

Beyond the Circle

Moran Museum, Seoul, Korea

The first artist in Switzerland to work with neon tubing, Christian Herdeg has made a successful artistic career experimenting with these glowing tubes of light, that prior to the 1960s were predominantly used for commercial purposes. While his early works consisted largely of spontaneous and anachronistic gesticulation, he began in time to limit the use of materials and colors, moving his art in the direction of reduction and simplification. Form and substance were gradually absorbed into a process of sublimation and reflection on the interrelationships of color, light, surface and space.

.From the mid 1970s, Herdeg began producing a series of neon sculptures based on the elementary geometric shapes that much of minimal art goes back to: the sphere, cube, pyramid, cylinder and prism. The neon tubes turn into floating lines or shapes of light in unreal space where everything is overt, bright, clear and transparent. Through the intensity of purist reduction, form and light conceal no mysteries and are therefore open to spiritual, almost sacred dimensions.

As Herdeg has continued to explore and progress through a diverse oeuvre, he has maintained a love of geometry and light that has never exhausted itself. His circular wallpieces consist of soft yet vibrant halos of flowing light against a colorfield background. They are representative of his work that interacts with the sculptural study of volume, space, material, light and reflection within the parameters of geometry. These wall objects are sensually and subtly radiating "color light fields" that blend art and design technology, constructive and expressive articulation, and transparent and opaque materials into new levels of reality and modes of perception.

These minimal circles of light with their ethereal nuances have completely obliterated the loud and gaudy effects of neon lights. The simple geometrical composition shows an affinity with constructive design and the outcome is often an experience of a felt transparency, which eclipses rational foundations. The cool colors express austere asceticism, detachment, reserve transfiguration and reticent refinement; the warm colors evoke proximity, closure, intimacy and earthly confines. The auras of light extend to the edges of the pieces and seem to be floating and shifting in a radiant field often affected by such variables as the caprices of natural daylight, which create atmospheric variations in tone, brightness and intensity.

Garett E. Marshall, 2000