

VERNE STANFORD'S NEW WORK

By Peter Frank Los Angeles, June, 2012

Verne Stanford's photo-based collages betray his training as an architect. To be sure, the subjects of the photographs themselves tend to the architectural: Stanford trains his camera on various architectural features of the plains and desert, focusing equally on vernacular structures and unique, newly designed buildings. But it is in his visual expansion on these images that Stanford truly declares his own sense of design. The photo-collages display a kinetic power at once rigorous and vigorous, a poised yet churning energy that would seem to conflate human choreography with tectonic geology.

Stanford, quite clearly, does not rely on the images in the photographs alone to determine the force of his compositions. Rather, the disposition of those photographs, repeated or sequential, determines that force, crucially abetted with drawn lines that extend edges and facets into a more abstracted, even conceptualized space. The visual strategy will remind astute observers to some extent of work by Dutch conceptualist Jan Dibbets. Stanford freely admits to Dibbets' influence, but works in a way that builds on rather than merely echoes the Dutch artist's method.

Stanford's own work in fact distinguishes itself from Dibbets' by beginning with human-made structures and extending those outward until they begin to determine landscape space. If anything, Dibbets' approach is the opposite, taking landscape factors and reformulating them into quasi-architectural form. You could say that each approach typifies each man's visual and social experience of space: the Dutchman takes what seems an unending planar expanse and determines to maximize its in-fact highly limited habitability with a highly efficacious attitude, while the American takes advantage of a much more varied topography but ultimately much more generous amount of space, one which allows a more romantic notion of architecture. Dibbets builds his spaces,

while Stanford takes his apart and re-conforms them. And they do so, interestingly, with apparently contrary energy, Dibbets relying on a centrifugal organizing principle to determine a controlled space while Stanford relies on a centripetal principle to realize an open, potentially unending space.

Finally, Stanford's sensibility is itself profoundly distinct from Dibbets'. The Dutch artist is a reductivist, beginning and ending with elemental factors and structures. Stanford is more concerned with structural relations, how things compose and how cohesion results from the management of composition. In this regard he is moved by, among other things, the examples of certain mid-century American sculptors, notably Richard Lippold and Kenneth Snelson, whose metal constructions are not only held together but formally determined by networks of cables, wires, and other crucial filaments. You might call Stanford a neo-constructivist (as opposed to Dibbets the minimalist), involved less with exposing the fundamentals of design than with exploiting and re-interpreting them, harnessing them to unusual purpose and unexpected effect.

Stanford's photo-collages constitute an ongoing investigation, and are at present the artist's preoccupation. They bespeak, however, his dedication to an approach that maintains visual vitality without relying on trickery, decoration, or arbitrary elaboration. Whenever he allows himself a fanciful move in the formulation of a collage-drawing, Stanford does so in order to offset the constrictions of structural imperative. Hardly an impulsive art, Stanford's work still incorporates impulse even though such impulse invariably fits into the logic of the overall piece. The exaggerations and non sequiturs of post-modernism fit Stanford's aesthetic even less comfortably than do the rigid patterns of minimalism. His is a logical art, but also one brimming with intrigue and surprise. Stanford's photo-collages similarly rely on such thinking; indeed, they practically emblemize it. They are the souvenirs of a supple mind.

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