A SHALLOW FLIGHT OF STAIRS
ROBIN PECK
MARCH 30 TO JUNE 10, 2007

CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY
OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 6–9PM
In SCULPTURE, A Journey to the Circumference of the Earth, Robin Peck’s writings, the sculptor takes us on a far-reaching tour of his travels to New York, Romania and Iceland. Each place is defined by his introspections on sculpture. He begins at the Dia Center in New York using Joseph Beuys’s 7000 Oaks, Richard Serra’s Torqued Ellipses and Dan Graham’s Rooftop Urban Park Project Two Way Mirror Cylinder Inside Cube (1981/1991) as points to draw both factual and experiential descriptions on making and looking at sculpture. His trip to Romania is characterized by a detailed tour of some of Brancusi’s most signature works and his trip to Iceland focuses on his travel companion’s permanent sculpture installed at the geographic centre of Iceland.

In all Peck’s travels, “the Sculptor,” a generic pseudonym for what seem to be several different companions, accompanies him. The Sculptor becomes a source of information, someone to bounce ideas off of and a tour guide. He/she expands Peck’s field of reference, taking him to natural history museums, Brancusi’s childhood home and into local art politics.

I start with a description from Peck’s writing not simply because it is an obvious portal into his thinking, but also because its passages are apt and concise descriptions of his own work. The introductory quotation is taken from Peck’s description of viewing Fragment Of the Head Of A Queen in the Ancient Egyptian section of the Metropolitan Museum but for the italic uncannily expresses what I imagine the experience of viewing A Shallow Flight of Stairs to be for works that are a departure from the gallery as a frame and in consideration of the way one could move around the piece within the architectural space in relation to its constituent parts.

For Peck, this negotiation is a form of disruption. The relation that is created by juxtaposing different masses (the sculpture and the viewer) is not one of static harmony, but created by motion. The sculpture and architecture are static, but are disrupted by the viewer’s movement, which reveals the incremental variations in perspective caused by the differing thicknesses of each transparent sheet. It is clear that the viewer is key. His writing is primarily about the way he and the Sculptor look at things. As viewers they are travelers, moving from city to city, gallery to sculpture to sculpture. They move while the works they view remain static. “There is an essential contradiction between sculpture and movement, a statue is something that stands, and the word itself comes from the same Latin root as the word static.” ² Peck uses this quote from The Art of Sculpture by Herbert Read to introduce an anecdote about the Sculptor.

During a critique of his students’ work, all of which are sculptures that move in some mechanical manner or through another device, the Sculptor reminds his students “that circumambulation has traditionally been expected of the spectator.”³ Peck then describes the students watching their moving, rotating,扩大ing sculptures as if watching television while the Sculptor paced around them, stating in the end that “the two attitudes seem irreconcilable.”⁴ A Shallow Flight of Stairs follows an ever-reducing line, one that rests in the reduction of the form, which is used to define and strengthen the contiguous relations between work, viewer and space. This reduction is an important part of drawing out the inherent qualities of the material, the particularities of sculpture as a discipline, and articulating the role of the viewer as an equal mass, as having influence on the work as well as being influenced by it. Contained within this traditional and formal lexicon of sculpture Peck’s new work has definitively achieved an encompassing gesture that clearly speaks to the material, incorrigates his discipline and allows the viewer to move.

Jennifer Paparano

SCULPTURE, A Journey to the Circumference of the Earth
Robin Peck
Publisher: NB Broken Jaw Press Inc.
2004, p13


4 Ibid


6 Ibid


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