

NAOS

MCAD GALLERY

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IMAGININGS

BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

*I saw eternity the other night
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm as it was bright;
And round beneath it, Time, in hours, days,
years,
Driven by the spheres,
Like a vast shadow moved, in which the
world
And all her train were hurled.*

Henry Vaughan
The World, 1650

The underlying human desire to understand the universe—to comprehend the vastness of space, to place the human life span within the context of eternity, to discern the unchanging principles which might lie beneath the flux of experience—is the impulse which drives the work of Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel. In this they are connected to a long history of such endeavors spanning centuries and cultures from the Tibetan Book of the Dead and Plato's *Timeaus* to Theo van Doesburg's "mechanical aesthetic" and Naum Gabo's kinetic analogues of universal forces.

For Jones and Ginzel such investigations take the form of installations which seem to map out the multiple orders of Henry Vaughan's neo-Platonic scheme. The four medieval elements—earth, air, fire and water—manifest themselves in ways suggesting how their fugitive effects spark the changes which make life and growth possible. Light often appears in a multiple role.

It may represent the life force, the power of reason, the cycles of nature. Within these mysterious environments various elements move or otherwise suffer alteration—pinwheels rotate, in the process stirring water or tracing circles in the sand, water shoots in long arching jets, steam rises and diffuses through the atmosphere, columns of ice melt into pools of water. These phenomena suggest the different orders of time—the almost imperceptible shifts of geologic change, the slow cycles of planetary revolution, the endless repetition of day and night, the relatively brief flicker of human life.

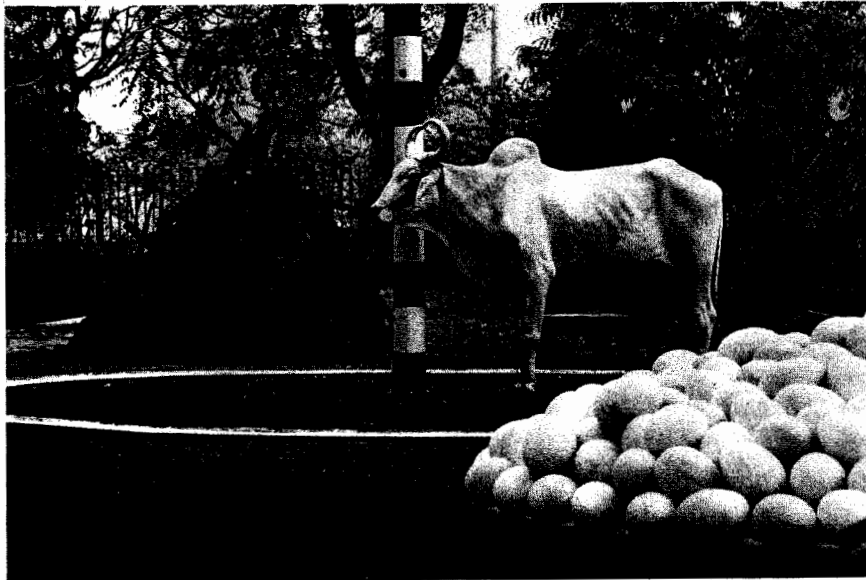
But, although they deal with the sorts of issues which have preoccupied physicists and metaphysicians for millenia, Jones and Ginzel's installations are not simply didactic demonstrations of scientific theory. Instead, they remain open ended and allusive. The dualities they suggest—between chaos and order, stasis and change, light and darkness, finally, even, between reason and faith—suggest dilemmas which transcend the physical universe. As a result, these magical environments can also be read as interior landscapes where the conflicts and resolutions of physical forces offer a mirror for various psychological states.

In fact, in the end, it is the human dimension which most interests this duo. As they have written, "We are driven by an acute awareness of our own mortality. The perception of time is essentially based on the increment of human life as the fundamental unit. We are fascinated by the speed of light, by geological time, and

by the "ephemera;" a moth that lives only for one day. The ephemeral nature of our work is itself a metaphor for our own mortality."

Jones and Ginzel met in 1981 and have been officially working as a team since 1985. One of their first collaborations involved the transformation of an entire gallery space into an epic landscape where dramatic upheavals recalled the transformations recounted in Genesis. Entitled *Spheric Storm*, and installed at Art Galaxy in New York City, it presented a four-minute cycle of events. Beginning in complete darkness, the space was lit first by a sprinkling of tiny points of light which slowly faded into a growing light. This rosy glow increased until it revealed a mountainous landscape looming over a quiet lake. These came to life: the lake became a whirlpool, sand erupted from a crater, plumes of vapor burst from behind the mountain, a storm of wind and lightning broke out, held sway and then waned as all activity slowly ceased and the entire space sank back into darkness.

This work, with its mythic dimensions, its clash between various elemental forces and its cyclical narrative, set the stage for future works. That same year, Jones and Ginzel completed a number of other projects which evoked cosmic phenomena. *Seraphim*, for instance, a work installed at New York's Clocktower, was inspired by the improbable miracle of conception recounted in the story of the Annunciation. This installation centered around a steaming vessel suspended in the midst of a deep blue space that flickers with points and streams of light.



Pletbora, 1991
Seventh Triennale, New Delhi, India
30' x 30' x 80'
Live bullock, marble, sand, wood,
pigment, steel, copper, gold

In 1986 the artists were invited to create a work for the window of New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art. This work, entitled *Triptych*, seemed to signal a turn from the illusionism of many of the earlier projects toward a more abstract vision. The window was divided into three parts. Above, a deep blue glow nestled within the crescent shape of the window's upper arch, while the space below was divided into a pair of contrasting tableaux. To the right was a scene bathed in glowing white light which seemed to celebrate the pure light of reason. It included such elements as a gradually mutating triangle traced in the air by a thin black and white line and a scale carefully weighing cones of black and white. The scene on the left, by contrast, connoted chaos and disorder, a dimly lit place where a pair of black spheres orbited erratically.

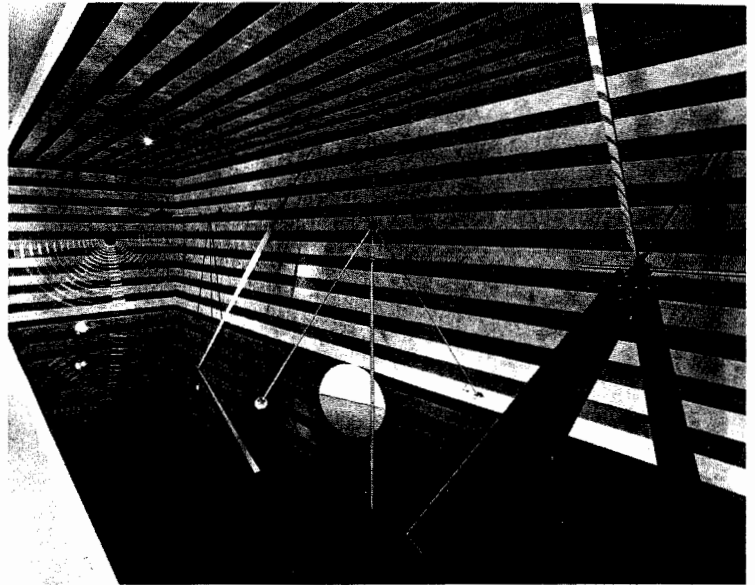
The polarities presented here remain important reference points in the artists' thinking. Sometimes as here, they are presented as irreconcilable opposites held together in an uneasy equilibrium by the more fundamental forces in the universe. In other works, they are seen as dual aspects of a larger unity. A more

harmonious coexistence is suggested by *Vis-A-Vis* from 1987. Here the exhibition space at Art Galaxy was transformed into an optically vibrating chamber where walls and ceiling were banded with broad stripes of gray and white and the floor framed a reflecting pool. Propellers on either end whirled continuously, setting up a wind tunnel which animated the various elements arranged between them. These included a hovering copper globe, a tripod topped with an aerial vane, a javelin, and a pair of glass spheres balanced at the ends of slender poles. The whole work suggested the primacy of motion and flux—a universe in which change, rather than stasis, is the underlying principle.

In a way the different philosophies suggested by *Vis-A-Vis* and *Triptych* are part of an ongoing dialogue within Jones and Ginzel's work between Western and non-Western conceptions of time, life and history. Some works take place within what seem to be recurring cycles of change and transformation. Others offer a more linear and close-ended conception of human and natural process. This contrast is particularly evident in their two most recent projects.

Plethora, designed this spring for the Indian Triennale, was completed at the end of a six-month sojourn through India and represents their effort to give visual form to concepts of regeneration and reincarnation. An outdoor work, it was bounded within a large ellipse, outlined by ultramarine pigment. There were three arenas. The central one was defined by a halo of plowed white marble dust. At one end, a charred wood pyre partially concealed an oxidized copper sphere. On the opposite side was a circular mound of large, smoothly polished marble eggs. These symbols of death and birth, the beginning and end points of history's continuous loop, were balanced by the imposing presence of a live white ox tethered to a banded pole at the center of the ellipse. For Jones and Ginzel, this noble, revered creature, a beast of burden, embodies a spirit of purity, innocence and tranquility which exists unruffled at the spiritual center of the otherwise chaotic and ever changing physical world.

Naos, the installation created for the MCAD Gallery, offers a counterpoint to the more Eastern conception of time suggested by *Plethora*. The title comes from the Greek term for a temple's inner sanctum and the work itself is overlaid with a sense of the creeping endangerment of our spiritual and physical environment. A honeycomb field of ash-filled vessels encroach threateningly on a central island in which life and growth are still possible. The outer edges of the field are bounded by a set of low granite posts. An arrangement of columnar tree trunks guard the core. Rising from one corner, an obelisk of ice melts into a basin of water each day. Thus, *Naos*, unlike *Plethora*, posits a linear notion of time and focuses on the possibility of an end which is truly a cessation and not simply another rebirth. It suggests the fragility of biological and spiritual life and exudes a sense of urgency about the possibly disastrous progress of human history.



Vis-A-Vis, 1986-87
 Art Galaxy, New York City
 8' x 30' x 8'
 Wind, water, pigment, pump, motors, timers, wood,
 aluminum, steel, halogen quartz light, acrylic, bronze, copper, gold

As this overview of the artists' installation works suggests, Jones and Ginzel do not view cyclical and linear conceptions of time as mutually exclusive. Nor do they privilege reason over intuition, stability over flux, being over becoming. Inspired less by the scientific quest for some kind of absolute knowledge than by the fluid poetry of symbol and metaphor, they seek ways to reconcile cosmic and human reality. Each installation is a different kind of imagining—a self-enclosed system whose constitution and interactions suggest the delicate equilibrium which makes spiritual and physical existence possible. With richly evocative vision, Jones and Ginzel urge us to step outside the narrow perspective of the day to day world in order to celebrate the mysteries of the universe and the often fragile possibilities of human life.

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