

Oscillating Space: The Art of Terry Haggerty

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“Human beings not only discern geometric patterns in nature and create abstract spaces in mind, they also try to embody their feelings, images, and thoughts in tangible material.” (Yi-Fu Tuan Space and Place. The Perspective of Experience 2007: 17)

Oscillating between two- and three-dimensionality, the paintings of British artist Terry Haggerty play with the surface: Fine lines solidify or move away from each other on the canvas or on walls, becoming narrower towards the margins and thus conveying a sense of depth. In his most recent cycle of works, Haggerty creates objects which rely even more on the principle of spatial illusion. Made from bent metal with an almost perfectly smooth surface, they excite curiosity at first glance. They are bent like strips of paper and display bold vibrations. When approaching the works from the side, they open new perspectives, complementing the first impression with an entirely new point of view. Accordingly, the works present two views, depending on angle and perspective. It is impossible to perceive them fully without moving yourself.

Part I, Haggerty's new work, brings together black and white. While the white back side is curving forwards, the object's black inside is revealed. At the same time, the artwork appears as if it has been twisted along its axis. Due to the processing of the metal, it possesses a distinct elasticity, while the viewers are asking themselves how the spatial effects – the play between flatness and volume – was technically feasible.

Why is exploring this intermediate space interesting? Terry Haggerty's new objects deal with spatial issues. Minimal Art already showed an interest in the phenomenology of space, examining the relationship between body and architecture, artwork and context: “The awareness for specific architectural spatial situations which arose in the 1960s was most consistently developed in the 1970s in connection with the meaning of space as a body of the exhibiting institution.” One of the minimalists, Donald Judd, used reduced, geometrical basic forms made from industrial materials whose frugality represents a particular aesthetic. In his opinion, it must be possible to understand an artwork in its entirety, not just as a summation of various distinct points of view. Clarity, objectivity, order and the eschewal of composition were equally significant, and so were material, space, color, volume and light as aspects of everyday life. Now the elementary role of the viewer and his/her relationship to the artwork have a determining influence on the space: “The act of putting an object in relation to the space and the viewer generates complex structures from which the sculpture cannot be separated as an autonomous object.”

Unlike the presently ubiquitous validations of art-historical standards of the 1960s and 1970s, whose virulence relies on breaching the dogmas of US-American

pioneers, Haggerty draws on the principles of Minimal Art in order to re-interpret them. Perfect and cool, yet with a surprising twist, these objects rephrase the vocabulary of Minimal Art. Haggerty's subtle and monochromatic color spectrum ranges from a midnight blue over a bold shade of turquoise and a warm red to a bright yellow. The colors are unusual in their tonality, lending the works their own presence while synchronizing the white work with the white wall. Moreover, the colors are intensely charged, and can appear to shift the weight of each individual work. By using the colors in a complementary manner, Haggerty is able to produce contrast and increase the spatial effect. Simultaneously, his works explore space and its elasticity, causing the space to oscillate.

In this process, the forms of the new objects have been created against the backdrop of Haggerty's paintings. They developed a physical shape in view of the sculptural and formal concerns which Terry Haggerty observed in his paintings. The artist incorporates ambiguous forms, showing an interest in an intermediate space. He aims to create images of very flat spaces. On one level they are paintings, on another they are objects. The viewer feels drawn to them because of their plasticity as well as the cool perfection of their surface – the ambiguity between flatness and plasticity is intriguing. Haggerty's works straddle flatness and volume; as a viewer, you are attracted to this language of optical illusion and the artist's exploration of three-dimensionality.

The French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre believed that artists had the capability of inventing new spaces. He viewed literature and art as spheres in which new models of space could be developed. In that way, art was able to open new ways of seeing. Artists often make use of forms from everyday life and draw on their own experiences. Through the physical use of space, they store, structure and imagine space. Influenced by the surrealists, Lefebvre adopted the model of the cycle, although to him it is not the objet trouvé that becomes an art object; rather, it is the randomly made experiences of everyday life that are arranged in a new way through artistic production, and thus become the subject. In the tradition of the post avant-garde, Henri Lefebvre championed the idea that art has the potential to transform spaces. Art is therefore the practice and poesis of space. Haggerty, too, is such an inventor. His objects convey the impression that they are alive. Their production was accompanied by some technical difficulties, since the early designs were often based on folded paper, creating a particular challenge with regard to the metal. In time, however, he found a solution to bend the metal into the desired form. Due to their matte surface, the effect of their oscillations is gently intensified. Their contours imply two discrete views, so while moving around the object, the form keeps shifting slightly and an illusive space is established which cannot be fully deciphered.

After all, Haggerty's artworks occupy an intermediate area: by treating surface like a strip of paper, he creates new, often seemingly infinite constellations. The interior space is encompassed by the outer space of his objects. This effect is further intensified through the use of matte surfaces. Haggerty's approach negates the physical properties of metal – its physicality and stiffness – and charges it with tension. In his most recent works, he combines a formalistic language with the simplicity of the object and the play with illusion. Reacting to his questions by making the space oscillate through use of the surface can be seen as a logical continuation of his painterly oeuvre.

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In her practice as an author, critic and curator, Nippe combines approaches and methods from art and cultural studies, aesthetics and European ethnology.