

Cultural Daily

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Ken Salter and his Reflecting Pool

Phantom Street Artist · Wednesday, January 3rd, 2018

San Francisco, CA – On display at the Exploratorium is a mesmerizing perceptual exhibition and installation by Los Angeles artist and engineer Ken Salter. His exhibition, titled “Reflecting Pool,” recently premiered on December 7th at the Exploratorium’s annual Glow event. “Reflecting Pool” uses video feedback to generate sublime interactive fractal images. This exhibition opened in tandem with several other exhibitions.

Echoing the design aesthetic of the Light and Space movement from Southern California in the 1960’s, “Reflecting Pool” captivates the viewer with hypnotic ephemeral images that are unique and ever-changing.

Appropriately titled, “Reflecting Pool” is an interactive multi-media device which must be seen to be appreciated. Its technology consists of a camera, a monitor, a computer and a gesture sensor. Salter intelligently orients the camera to view the monitor which displays a mosaic of multiple identical camera images in different orientations. This establishes a feedback loop whereby the camera repeatedly takes pictures of its own pictures. The result is astounding; a spontaneous generation of patterns with infinite complexity and detail. The gesture sensor allows the participant to change the geometry of the mosaic much like rotating a kaleidoscope. The sounds are a blend of fundamental tones whose volumes depend on the colors in the image.

Salter intentionally references his Light and Space predecessors as a hybrid language which is accessible only through direct experience. The Light and Space movement referenced op art, minimalism and geometric abstraction. The 60’s movement was loosely affiliated yet characterized by a vigilant focus on perceptual phenomena, such as light, volume and scale. It employed a diverse use of materials such as glass, neon, fluorescent lights, resin and cast acrylic. Today the movement is faithfully updated by Salter who uses orthogonal planes of video monitors and mirrors to activate 3-dimensional space.

Salter asserts himself into the annals of history in becoming this generation’s Neo Light and Space artist who invites spectators to experience the post modernity of light and other sensory phenomena.



Neo Light and Space Art

Salter was born in Los Angeles, on Jan 27, 1962, where he worked much of his life as an engineer at the frontier of entertainment technology and art for close to three decades. With engineering

degrees from both UC Berkeley and UCLA, Ken worked for Walt Disney Imagineering developing new technologies and systems for its theme park rides. He has numerous patents on ride and entertainment technology. Salter also co-owns a company, which manufactures large sculptures using digital techniques, for some of the world's most successful artists. Salter's interest in fractals and emergence originated in 2000 after studying several books which addressed the science and mathematics of chaos and complexity theory. In 2008, Salter was diagnosed with early onset Parkinson's disease at the age of 46. One of the unexpected benefits of this illness is that, for some patients, changes in brain chemistry enhance creativity and ultimately awaken dormant artistic abilities.

It was in 2013, five years after being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, when Salter showed his first piece, titled "Chaotic Fractal Generator," at San Francisco's Exploratorium. Ken considers himself a skeptic who perceives reality from a systems perspective. The concept of emergence reinforces his worldview where intricate systems, which appear to be divinely created, are designed only by mathematics. He is a Humanist who is particularly interested in consciousness as an emergent phenomenon. More than an agnostic, he is a voice of diversity that shares his creative process by allowing viewers to interact and engage with Reflecting Pool as an instrument for their own magnificent creations.

Says Salter, "Emergence, the phenomenon where simple rules applied repeatedly lead to unexpectedly complex and coherent structures, is the design language of the natural world. From snowflakes to nebulae, the beauty we observe in nature can be ascribed to simple recursive algorithms. The emergence of Mind from Brain is, perhaps, the most remarkable example of emergence. 'Reflecting Pool' demonstrates this principle and allows the viewer to participate in its enchanting rhythm and flow."

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