

Siah Armajani – 05/05/10

Public Art - 1968-2000 – open, available, functional, public (i.e. Whitney Bridge at Walker Art Center)

Private Art – 2000 – closed, non-available, not functional, personal, private

In Public Phase

- Tried to conceal emotions, angst
- Portray not a false, but neutral image
- We should all try to become famous – then we're all anonymous
- No gap/dichotomy between bridge and landscape; many don't even consider it art; it is functional, not at all metaphorical
- Santa Monica Garden Project
- Wallace Stevens poem – re: Tennessee landscape – no cohesiveness; Stevens places food jar into landscape and realizes landscape then organizes self around landscape – but the jar never became Tennessee – a gap/dichotomy remains in much of Armajani's public work, he feels a gap/dichotomy between piece and landscape usually because commissioners were in a hurry to construct something. The bridge here closes that gap.

In Private Phase

- 2000 decision to stop doing public work any more – instead be free to express personal views, emotions
- Armajani's inspiration in MOMA's Giacometti Palace at 4 a.m. – influences on Giacometti – Swiss Romantic painter, Arnold Böcklin's image of shrouded woman entering island of dead & Russian Constructionist theatrical set; dreamed this sculpture before realizing it; Donald Judd, Robert Morris, others – minimal sculptures were all stage sets – gives more freedom than sculpture

Re: Sculpture in Until Now

- c. 2000 – decided to begin making stage like pieces, so they could be walked around
- This place is closed, but you have been inside this place or a place like it
- You know how to behave in this place
- Poetry, Thought and Language is an important reading; closeness or sensibility to Asian philosophy i.e. relationship between humans and nature; one essay regarding “What is a work of art?”
- See also, Walter Benjamin's essay on The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction
- You don't have to physically enter a familiar space to understand it.
- Borrowed from Giacometti:
 - o 3 doors
 - o Image hanging next to bed – symbol of masculinity in surrealism
 - o Vertebra
 - o Piece of hanging glass
- Some of choices are purely structural

- Figure on platform – Saint Adorno (Theodor W. Adorno)
 - o German philosopher/musicologist; especially regarding music; on Beethoven – enriched with experience as aged, not cynical
 - o 60s theater of the absurd
 - o John-Paul Sartre book – Saint Genet (about writer Jean Genet)
 - o Elevate those mistreated in life to sainthood
 - o 1934 - left Germany
 - o 1949 – returned to Frankfurt and assumed position as professor
 - o Outspoken supporter of Marx
 - o 1969 – died
 - o “Poetry is forbidden since Auschwitz” – Adorno friend of Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, also essay on The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire (You don’t have to read these – just carry them around to look important ☺)
 - o Worst kind of human beings are border guards – criminals in uniforms
 - o Phenomenology of Perception by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (we perceive the world through our bodies)
 - o “My physical dexterity ends with a hot glue gun and a piece of cardboard” I build a model and then they realize it in the studio
 - o The other figure is a self-portrait from “St. Peter Dreaming” – Giotto painting
 - o Space is not an inner experience, it’s an outside identification; empty places around a table or door are not actually empty – they cannot be filled or the door or table will cease to function.
 - o Saint Adorno – Bob Marshall asked how we’re to understand him as an exile – “once you’re an exile, you’re always an exile”
 - o Ended his life successfully

Armajani Background

- Armajani is dreaming of Adorno because he feels he’s an exile
- Iran’s President Khomeini, former minister of culture (1984-85), invited him to Iran in 2005 – after some time he agreed and went
- First 8 years here – spent traveling around organizing students against the Shah
- 9 times to meet with clergy and urged them to set aside Marxist “religion is opium for the masses”
- Iran’s religious minorities:
 - o Zoroastrians
 - o Jews
 - o Christians
 - o Sunnis
 - o State is Sh’ia Muslim country - animosity between Iran/Sh’ia and Sunni Arab countries
- Realized religious revolution was not the revolution they really wanted
- All his life he tried to get rid of Shah
- 1980 – accepted revolution as failure

- 1984-85 – invited him to design a park in Iran – declined because of disillusionment with revolution result
- 2005 – wife and friends encouraged him to return to Iran; didn't visit any places he knew – too emotional/painful to cope with; Tehran has exploded from 1 million when he left and is now 14 million
- Seated figure doesn't have legs – just because – no deeper/intended meaning – they are just not part of the narrative
- Dreaming about something better while other things going on
- Doors locked from inside, yet open on one side – certain ambiguity – but ultimately it's up to the figure to get up and leave, to be willing to compromise and be ready to forget/forgive the past
- Would prefer to not have any labels on his piece
- Whitney Bridge fabricated at Hugo, MN; became friends of former Walker Director, Martin Friedman, over course of bridge project and fabrication
- Liz Armstrong: How do you feel about visitors projecting their own ideas and experiences onto your work? Armajani: “You cast your lots long before you create a piece. You're committed.”
- This piece is last (14th) in a series since 2000; models made 1990 – 1999
- Early American vernacular architecture – silos, barns, farmhouses, covered bridges – have had a great deal of influence on my work; no ambiguity about them, as soon as you enter space, you know how they were made and why immediately
- Walter Gropius visit to US grain elevators – writing to Le Corbusier – used examples of form and function; ambiguities in construction create headaches in ideas
- Next series “Tombs” – 9 of them; 1st will be for St Augustine