


The image is an abstract composition. The lower two-thirds of the frame are filled with a solid, deep red color. A thick, horizontal black band runs across the bottom of the red area. The top third of the image shows a view through a window, looking out at a modern building with a grid of windows and some greenery. The window frame is visible as thin black lines. The text 'Nathalie Junod-Ponsard' is printed in a light, sans-serif font, centered horizontally and partially overlapping the red background and the window view.

Nathalie Junod-Ponsard



*"It moves. It moves not.
It is far, and It is near.
It is within all this,
And It is outside all this".
Upanishads*

Venka Purushothaman

Wandering through the Wonder:

The Phenomenology of Nathalie Junod Ponsard's Cosmic Geometry

The universe is flat! So scientists and astronomers have recently proclaimed. If it is so, we all should be able to comfortably fall off the edge and yet we know we cannot. The sun, a life source providing heat and light, is a star around which the earth and other planets revolve. It has been the guiding principle of clarity and objectivity. The moon, on the other hand, has inspired, century after century, poets, painters and musicians. It has a symbiotic relationship with the earth as it is held in orbit by the earth's gravitational pull. It does not produce light but relies on reflecting the sun's light. It is the guiding principle of romanticism, idealism and subjectivity. Between these two ideas, lies the earth, and this informs Nathalie Junod Ponsard's light installation work. *Cosmic Geometry* is a study of the world as it is lived and experienced by humans rather than the world as it is objectified, abstracted, and conceptualised.

German philosopher Edmund Husserl, was instrumental in developing this philosophy of experience or Phenomenology. He wrote extensively on this co-relation between the material world of constructs and the lived world. He said "I am aware of the world, spread out in space endlessly, and in time becoming and become, without end. I am aware of it, that means, first of all, I discover it immediately, intuitively, I experience it. Through sight, touch, hearing, etc in the different ways of sensory perception, corporeal things somehow spatially distributed are for me simply there, in verbal or figurative sense 'present,' whether or not I pay them special attention by busying myself with them, considering, thinking, feeling, willing." [1] The key pre-occupation is the development and state of the human consciousness. Works of art mediate between the creator's and the viewer's consciousness. French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty took this further and in his not so famous treatise, *Phenomenology of Perception*, asserting that lived experience is wrought with ambiguities and that the human consciousness should be situated in the body physical and its senses.[2] So what is our perception of the sun/moon or for that matter it's tangential relationship to the human being?

Cosmic Geometry is located within a phenomenological framework and Minimalism which moves away from the clutter of representational imageries to reducing art to its bare essentials, in some instances to the bare bones of geometric abstraction nested on a space-time continuum. Following the path of artists Barnett Newman and John Cage, Ponsard's installation is characterised by the formal predominance of shapes that endow them with high compositional abstraction. The sun/moon is reduced to sparingly spartan geometrics highlighting the uncommon and conflicting connections between them. Her unabashed insistence on its minimality renders this work aesthetically-pleasing. The work thrives on its ambiguity, indeterminacy and openness for formal and informal interpretation. It can be the most liberating of forces, as it invites the viewer to open his/her mind to wonder, wander. The clutter of the information era is banished in the clearing of the field of perception.

The use of space and time is etched on our perceptual map of reality. Western concept of space-time goes back to Greek thought which saw geometry essentially of nature rather than a construct. Eastern philosophy, on the other hand maintains, that space-time are essentially constructs of the mind - relative, limited and illusory. [3] Ponsard attempts to play with the latter in de-structing the gallery/universe space and the pre-ordained notions of the sun and moon in allowing the viewer to view *Cosmic Geometry* as an open work for an open mind. Therein lies her critique of existing perceptions of the cosmic world.

By positing the idea of the Sun into a yellow box, and the Moon into a white luminous light, Ponsard turns the two constellations into artifacts, simply by isolating them from the context of the universe. The inbetween is earth. The viewer becomes as Merleau-Ponty calls, "the anonymous one that is buried in the world, and that has not yet traced its path". The viewer's wish to centre his/her presence in the room is also what prevents him/her from doing so completely. At once, the viewer is caught between the freedom to walk out of the space or be bent on servitude to the two constellations. The eye can never see itself seeing because at the centre point from which the perceptual field radiates - the viewer remains null and void. The viewer immediately is transposed from the perceptual centrality of the earth in the gallery/universe to, in a sense, to the margins and footnotes, of the gallery/universe, in a sense, to the margins and footnotes. Ponsard makes the functionality of the sun-moon-earth relationship dysfunctional.

Light serves to illuminate the geometric shapes from within. They are ordained with visual substance that is contained with clear perspex which seeks to allow seepage onto the gallery floors. The illumination from within becomes the palate of colours and breaks the dialectic of the sun and moon. The shapes provide visual drama as they take on roles of absolutes and draw great visual attention to themselves. While illuminating, the geometric shapes are in the spotlight. The dialectic of light/dark is played over and over again in the viewers mind, not in the gallery. The spectral play becomes the integral element in this installation.

So where does the viewer's eye go? Is it free to wonder, or will it try hard to seek out the "artness" of the whole project or will it be challenged to find a point of interest or comfort zone to allow one's mind to formulate a perception, an opinion. So where does the viewer's physical body go? Will it wander freely or try hard to seek out the less illuminated, the least bright of spaces to locate itself? This instability is important for the viewer to accept and integrate it into his/her sensibility. The "openness" of the work gives us an image of discontinuity. It does not narrate or complete. Umberto Eco in his book, *The Open Work*, says that art "takes on a mediating role between the abstract categories of science and the living matter of our sensibility; it almost becomes a sort of transcendental scheme that allows us to comprehend new aspects of the world." [4] Ponsard' *Cosmic Geometry* does just that.

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Notes: [1] Edmund Husserl. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. New York: Macmillan, 1962. [2] Merleau Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perceptions*. New York: Routledge, 1989. [3] Fritjof Capra. *The Tao of Physics*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1976. [4] Umberto Eco. *The Open Work*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1989.

