LIGHT, SPACE, & TIME

The essential elements of our perception of the physical world are light, time, and space. Most obviously, all we see is a function of light. Time is measured by light traveling through space, and space is established by the distance light travels in a given time period.

Most of what we perceive in a painting could be considered a function of one or more of these elements:

**LIGHT**: The illusion of color, form, space etc. is a result of the manipulation of the perception of light. Consider: What are the different qualities of light at different times? How is light registered differently on different forms or different atmospheres? How does it feel? What are the metaphorical possibilities of light? What is spiritual light?

**SPACE**: Within the picture frame, the illusion of space is one of the more dynamic elements. But, we should also consider the space (literal and metaphorical) that exists between the viewer and the painting -- the physical and conceptual framework.

**TIME**: An illusion of time within the framework, within the picture, affects our reading and response to the picture. Is there time within the painting as narrated by the imagery, by perceived actions and/or movements through the picture space? Is there a sense of a "place in time" as indicated by the painting's style? Beyond our picture plane, the context/framework is set in the immediate present. In what time is the painting set? What is the relationship of context to content?

Throughout the semester we will consider these elements (directly and indirectly) as they relate to painting.
1. LIGHT

Everything about your painting is dependent on the way you manipulate light. Always, light will be present as a formal element, otherwise we wouldn't see anything in the painting nor have much spatial illusion. Light can play a more substantial role, however, by evoking mood, acting as metaphor and by being the subject as well as the modifier in a painting (consider the Impressionists, the Luminists, or more contemporary artists such as Jane Dickson, Stephen Mueller.) No light (Ad Reinhardt) or flat light (Phillip Guston) are also powerful qualities of light in a painting, if appropriate to the content and meaning of the work.

The key here is to approach the development of light (in whatever form) as a critical aspect of your painting. You need to manipulate more consciously the light in your paintings--this is tied to color and value- and consider its impact on mood and meaning and choice of subject matter.

SEE:
* Focused Pallette Project
* Light Project

2. SPACE, SCALE, SIZE

**Space**

Space can exist within a painting -- an illusion of space: cramped, active, expansive etc. You establish the depth and breadth of the space by manipulating light, form, paint etc. within the painting and by determining the relationship of those elements to the edge of the canvas. The edge of a painting is an important element in determining the boundaries of spatial illusion. The edges of the canvas can be viewed as the edges of a window through which you look into the space. You can create the illusion that space extends way beyond those edges or that it is contained within the frame.

As well as moving space beyond the edges and deep within the painting, you can also choose to flatten it toward the surface thereby reaffirming the picture plane. Once you flatten the space, the surface becomes dominant, and the surface is read as a shape defined by the edges of the canvas. No longer do you have an illusion which denies the surface plane of your canvas. The painting can now be seen as a thing-- a square, a rectangle, a circle etc. -- an object. Consider what the relationship is between subject matter and content and the shape of your canvas.

In considering this edge/frame, we should consider the size, scale, space, shape of the canvas (and even whether we should use canvas), and examine these elements in relationship to what we are trying to communicate. In this way we do not take the canvas for granted. Instead we recognize that the relationship of viewer-to-canvas-to-image is an important one. We see that there is a dynamic relationship beyond the edges of the frame as well as within
Scale & Size

Scale becomes a component of space, as scale helps establish spatial relationships. Scale implies a relationship. You can change the scale by changing the relationship of: image size to image size, image size to size of the picture plane, image size to human size. Obviously, since scale can be established in relation to the size of the picture plane, we need to consider the size of the picture plane as an active element that interacts not only with images within but also with the viewer outside.

We tend to use ourselves as a standard of measure. Shifts away from a conventional norm or physical norm have impact. Consider: the effect of large objects next to small, small items in a very large frame; a vast landscape in a small frame; a painting 2 stories high; a 10' painting with 2" images etc. If you work on a large painting and have small scale images, what are the implications of this large size/small scale relationship? What kind of space does that create? What is the relationship of size of canvas to body of the viewer? Does it envelop the viewer or does the viewer envelop it? What does it mean if a painting is very small? What does it mean if you are forced to move up close to read a painting or if you are forced to move far away? How can size/scale be manipulative? Should space and scale be neutral in relationship to the viewer (i.e. everything in harmonious proportion) or dynamic?

SEE: 
Alternative Material/Format Project, version 2

3. TIME

(a) Inside The Frame

Paintings (as opposed to film, music or even sculpture) are fixed. You see everything at once, beginning and end simultaneously. In the painted world then, what creates time?

There are many ways of approaching time in a painting:

- Is it a literal reading of the representational illusion in a painting (i.e. time of day, morning for example)? (Monet landscape, Eric Fischl).

- Is it a frozen moment-- a still-life for example? (Gordon Cook, John Sparagana).

- Or can time become active, expansive? This can be achieved through the illusion of movement, motion in the painting.

In the physical world, time is a function of light moving through space. You do not have time unless you have movement. In painting this motion may come through following the illusion of representational actions (a man falling, a nude descending the
staircase), through the implied movement of repeated shapes (Matta), through changes from light to darkness and the time implied following this change (Chris Brown, Caravaggio). Through narrative, too, time can expand beyond the confines of literal action on the canvas (Sue Coe, Eric Fischl, Bosch).

In a narrative painting, there is a sense that something is happening, has happened and/or is about to happen -- action, activity, movement through time. If your audience has a shared history, a common mythology, illustrating one moment may trigger a response to fill in the whole story. The narrative could be illustrated by activity B on an implied continuum of activity A to-> activity B to-> activity C. Or, the narrative could be created through a more abstract montage of images from various times within the complete narrative.

SEE:
Inventive Approach Project
Narrative Project

(b) **Beyond The Frame**

So far, I have referred to time as something that can be represented by imagery and actions within the painting, within the frame. We can look to implications of time in a more expansive way by examining the framework/context outside the painting and the painting’s relationship to it.

Paintings are created during a fixed point in time and are always seen/experienced in the present. Because paintings last for hundreds of years, the dynamic between the time a painting is painted and the time it is seen changes radically. The current political, artistic, social, physical climate may be very different from the context in which the painting was made. Indeed, the role and place of a painting may have changed dramatically from when it was made. In what way is the meaning/role of the painting affected by the painting being seen outside its original context? For example, consider religious tableaux which have been removed from the churches and placed in museums. In what context (physical, conceptual) do you want your work to be seen? How does it affect the meaning? Does it matter that your work is going to be seen in an ever-changing context?

Often paintings can be dated through the examination of their style, technique and content (literal, conceptual). Painting has been commonly used to illustrate contemporary conditions and concerns. One of painting's broad roles has been to communicate about the times in which they were made - to record, illustrate, and comment on conditions at that time. What happens to the vitality or significance of a painting if it refers to events occurring one hundred years ago? What distance does history create? Does this distance make the painting more acceptable now than during the time period it was made?
(b) Beyond the Frame, contd.

Think about controversial artwork today, how will it be viewed in 50-100 years (Serrano, Sue Williams)? What does it mean if we are more willing to collect and support art from the past than to support contemporary work?

Does contemporary art need to address, on some level, in some way, the current life condition, the current needs? Is art, in the traditions in which we know it, capable of this role?

Do paintings still communicate? And if so, what and how? If the content of a painting is contemporaneous should the style be contemporary too? How do we read paintings created today that use/appropriate styles from the past?

For some, the need to involve art in contemporary life leads to political art. Can art be political? Can art be apolitical?
For some, art speaks only about art. Is that enough?

SEE:
Appropriated Imagery Project