

*Serra's sculptures provide us opportunities to understand the environment we live in by exploring bits of it in order to attain a perspicuous overview where at first there is none.*¹

Transparency

Noë writes that experience “is too transparent to capture in thought or on paper”² We can not make an image of experience; Only of what we perceive. Nor can we describe experience in language; We can merely describe what is in the environment around us, presenting itself to our senses. It is only when we are made aware of our own physical presence in an environment that we can begin to know things about our experience. Self-consciousness is in this way necessary in order to perceive our experience. When a young-adult, newly full grown, walks in to the playhouse that they knew well as a child, and needs to kneel just to get through the door, they are suddenly aware of themselves and their changed physical presence in a more direct way. They can effect their environment and their environment can effect them.

Reflection

Noë calls attention to a common construct which would imagine our perceptions to be internal, turning the word *reflection* inward as well.

“The puzzle of the transparency of experience results from thinking of experiences as like inner pictures and from thinking of reflection on experience as like turning one’s gaze inward to those pictures. But this is a false characterization of experience. In experience we are aware not of inner pictures, but of the things around us in the environment.”³

When we see a reflection of something other than ourselves in water or in a mirror, we tend to stutter past the work of careful looking by assuming the reflection to be correlative, in a one-to-one relationship, with the original. We tend to internalize the assumption that we have understood the object with such force that we project all of these characteristics on to the reflection and assume that we understand it as well. A funhouse contorts this internalized idea with equal and opposite force.

¹ Alva Noë, *Experience And Experiment in Art*, (note 11, pg 94)

² Alva Noë, *Experience And Experiment in Art*, pg 83

³ Alva Noë, *Experience And Experiment in Art*, pg 83

I am interested in creating an expression of reflectiveness that is both strongly external and physically engaging. The window is commonly held to be the model behind rectangular canvases in a western tradition of painting. Beginning on a panel of six feet square (understood by Tony Smith to be the proportion that most directly relates to the human body in actual space) I will reflect an image of a painted window from painted depiction on a flat surface in to physical space as part of a small house, built off of the surface of the panel and echoing its dimensions in footprint and wall height. To view the panel, a viewer will need to walk in to this house. I imagine this movement as both an act of reflection and an act of translation.

Layered on top of this translation of a window, I will embed mirrors in to the surface of the panel. These will serve two functions: First, they will expand the small space of the house's interior by means of reflection. Second, they will reflect the body of the person experiencing the piece, helping them to be aware of their own physical presence in the piece. I am interested in ways that the rectangular mirror can become a surrogate for the window as a model behind the rectangular canvas. Noë points out that the work of Richard Serra makes viewers aware of their physical presence by inducing dizziness, disorientation, and even fear as a compliment to the visual experience. For Noë, this helps a viewer to catch themselves in the act of perceiving. My hope is that mirrors will use self-consciousness to aid in the same end.

Layered Reflection

The web of assumptions woven through the way we construct reflections is itself reflected in Noë's description of the "details in the head" paradigm: the idea that we carry in our internal imagination an in-tact reflection of our surroundings that is true-to-nature.

When you see, you take yourself to be aware of a densely detailed world, to be sure. But you do not take yourself to have all that detail in consciousness all at once. The "details in the head" model falsifies experience. Rather, you take yourself to have access to the detail by the flick of the eye or the turn of the head. The seeing, the experiencing of all that detail, is not something static, but something temporally extended and active.⁴

There is a beautiful undercurrent of a phrase like "already but not yet" in this passage. The potential of being able to look at any detail by the flick of the eye is able to stand in for actively seeing. Hasegawa Tohaku's Pine Wood paintings harness the same beauty by inviting their viewers to project the contents of their own imagination in to the white paper left blank in vast regions of the image. Once imagined, these things are already present but not yet physical. Tohaku's panels begin to echo or reflect what Noë calls the "characteristic indistinctness of the visual field at the periphery"⁵

⁴ Alva Noë, *Experience And Experiment in Art*, pg 85

⁵ Alva Noë, *Experience And Experiment in Art*, pg 83

