

## Samadhi: The Contemplation of Space

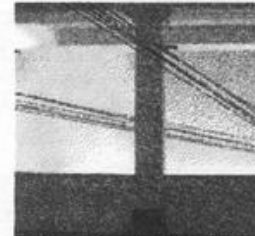
Robert C. Morgan

The Sanskrit term "Samadhi" is often used in Zen Buddhism to describe the condition of meditation in which the focus of concentration resides in the undivided self. (1) One Chinese scholar, Garma C. C. Chang describes the experience of Samadhi as "putting things together" or "the union of the mediator with the object meditated upon." (2) In visual terms, Samadhi may allude to a specific image or thought made manifest in material form. For example, Chang describes the one who meditates as being "absorbed in perfect concentration on the object upon which he is meditating." (3) The experience of Samadhi could be described as "a state of fusion" that produces "an intensely blissful sensation, which is both physical and psychic." (4)

Another, more recent text by Benjamin and Amy Radcliff suggests that "in Samadhi, one is completely involved or absorbed with life rather than idea about life." (5) The relinquishment of a conventional cause and effect analysis of events in the everyday world is necessary in order to attain a blissful state of mind. (6) Samadhi is less about rational categories than about a closeness to life where separations between the perceiver and the object being perceived begin to dissipate. Samadhi occurs when one leaves the realm of self-consciousness and discovers a connection between what is held within the mind and what is simultaneously being processed through one's sensory organs.

In organizing an exhibition for the new Chelsea Art Museum in New York, I chose eleven works by eleven artists that would somehow connect with one another. I did this not according to a visual theme or a method, not according to a process or even a discipline, but instead I relied on a kind of felt experience between the diversity of the various works. Whether a reductive concrete painting by John McLaughlin or a gestural painting by Jean Miotte or a series of wire-mesh cubes by Rakuko Naito, each held its own in the space of this large gallery. I was interested in the kind of visual conversation the works might have with one another. My criterion for the selection had something to do with the singular space of the object or the visual consistency of the form according to its materials, wherein one might contemplate the form not simply as a type of formalism, but as a form in space, where a feeling for the space might preside over disturbance, and resolve itself as a kind of imperfect abstract purity.

Realizing that this approach is diametrically opposed to the kind of images so often seen in West Chelsea today — images appropriated from the commercial media or complex assemblages presumably "loaded" with the weight of an intertextual meaning — I wanted to go in another direction. I began searching for art from the present and from recent past



Mimmo Roselli, Round Mixer

hypothetical results remain outside the control of one's projected vision. Duchamp used the term "art co-efficient" to describe the process whereby the viewer ultimately completes the work. In Samadhi, many viewers will complete the exhibition.

In organizing this exhibition, I became interested in artists who dealt with space in a singular, focused way — not as a maximal exegesis, but as a distillation, as a process of an emptying-out the environment. I selected artists whose works would complement one another within an active (though static) visual field. I wanted to emphasize the notion that space was not a given condition, but a created one. The participating artists include: Renee Pierre Allan, Robert Barry, Boem Moon, Frederick Eversley, Tadaaki Kuwayama, John McLaughlin, Jean Miotte, Joan Mitchell, Rakuko Naito, Kazuo Shiraga, and Mimmo Roselli. The unique aspect of each artist's vision is what contributes to the whole.

During the installation process I became interested in how a 1969 painting by Joan Mitchell — painted in blue and brown patches on a white field, using her well-known gestural mannerisms — related to an expansive floor installation of aluminum cylinders set in a grid by Tadaaki Kuwayama. On another wall, a silvery blue monochrome — painted with automobile lacquer — by Korean artist Boem Moon related visually to a bright red painting in a heavy steel frame by French-Canadian Renee Pierre Allain. I saw a connection, if not a resemblance, between these works even though the artists came from vastly different cultures. Mimmo Roselli's triangular configuration of brown cords, strung between three walls, appeared like a floating harp above eye-level, and related implicitly to the reductive organization used in John McLaughlin's painting of two black horizontal bars floating against a white ground. This provoked another conversation between John McLaughlin and a nearby sequence of discrete sculptural cubes, constructed of wire-mesh and folded paper, by the Japanese artist Rakuko Naito.

On another wall, Kazuo Shiraga's brilliant foot painting, made in Japan in 1961, evokes the action of the body in the act of painting while conversing with a recent, large-scale, black and white abstract gestural painting by Jean Miotte. Frederick Eversley's opaque convex disc, cast in plastic, and situated in the far corner of the large gallery, coincide with the abstract words and phrases printed diagonally on glass at the entrance of the exhibition by the American conceptualist Robert Barry. The contrasting and complementary components in the exhibition offer an effusive and ineffable sensibility to the large open space on the first floor, thus creating an open visual dialogue between the various artists' works.

And Samadhi? Where can it be found? Perhaps, less in the objects than in the viewer's willingness to become a participant. In this way, the art can be put together and constructed as a mental image, an intentional concept, forever in transition as one moves physically throughout the gallery space as one's thoughts move within the space of the mind. It is possible, of course, that my intention has little or nothing to do with the conventional meaning or use of the term Samadhi. The appropriation of the term may be misguided. Even so, the exhibition will be given another reference point, being one of experience as absence — what Samadhi strives to attain. Here is another way coming from an Eastern point of view into the