

Sebastian Hempel

Though his work substantially deals with the phenomena of light, space and time, velocity and sound, perception and motility, it is in the manipulative investigations born of an “experimental play” with these issues that the essence of Hempel’s work resides. Therefore the nature of curiosity, problems to be solved, puzzlement and subsequent discovery, are integrated into his sculptural and spatial undertakings from the very beginning, “in my opinion, the study of fine arts exists for the purpose of finding out what your interests are.”

But to mention play inevitably alludes to pleasure and fun, to the artist’s optical games as well as the spatial actions he provokes, and it is at this secondary level that we find both humour and wit are applied. His developing of human sensory experiences of either of an optical or aural nature, mediated through a motile and spatial impulse, is an omnipresent feature found within all his works and installations.

While kinetic art has had a long development history throughout the twentieth century, driven by the twin characteristics phenomenological perception and/or the dynamics of movement, this should not blind us to the fact that increasingly revolutionary models of optics still remain fundamental to our developmental way of seeing. Visual stimulation, optical deception and its meaning(s), arguably still shapes our engagement with the world. This remains true whether it takes the everyday form of special effects in film, most often an illusionary manipulation where the viewer is stimulated in a passive state, or in the more direct or participatory pleasure experienced in the kinetic-spatial works of Sebastian Hempel.

That which is static but subsequently moved, or conversely expressed, how different forms of movement trigger things from their static, has always been pursued by Sebastian Hempel. Hence the work physically moves the viewer and incorporates them into the phenomenal process (they remain physically still but are moved), as against the detached optical processes of a viewer merely observing an effect.

Objects exist in space but their experience consists in and through time. The application of small hidden motors is a common practice with Hempel (motors exist in space but they operate through time), and can take many forms sometimes being turned to quite conceptual effects. However, rather than considering the accelerated aspects of velocity and motorisation, Hempel is more concerned with the way small motors can be varied and applied in terms of their speed and settings. It is less a question of the exhilaration of speed, and more a question as to how variable speed effects are able to change our perception.

The role of sound and light in both optical and physical disorientation, that is to say the creation of sensory confusion, has always interested Hempel. Hence sound is often incorporated to challenge the primary status given to the visual within the processes of

perception. Sound challenges that which is seen and presents a truer sense of natural simultaneity of the senses at work in our experiencing of the world. Not surprisingly it is also linked to colour, for as has been frequently observed colour can only exist in light – no light equals no colour, and an excess of light leads all colour into the void of whiteness. Thus Hempel's recent works have shown a marked propensity towards the matter of light and colour.

What this supposes as has become increasingly evident in Hempel's work, is that he has mastered and developed the three-dimensional concerns of space, but allied them to the sensory phenomena of light, time and perception. Hence wall, floor, and ceiling, are all as one in the mind of Hempel, and the advances he has made in terms of technical accomplishment is closely linked to an increasing understanding of the complexity of both installation and presentation.

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