayman's many years of "capturing light" within a glass form have determined a very unique aesthetic direction. His own words describe it most accurately. "I have painstakingly wrestled the ethereal substance of light into this 3-D object." This 3-D object, as he refers to it, is eloquent, heroic, and most of all, profound.