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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Kenneth Butler for the Master of Fine Arts in Painting presented February 24, 1978.

Title: "Sightings".

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:

Lou Ocepek, Chairman

Mary Constans

James Hibbard

Robert Kasal

The thesis is a description of the concepts and processes relevant to twelve of the thirty-seven works presented for the Terminal Project Exhibition in March, 1977.

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE:

The members of the Terminal Project Committee approve
the thesis of Kenneth Butler presented February 24, 1978.

Lou Ocepek, Chairman

Mary Constans

James Hibbard

Robert Kasal

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Leonard Kimbrell, Head, Department of Art & Architecture

SIGHTINGS

by

KENNETH BUTLER

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

PAINTING

Portland State University, 1978

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I am a creator, collector, and arranger of images, objects, skills and ideas and the two years in the M.F.A. program provided the opportunity to pursue these activities with concentration and direction. Working in a wide variety of media (primarily painting, sculpture, photography, film, and music) kept the direction flexible and experimental. Organization is the key to handling the great variety of information and imagery available from the contemporary environment. My interests are to seek relationships from this collage environment and to create works which reflect the multiplicity of stimulæ. I am continually aware both in my living and working spaces of the visual and functional relationships between objects. The placement of my desk, objects in the drawers and on the surface receive the same consideration as the artworks. Immediacy, efficiency, and simplicity are my concerns in the process of creation. The predominant techniques used in the thesis works were collage and assemblage and most of my materials were light-sensitive.

The thesis proposal included a group of large mixed-media constructions, smaller flat artwork, photographs, and a 16-mm film using mixed materials.

The thesis title, "Sightings", was derived from the process of photographing the works when they were completed.

Of the thirty-seven pieces exhibited in the Terminal Project Exhibition, I have selected twelve to discuss in regards to process and concept as the main body of this thesis.

A detail of a 6' x 15' wall construction entitled "Harmony on the Critical List" is illustrated in Fig. 1. The background was made by contact printing large x-rays on blueline diazo paper, a commercially avail-

able light-sensitive, blueprint-like paper. By using a roll of this paper in the diazo printer, the x-rays can be fed through and re-exposed, thereby enabling the re-printing of the image on the same piece of paper. In this construction two 3' x 15' sections of paper were taped together to form the background. The x-rays produced a shape which was guitar-like. The shape of the guitar resembles the pelvic shape and the fret board is compared and contrasted with the spinal column. A wooden red cross, a crutch altered to suggest a syringe, and other medical paraphernalia interact to create an atmosphere of injury: the crack in the guitar, the bent spines of the x-ray subjects, and repair: the red cross and syringe/crutch. The inclusion of the violin and guitar, both of which I play, serves to infer the therapeutic and regenerative qualities that I associate with playing my music. The composition is complex and functions through juxtaposition of forms with limited color.

Figure 2, a detail of a 7' x 12' construction entitled "Depth of Feel", has a background of brownline diazo paper that has been exposed to sunlight coming through a bank of windows and then worked spontaneously with ammonia (which served as developer and fixer), charcoal, tape, spray paints and inks. Attached are three diazo sections, one of which comes off the wall at a 45 degree angle. These sections are the focus of the composition which deals with spatial and surface illusion. The three-dimensionality of the sections enables the piece to be photographed in many different ways thereby enlarging the possibilities of the illusion. The large scale and the distorted perspective place the viewer in a surreal environment. The title is a play on the photographic term "depth of field", which means the range of focus.

Figure 3, a 7' x 10' construction entitled "Contraption", was created with the intention of adjusting and altering the composition for photo-documentation or film animation. This contraption is pseudo-mechanical and is Rube Goldberg-like in use. The objects imply surveying tools, registration, measurement, and related considerations. Two magnifying glasses, a ruler, a compass, and other devices are easily moveable and are capable of lining up with points on the rear grid or chart. The main unit can be adjusted to fit within the format of any camera lens, thus enabling a variety of compositional interpretations.

Figure 4, a 6' x 9' kinetic construction, called "Hook, Line, and Sinker", includes an altered electric clock with an extended second hand and an attached wooden cross one inch from center. As the second hand rotates, the cross moves in a slow clockwise rotation suggesting wave motion and swells. The large scale enables the viewer to be physiologically affected by the movement. The background is backdrop paper on which paint has been sprayed through a fishnet altered by stretching, creating a sense of underwater space. The piece implies undersea navigation, sonar, and related themes of measurement and exploration.

Figure 5, a 7' x 11' construction entitled "Electronic Music", contains three sections; a brownline diazo background exposed with sunlight coming through the studio windows, a music stand (with its shadow on the background), and an umbrella/kite with a key attached to the handle. The key implies Franklin's discovery of electricity and also a key of music, the empty music stand indicates the lack of a

written score, and the shadow and quality of light imply the gradual, drifting quality of music in the "key of light". An additional consideration is the collapsability of the stand and umbrella which permits easy set-up and removal. This concept applies to all the thesis pieces. The backgrounds of the large constructions roll up for easy storage and the three-dimensional objects dissemble and collapse. The entire show can be stored in an area 6' wide, 9' high and 3' deep. This permits me to work very large yet without being burdened by bulk and handling problems.

Figure 6, a 7' x 8' wall piece entitled "Frame of Reference", is similar to "Contraption" in concept. The frontal component is an adjustable unit of enameled wood strips that can be set to define parts of the surface, to define edges, or to form geometrical compositions. The background is brownline paper exposed to sunlight as in "Electronic Music", but processed with ammonia vapor rather than sprayed ammonia, yielding a more distinct image. The frontal unit also suggests a pantograph or sun-tracking device, minutely adjustable to any section of the background. White lines in the left hand portion of the image are tracings of sun movement recorded at intervals.

Figures 7 and 8, both 22" x 28" diazo collages, are untitled and part of a group of a dozen produced by a similar process. Push pins placed into the flat paper were over-laid with an acetate grid, allowing contact with the paper only in the center. This produced variations in the sharpness of the image and created distortion of the space. A cut-out diazo fragment made by wrinkling the paper, then exposing it to light, was placed on the grid and slightly elevated so that when

exposed to a sunlamp, a specific shadow was cast. The paper was developed and the fragment glued in place. The redline and its shadow implies two-dimensionality while the rest of the composition implies three-dimensions, a visual contradiction. These pieces are concerned with light source, depth illusion, and, unlike other pieces, were systematically planned.

Figure 9, a collage entitled "Try an Angle", was created by a process similar to the two previous figures though a fishnet was used to expose the background. A bronze mesh screen was added that functions as a half-tone screen to increase middle values in the background. The screen also forms moiré patterns on the central triangle which is an engineering form. The surface has been worked with spray paints and white pencil to add richness to the subtle color. The piece relates to imagery generated by machine or computer, but deals principally with spatial illusion as in the two previous figures.

Figure 10, entitled "Luminous Flux", is a 68" x 82" blueline collage, the background of which was made from light coming through Venetian blinds and a plant. The center triangular shape was made by exposure through glass marbles onto the paper. The spray painted center circle acts as a magnifying lens or split-image viewfinder as in a camera. This reference to a camera is intended to comment on the transient state of light captured in motion, its character modulated by time and distance.

Figure 11, a 22" x 28" collage entitled "On Target", consists of a black ground on which has been placed a blueline diazo form made by wrapping the paper around a paintbrush and then exposing with a

sunlamp from a low angle. This yielded a relief image across which was taped red cross hairs which serve as a "sight" or point of reference. In this piece there is a subtle rejection of the brush and of compositional consideration in that all the elements are placed directly in the center.

Figure 12 is untitled and was exhibited in the show as an 8" x 8" color photograph of a 9' x 9' construction incorporating a rheostat-controlled motorized piece on a tripod in front of a black ground. Similar to "Contraption" and "Point of Reference", this piece has a variety of possible functions designed for use in the film. For example, the rotating stick was recorded through time exposures and also provided rhythmic motion. The tripod and stick were used in relation to other pieces during filming to create transitions and define musical passages.

The idea of filming these pieces was a concept present at the outset of the thesis program. The filming is the most efficient way of representing the possible combinations and kinetic capabilities of the adjustable pieces. The film presents the images in their most condensed physical forms as well as providing the greatest variety of compositional interpretations. Through film, I was able to direct the viewer to certain specifics, through variations of size, timing, and framing. The musical score determined the visual phrasing and rhythm as well as adding an extra dimension to the perception of the images.

The Terminal Project Exhibition represented neither a beginning nor an end. The thesis works, with few exceptions, have the po-

tential of continually evolving by re-organization of parts or by re-recording in different combinations on film, either in still photographs or moving images.

FIGURE 1 (detail)

FIGURE 2 (detail)

FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4 (detail)

FIGURE 5

FIGURE 6

FIGURE 7

FIGURE 8

FIGURE 9

FIGURE 10

FIGURE 11

FIGURE 12