

ART REVIEW

Capturing the Sunshine, Releasing the Bees

'Light and Landscape' at Storm King Art Center



Librado Romero/The New York Times

The StormKing show includes works by Alyson Shotz, lattices of prismatic light made of thin bands of a semi-reflective material called dichroic acrylic.

By KEN JOHNSON

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MOUNTAINVILLE, N.Y. — Storm King Art Center, the bucolic 500-acre sculpture preserve near West Point, makes me think of Steven Spielberg's "Jurassic Park." With giant dinosaurs of Modernist abstraction by Alexander Calder, Alexander Liberman and Mark di Suvero looming over the gently rolling landscape, it takes visitors back to a nearly forgotten era — the 1960s — when sheer bigness and industrial materials and processes were compelling signs of sophisticated sculptural ambition.

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The center has updated its collection over the years, adding a gargantuan bronze spider by Louise Bourgeois, a wavy field by Maya Lin and a stone wall winding through woods by Andy Goldsworthy. Still, the aesthetic center of gravity remains pretty conservative, and many of the most provocative sculptors of the post-World War II period — John Chamberlain, Jeff Koons and Franz West to mention three — are absent. If the recent addition of "Three Legged Buddha" by Zhang Huan — an immense and immensely ugly gift from Pace Gallery and Mr. Huan — is any indicator, the center could become a graveyard for sculptures no one else wants.

Temporary exhibitions at the center have not been notably with-it either. This year's, "Light and Landscape," ventures haphazardly into Postmodern territory with mixed results. Organized by Nora Lawrence, the center's recently appointed associate curator, it samples a variety of familiar conceptual approaches relating to natural light by 14 artists.

There is one indisputably beautiful piece, a washtub-size cylinder of solid, icy blue glass by Roni Horn. Placed in the center's Norman chateau-style museum building in a room with floor-to-ceiling windows, it glows. While frosted around its circumference, it is so smooth on top that it looks as if filled with water. On the walls a series of close-up photographic portraits by Ms. Horn of an Icelandic woman up to her neck in different thermal pools in her homeland gives the otherwise enigmatic glass object a curiously literal yet still poetic

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meaning. The sculpture's title — "Untitled ('... it was a mask, but the real face was identical to the false one)" — adds another lyrical layer.

A different sun-filled room is occupied by a pair of works by Alyson Shotz made of thin bands of a semi-reflective material called dichroic acrylic. The sculptures resemble bigger-than-life classical human torsos dematerialized into woozy lattices of prismatic light.

There are a number of duds indoors too. A sign by Matthew Buckingham tells how long it took light from the sun coming through the windows to reach it. A video by Diana Thater pictures the sun tinted blue, so you can see swirling patterns on its surface. A bulky construction like a telescope by Olafur Eliasson offers a banal kaleidoscopic view out a window. Any of these would be more meaningful in a children's science museum.

Outdoor pieces similarly tend to elementary science. Attentive visitors may notice that the bulbs inside antique lamps over the museum's two entrances are flickering — not because they need to be replaced but, according to the exhibition brochure, because they are registering, in real time, transmissions from a lightning-detecting antenna in Britain. This putatively global-consciousness-expanding piece is by Katie Paterson. More immediately a concave disc of polished stainless steel by Anish Kapoor attached to the building's stone exterior wall demonstrates perceptually confounding mirroring effects.

Farther afield a clunky construction more than 11 feet tall by Spencer Finch titled "Lunar" looks as if designed for a Moon landing. Elevated on a tripod base, a big ball made of hexagonal, beige-colored plastic facets is illuminated from within by lights powered by solar panel wings. The brochure explains that the orb's light exactly replicates the color of the July 2011 full moon over Chicago. On the sunny day of my visit I had to take that on faith, but I imagine it looks good at night.

"Solarium" by William Lamson is a walk-in greenhouse the size of a tool shed with a couple of potted plants on a bench inside. The building's glass panels have sugar baked in, giving them variegated caramel hues. The brochure explains that this alludes to the creation of sugars in plants by means of photosynthesis, but it does not say anything about the most interesting phenomenon: the hundreds of [bees](#) buzzing around the panes. The glass is odorless, as far as I could tell, so I guess they evidently are attracted by the honeylike colors, which must be terribly frustrating for them.

Happier bees, on the other hand, are to be observed in an installation of real hives within a picket fence enclosure by Peter Coffin. The brochure says that a beekeeper will be there on Saturdays at noon to educate visitors about what bees do. Since I was there two Sundays ago, I cannot comment on that experience, nor could I receive the gift of a jar of local honey promised to attendees.

My favorite piece was another by Mr. Coffin: "Untitled (Sunshine)." Four loud speakers on a tall pole on a grassy hill broadcast cheerful keyboard melodies. Again I had to refer to the indispensable brochure wherein I learned that Mr. Coffin invited the jazz musician Bob James to compose and perform "a musical interpretation of sunshine." I enjoyed the music, but what I liked more was that it was emitted by equipment that looks as if it had been appropriated from an Army base. Nothing else in the exhibition was so delightfully unexpected.

"Light and Landscape" is on view through Nov. 11 at Storm King Art Center, Old Pleasant Hill Road, Mountainville, N.Y.; (845) 534-3115, stormkingartcenter.org.

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