

sculpture

March 2015
Vol. 34 No. 2

A publication of the
International Sculpture Center
www.sculpture.org

\$7.00US / CAN

03>



0 74851 64837 7



LOS ANGELES
Helen Pashgian

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

The darkened rectangular chamber on the entry level of the Art of the Americas Building at LACMA was illuminated by a series of 12 columns running down its center in a straight line. Above each bipartite, gracefully rounded column, two narrow light beams were cast down, turning into a soft glow that emanated out in shifting white to violet-tinged hues. The works featured in “Light Invisible” framed the operating premise of Helen Pashgian’s ongoing research into light and space: the viewer’s perception and his or her active exploration of the work gives it meaning and phenomenological bearing.

Above and detail: Helen Pashgian, *Untitled*, 2013–14. Acrylic, 12 columns, approx. 8 x 1.58 x 1.85 ft. each.

From the entrance, it was hard to see all of the details in the columns. With the surrounding darkness and the viewing angle, they appeared to be almost identical. After entering the untitled installation and walking along the eight-foot-tall monoliths, it became clear that each separate column consists of two fused ovaloid forms, each one embedded with other elements. From the entrance, the columns appear mostly empty, except for the perceived shifts in color from the light; but from the far end, the embedded features emerge in luminous definition, if not clarity. Reminiscent of platonic solids, cones, disks, triangles, and irregular trapezoids float inside the columns, revealing more or less of their physical definition depending on the viewer’s vantage point. The soft edges, defining where the shapes emerge from the light, have an almost surreal quality that underscores one of Pashgian’s contributions to the more generally austere Light and Space movement—her enchantment with color.

The process behind the columns relied on heat casting acrylic sheets onto wooden molds that were then allowed to cool into the various shapes. In contrast to Pashgian’s cast and polished resin work of the ’60s and ’70s, this process allowed her to

work on a large scale, and the milky quality of the acrylic sheets, though lacking the transparency of resin, still permits her to work within the play of light.

Pashgian, like other Los Angeles Light and Space artists, such as James Turrell, Robert Irwin, Mary Corse, Larry Bell, and Peter Alexander, has been working since the ’60s, so it is fitting that she is finally recognized for her unique poetic within the larger historical group. Opting for more intimate and intricate solutions over bigger, more muscular feats, she has focused on the mystery and enigma of color and our discovery through time of how light shifts and passes from one state to another as our observations continue.

The tension between what is in Pashgian’s works visually and what the viewer perceives is part of their beauty; the artist does not provide any clues to her inspiration. We could speculate on why she chose 12 columns or on the origins and the allusions of the embedded forms or even if the peculiar similarity of her columns to a zygote-like shape was ever a consideration. Happily, these projections on the part of the viewer, the casting of a personal semantic halo, do not interfere with the act of seeing Pashgian’s invisible light become manifest. Light is enriched by interpretation, which intensifies the complexity and nuances she seeks.

—John David O’Brien