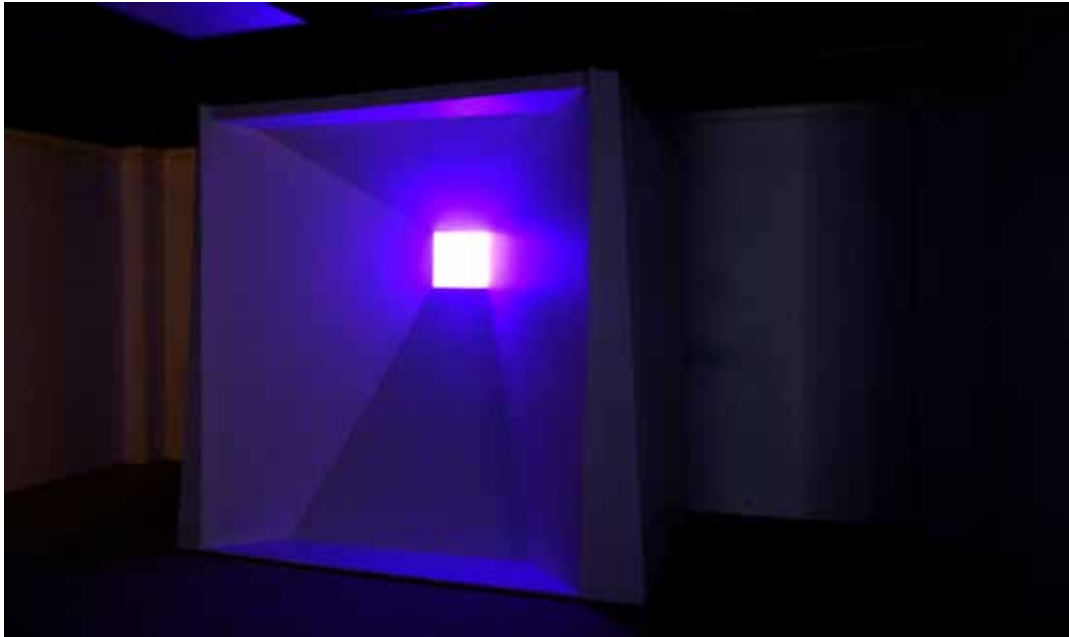


David Abir: Dreaming in Light and Sound

By: Renée Fox



Renew, Reflector, 2011-2012. Mdf, drywall, wood studs, plywood, joint compound, plaster, satin acrylic paint, custom led system, Polk audio speakers, qsc power amplifier, 4 channel sound mixer, ipod, SR minute music composition. 120x 240x210cm. Courtesy of the artist & Shulamit Gallery.

Fascination with light has been a basic human experience since the beginning of time, by observing the passing of night and day and planets and stars in the night sky. This otherworldly experience of light inspires us to think from within and outside of human existence, and dream what could be.

When I met David Abir, I was immediately taken in by his outgoing, youthful personality. An intelligent playful light danced behind his eyes revealing an artist who finds inspiration everywhere he looks. It is no wonder that this work reaches out in the same effortless way and provides such a generous, all encompassing experience. Abir spoke quickly and excitedly about his work. On his MacBook he shared beautiful three-dimensional digital drawings of the planned layout and explained how a new installation consisting of a built environment was like smoke and mirrors in its transformation of a space. After absorbing images of his work, drawings for the new installation and Abir's emotive explanations I yearned to have my own experience of

the installation. Abir's "smoke and mirrors" are akin to a painter's paint and canvas or sculptor's chiseled stone, the methods artists use to communicate their ideas. Abir uses geometric minimal constructed forms to create architectural settings where upon colored light which shifts in unison to manipulated classical musical compositions and sound are refracted. The effect is a transcendent experience. California's history of light and space artists Dan Flavin, John McLaughlin and James Turrell are Abir's contemporaries who also challenged traditional material commercial art making techniques and materials. David has produced music and sound installations in collaboration with several artists, including Doug Aitken, Alfredo Jaar, Shirin Neshat and Shahzia Sikander. The sculptures Abir creates follow the form of the inner ear, mimicking the human perception of sound. Like a well-composed soundtrack, the sound and acoustics in Abir's sculpture are seamless within the built structures, and a complete, yet paradoxical picture forms. Materials, sometimes

physically tangible, sometimes not, are used to create very real, describable experiences, all generated by an intangible idea. Curator Jessica Hough explains her experience as though entering a time machine: “A viewer will enter through a narrow passage which opens into a larger central space. The space then tapers again into a narrow passage that ends with a reflector, which bounces both light and sound into the space. The whole experience is likely to be both pleasant and disorienting, as the cycle of music and light, in combination with the unusual angles of the space, transport us from the world outside into an altogether different environment.” The magic of this experience is that even though it can be felt and described, in any given situation, different people will experience it differently. Abir appears to be the type of artist, the type of person, for whom the one dimensional experience falls flat. The spirit of Abir's work is an unforgettable experience that references the layers of his mixed Iranian/American heritage. Abir was conceived in Iran and born in 1969 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where his father, a medical doctor, had received a fellowship from Children's Hospital. Until 1976, the Abirs had summered annually with David's grandparents in Tehran, and traveled all over the country. “My heritage plays a definitive role in my work. My earliest memories are from being in Iran. My sense of awareness was formed there: The culture was so rich in terms of food, light and music, the warmth of being in a large family. It definitely felt ‘deeper,’ and in hindsight, was the side that affected and formed me the most”.

Works like Abir's walk-in light and sound installation *Tekrar* reference Abir's experiences of Iran. *Tekrar* comes into focus as a fictional monument, seen through a historical and archeological context. The installation and sculptures are constructed of slanted vertical surfaces that Abir uses to communicate the idea of ruins that are in a state of excavation. Symphonies from Western Classical composers like Beethoven, Bach, Haydn and Vivaldi are appropriated and coded it to the layered non-repetitive tempo of classical Persian music. The facets shape of his sculptures further shape the sound to the point where sound, light and structure become an immersive experience that support and inform one another. Abir states that his musical

influence was formed by a combination of Western classical and traditional Persian music that was played consistently in the background of his home life. “As Western classical music provides the various colors needed [for my work], the depth of Persian music, and its meditative and deeply moving sonority, is my main influence, as well as the culture I define myself by” says Abir. Certainly, His process of combining elements of western classical music and classical Persian music must create cognitive connections between the two formative cultures for Abir.

Abir's interdisciplinary approach reveals his passion for music is its effortless ability to communicate. Abir's concern in the therapeutic value of his work is an interest inherited from his father. Sound art's history is shared with that of experimental music and with contemporary visual arts, linking Futurism, Dada, Fluxus, Bauhaus, Post-Modern and Relational art. In the works and lectures of John Cage, partially under the influence of the teachings of Zen Buddhism as well as of the painter Robert Rauschenberg, conceived of no difference between noise and music, proposing that everyday sounds are as worthy of attentive listening as any composed piece of music. Abir admits that although he was originally drawn to music, he realized it wasn't the full message he wanted to convey. He suggests that the work is about the quest for nirvana. Interestingly, feedback of the work has been found to have healing properties. Leading neurologist from a lime disease clinic in Connecticut used one of his sound sculptures in his study of neuro-feedback treatment used in brain lesions and ADD treatment. In a double blinded test, sitting in front of the sculptures for 10 minutes was more effective than a 35 minute neuro- feedback treatment. The brilliant abstract painter Mark Rothko, who worked with the effect of light with colour had similar ideas, that art could effect life and offer experiences that transcend the impact of daily physical experience and inspire us to dream beyond.

About the Writer

Renée Fox is a Curator and Co-Director of Shulamit Gallery in Venice, California.

We would like to thank Shulamit gallery in Los Angeles for their support in providing us the material needed for this article.