

Time, Silence and Motion

Robert C. Morgan

Ancient stones tell their story. In them we discover inscriptions from the past, and perhaps, a feeling of estrangement and isolation. The stones resonate with hope and hopelessness, the echo of silence and reverberations of light. The latter theme is an important one. The poet Cavafy suggests a kind of tyranny in light. A line from one of his poems reads: "Perhaps the light will be some novel tyranny/ Who knows what new things will show." Here Cavafy does not refer to stones, but to windows – openings or apertures that allow us to see through into another space, into another world of perception, a new dimension of time.

In a life-size drawing installed in two panels by the artist Pelagia Kyriazi, one may discover an interesting paradox. On the surface of the larger panel, a male nude is seen from the dorsal view confronted the stone steps before him. The visual rhythm of the steps – inspired by the famous Pergamon Altar, transported from Asia Minor to Berlin more than a century ago – holds a nearly hallucinogenic effect. Within this unusual architectural context, Kyriazi's male figure appears in a state of noble trepidation. His desire is to climb upward, and thus, to regain a sense of himself.

As a complement to the drawing, Kyriazi made a video-projection, entitled "Tyranny of Light" – a montage filled with overlays of images taken from the drawing, combined with other images and digital brushstrokes. By manipulating the stone steps through digital time, and by contrasting them with a view of Venetian blinds, a strange visual metaphor begins to emerge. Suddenly the hard obdurate stones – fraught with historical memory and conflict - are transformed into a source of light.

In viewing Kyriazi's projection, we may ask whether the mythical figure in the foreground is searching for light or whether he is ascending upward to the stone terrace at the top? Is he Apollo or Sisyphus? Orpheus or Prometheus? Is he on a path toward the discovery of truth or is he doomed to repeat the same solipsistic journey over and over. We don't know. But there is certain mannerist intensity about his pose as if he were caught within time. Kyriazi's "Tyranny of Light" functions as a kind of animation, a study in the transmutation between one form and another. There is a deliberate ambiguity between the metaphor of the stones and the symbolic content of light. Immediately one is struck by how the artist has altered her classical forms and recycled them into a kinetic structure that resembles Analytic Cubism. Kyriazi reveals the shifting umber planes, the momentary response to time and space, and the facets of light congealing into a single instant. Clearly she is aware of the Cubist method in the way that objects are discerned from various angles. In addition to her formal integration of images, Kyriazi's soundtrack includes a selection of music from the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen with a voice-over reading of Cavafy's poem.

In "Tyranny of Light", the conflicting elements of stasis and kinesis constitute an underlying theme throughout the video. In many ways, the video is a direct response to the drawing. Together they articulate the need to get within time as a release from those anxieties that distort our perception of reality. Indeed, Kyriazi's work is about two of the major components of time: silence and motion. The interplay suggests balance as if through balance one might sense a feeling of hope in uncertain times.

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