

JACK RASMUSSEN Interviews PATTIE PORTER FIRESTONE Sept. 6, 2011

Jack: I was thinking about all the installations there have been in our sculpture garden, and the different approaches that have been taken. Instead of placing objects in the space, you seem to have been more intent on transforming the space, working with the envelope of the space.

Pattie: The difficulty with that space is pulling people into the space, to get viewers to make that turn to see the third wall. I did not want to fill it too full with “stuff.” I tried to keep it a little more “zen.” But I worried it would not feel full enough with most of the work on the walls.

My work often implies music, so I thought to use sound to help fill the space. Between the bright colors and the sound the objects take on a visual space larger than they actually are. The sound adds to the mix, making it work.

Jack: What do you mean by making it work?

Pattie: I wanted to create the experience of a journey for the viewers, one where they would walk through and experience the space, take a break from reality.

Jack: The addition of music introduces an element of time, but I suppose sculpture already introduces the experience of time as you have to walk around it in order to experience the work.

Pattie: My goal is to have those blue lines pull the viewers into an experience, another world. By calling it a “dream space,” they can let go of their expectations. They do not expect reality. I am very curious to hear what people’s reactions are. In this day and age it’s so hard to get people to slow down. You must find this to be a problem.

Jack: My job is to get people to slow down. I’m not always successful.

Pattie: If you can just get people to slow down and actually look at something carefully. Even other artists have trouble stopping long enough to really look at something and let that experience sink into their consciousness.

The blue twists of steel work in the space as waves of water or music. Those lines in the concrete could be the bars in a musical score. The waves of energy could be quantum strings. I’m very happy with the vibrating blue color of the twists. The twists lead to the “Seismic Shift” on the third wall. It’s not a disaster movie, but rather symbolic. The timing of the earthquake last week was lucky and gave me some free publicity.

“Seismic Shift” represents the subtle shifts going on between the digital age or information age or whatever it is we are living in now and the previous industrial age. I saw an exhibit at MOMA of photographs of the Ford plant back in the 1930’s. The huge

spaces and the reverence with which they took the photographs were like worshipping in a cathedral. The photographs captured a belief in industry and in man-made steel structures that was almost religious. I feel like this new era we are living in now is like “God is Dead.” Big industry is dead. Obviously, we still need industry but we all must adjust. No one is quite sure how this is going to end up.

Jack: where is your work pointing us?

Pattie: I’m probably pointing to the “confusion” period - the shift. When I first came up with this project, I wanted to use shiny metal for the sweeping curves. It turned out to be difficult on that scale because this piece is 40’ wide and 12’ high. I ended up finding a spool of thin recycled stainless steel that required bending and riveting to span those distances. I decided the rivet represented the industrial age. The unintended consequence of the found material repeatedly drilled this symbol into my head with each of the over 3000 rivets in “Seismic Shift.”

Jack: You had no problem playing off the brutality of the concrete.

Pattie: I actually like the concrete. It’s like a blank canvas, it’s all about the sculpture. I like working outdoors because I like working with nature. In this space the sculpture is not competing with nature. Instead, the man-made architecture is the competition. The walls become a calm background for the organic lines.

Jack: That’s the secret of working in the whole Katzen Arts Center. You can’t fight it. You have to take what it gives you and run with it. I think you used the walls beautifully, and the music is an integral part of the experience.

Pattie: Barbara Buchanan composed the music on the computer specifically for the space and the sculptures as seen from my model. The music for the first standing sculpture, *Dreamscapes*, is a journey dream to get people to walk into the space. The second piece, *Storm at Sea*, is more somber as you look to *Seismic Shift*. Barbara says the brass instrument sound travels better in the space than the string instruments. So she had to work with the specific acoustics of the sculpture garden. We worked well together and it was a fun process.

Jack: It is a very successful collaboration.

Pattie: It’s not always easy to collaborate. I have tried, and it’s not often successful. I think it may be easier to collaborate with artists from other fields than with other visual artists. I have been in touch with the AU Dance Dept. about offering the installation as an inspiration for improvisational movement. One of the opportunities of working at a university is the contact with other disciplines. I hope my poem on the wall also adds to the viewer’s experience.