

Images to Infinity

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Taking a conceptual approach while fusing rich textures and content to make sumptuous imagery, Michael Pinsky has developed a particular style of work which reconfigures that of many of his predecessors and yet maintains a contemporary essence. By deliberately subverting the rules of the landscape genre and by making visible the temporal factors in photography in relation to real time, Pinsky creates a space-time compression which inverses our largely forward linear approach to these issues.

Transparent Room marks an ambitious departure in the technical nature of Michael Pinsky's work, but it remains firmly rooted within the systems-based series looking at the representation of space and time as characterised by his previous work. Using video projection to describe a 3-D space, Pinsky transforms what is essentially a white cube into an X-ray of the space beyond the walls, floor and ceiling of the exhibiting gallery. This piece is touring extensively and is site specific in that the artist documents the exact locations outside each of the exhibiting venues.

A running theme in Pinsky's work is to make visible the invisible by choosing imagery or graphic representation of motifs which would be overlooked in another context. By documenting the ordinary spaces and landscapes outside of the gallery, *Transparent Room* is no exception to this. This piece also emphasises Pinsky's interest in space-time compression - 24 hours of events, mostly ambient, outside the gallery space are documented and compressed into 15 minutes of real time. The viewer sees the outside events significantly speeded up as clouds, everyday features or people hurtle through the landscape, interior or skyscape. These images are what could be seen through the video viewfinder while filming. The next sequence zooms into the image and shows a close-up during which a day is compressed into 7 minutes and 30 seconds. Next shows a texture from the close-up which lasts for 3 minutes 45 seconds and finally the image becomes purely a swathe of colour lasting for 1 minute 52 seconds. At each sequence the compressed space of a day is halved as the image becomes more and more enlarged. Time is compressed and space is expanded.

An important component of *Transparent Room* is that it also implicates the viewer as part of the work. This is true of all Pinsky's work, but the immersive quality of the 3D space makes this even more accentuated. The viewer is transported into a space where time is compressed, and the image is being gradually projected at an increased scale. If the viewer stays in the space for the full duration of sequences s/he, like the crew in *Fantastic Voyage*, becomes gradually miniaturised until they are effectively the size of a pixel when the image is reduced to colour only. In the piece *Deceleration* (figure 10), which is closest in character to *Transparent Room* in relation to the rest of Pinsky's work, the audience is implicated through time manipulation of the image again. The work consists of three screens; the first of these shows speeded up imagery of Liverpool Street Station. The second is a projection taken by a hidden camera filming visitor to the gallery space, the image gradually decelerates so that visitors see themselves slowing down on screen. Finally, on the third screen an aerial view of the sea is projected at one fifth speed so that it looks like sludge. The audience is obviously an integral part of the piece but, like *Transparent Room*, *Deceleration* also looks at our relationship with the environment, scale and passage of time.

On first glance in both *Transparent Room* and *Deceleration*, the reading of the work could be quite literal in the sense of our relationship with the urban and rural and the perceived speed with which we engage with both environments. The reading of the work, however, goes well beyond this as an

investigation into the Romantic notion of the figure in the landscape as well as a formal approach to photo-graphic production. By implicating the audience in the sense of placing them as a part of the piece, they literally become the figure in the landscape but not a heroic one at odds with nature in the Romantic tradition. Nor are they figures placed within the genre of the picturesque. The landscapes produced by Pinsky are technologically mediated ones and the viewer is placed as the intermediary between the real space (the gallery) and the projected landscapes. Instead of being at odds with nature, the viewer is implicated as the ambivalent component between the simulation and the real.

The introduction of the moving image into Pinsky's work has created some unintentional readings of the work which relate to an everyday engagement with people's perception of real and simulated situations. In the three series *Stripes* (figure 9 and 11), *Wall Stripes* (figure 8) and *Passage Stripes* (figure 7) the artist used still photographs taken from the observation of people meeting and engaging with a public art piece by Daniel Buren in Palais Royal, Paris over a day. Mostly the images were of children playing, couples meeting and people picnicking. On entering the three installations the introduction of people into the work could be seen as voyeuristic.

However, the main focus of this work as with all of Pinsky's to date is to compress a long time frame into a gallery space and visualise it. The various *Stripes* series was no exception. This was the first time Pinsky had introduced the human figure into his work - but the implications of the actions of the subjects were almost irrelevant. They were sculptural forms using the Buren artwork as plinths. It was the temporal element of the work which was central to its reading.

By default, in *Transparent Room* and more explicitly in *Deceleration*, the human figure is present in the imagery of the work. It is possible to read these images in relation to surveillance and in the case of *Transparent Room* even as a panopticon. However, the images are purely a document of an environment, some of which happen to have people in them. The content of the work is not a commentary on surveillance - it is a cool document of what happens to be in the image and ultimately the only human figure implicated in the reading of the content is the viewer. These pieces are about the disenfranchisement rather than the empowerment of the viewer. The image is always in control of the viewer rather than vice versa.

Pinsky's work deals directly with a range of outdoor environments and brings them into the gallery. There are potential references to the work of Richard Long in the artist mediated photographs of *Signals* (figure 5) and *As the Tide* (figure 6). However, once again these series of photographs represent a passage of time and allude strongly to the ephemeral nature of the mediation of the landscape. This can be seen quite literally in *As the Tide* when the sea washes progressively over the representations of time. There is no sense of the artist making his mark on the landscape in these works as has been observed of Richard Long's walks. Pinsky's work is far more clearly located within the series-based works of conceptual photographers such as John Hilliard or Keith Arnatt. The piece *Waterdrop* (figure 4) is perhaps the most formal representation of time and most closely aligned with conceptual photography. Here Pinsky photographed a water ripple and printed its progression on to sheets of perspex which were then suspended in line in the gallery space. The distinguishing feature of Pinsky's work over his conceptual predecessors is one of a pluralistic approach to his aesthetic. Art is no longer the referent - the site, the context and the relationship of the viewer to the representation of time are the key issues in reading the work.

All Pinsky's work to date deals with the representation of the characteristics of an environment in relation to the exhibiting space. There is a strong yet paradoxical correlation with art in public spaces and his series of works shown in the gallery context. Most literally, this can be seen in the three *Stripes* series where Pinsky uses Daniel Buren's public sculpture as a central focus to the work. In this case he

is literally appropriating a public artwork for his exhibition. *Transparent Room* brings whatever is outside the venue into the gallery space. Hence it could be read as a public artwork within a gallery.

All the work is sensitive to the space in which it is exhibited, and Pinsky has adapted the pieces to fit particular spaces. There are three different versions of *Stripes*, and *Transparent Room* has a new set of images shot to correspond with each venue. *Time Spiral* (figures 1, 2 and 3) is one of the few pieces to be exhibited outside of a gallery space. The work was exhibited at Blackthorpe barn in East Anglia. Given its age this space has a strong temporal resonance and presence. The projection of numerals to represent time on to a largescale spiral of white triangular projection screens alludes to fragments of time within the building's history.

Pinsky's work, although photographic and sculptural, does not focus on the production of an object. All the pieces function as environments which integrate the architecture of the space whether a gallery or a mediaeval barn. Individual elements of the work cannot exist discretely, or the meaning of the work is lost. *Transparent Room* perhaps represents the most holistic pieces in relation to this approach. The six planes in the cube of projections with their different timespans and representations of the image outside the gallery take on a complex intertextuality relating to passage of time, history of art and photography and the viewer's relationship with technology, the landscape and the mediated image. As a viewer stands in the immersive space, they are reminded of their own presence in the landscape. They are also taken through realism to abstraction in the form of the continuous enlargement of the image. If a viewer stays in the space for the duration of the sequences, they are reminded of the concepts behind painting such as Abstract Expressionism. The Colour Field painters literally abstracted the landscape to pure colour and using video *Transparent Room* applies the same technique.

Pinsky's work is hard to categorise and operates outside of a particular grouping of artists. It takes on its own positive style and aesthetic. Much of the approach is based in the modernist tradition but Pinsky avoids all the pitfalls associated with this by introducing a responsibility on behalf of the audience and by making subtle historical references to other genres in art. *Transparent Room* may seem like the ultimate conclusion to Pinsky's experiments with space-time visualisation, but as has been demonstrated in the scientific arena there are often surprising alternatives to investigate.

Transparent Room

A book documenting the touring video installation *Transparent Room*.

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