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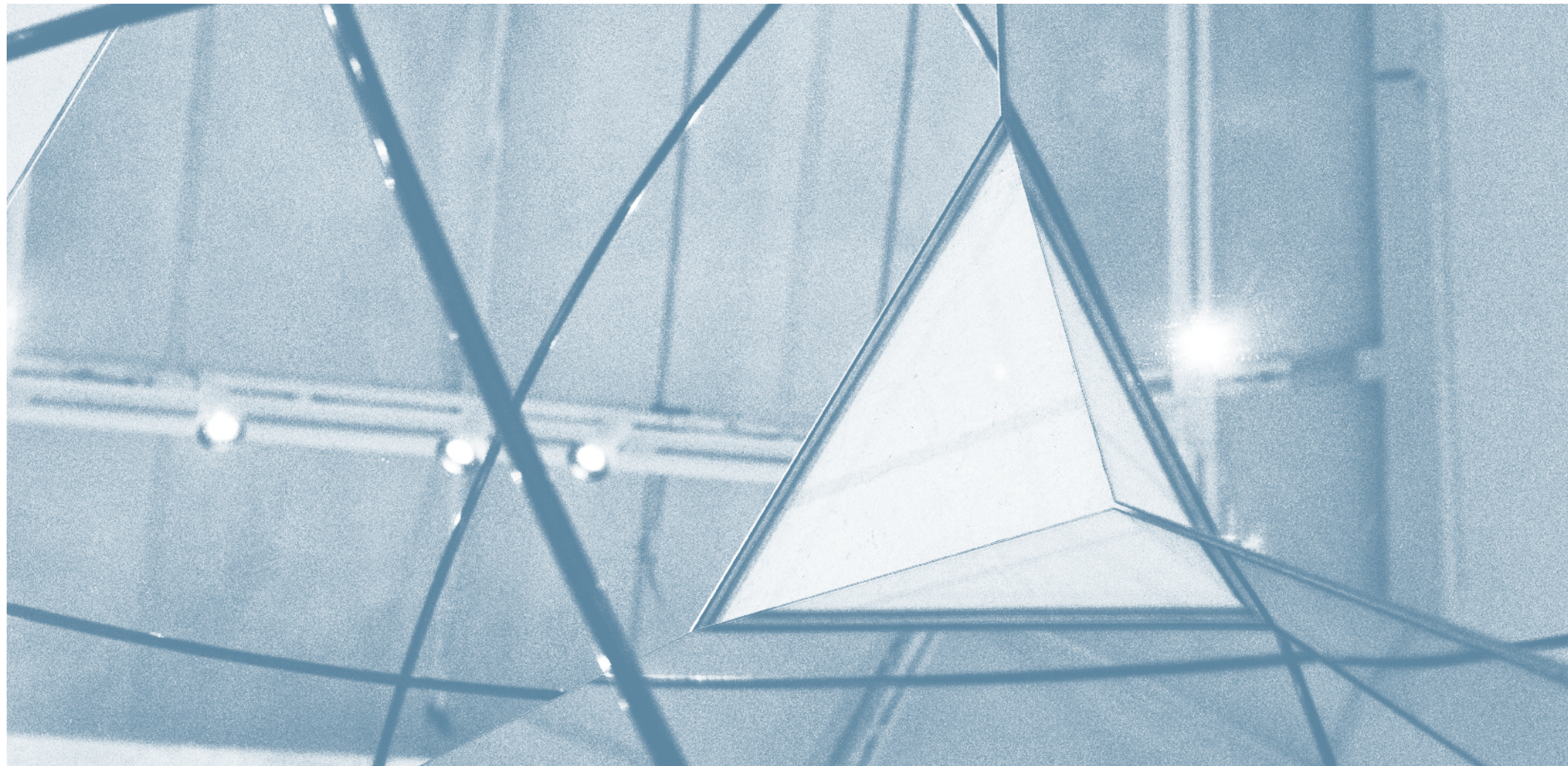
# Mirror Images

## By Katherine Pill

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### On the Sculpture and Installation Works of Brookhart Jonquil

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As anyone who has entered a mirror maze can attest to, it is disconcerting, at times terrifying, to be confronted with the illusion of the multiplied self. As the surrounding space is fractured into reflections, and as one continues to bump up against the reflective surface, the world as we know it is truly unrecognizable, and difficult – near impossible – to navigate. It is not quite this Bruce Nauman-esque sense of bodily uncertainty and disorientation that Brookhart Jonquil strives for in his work, but certainly bringing one's attention to one's place in space is: "It's kind of a theater where you interact with yourself. It's about a fracturing of the environment and of yourself in that environment,"<sup>1</sup> he says of his use of mirrors. As a material, mirror took on loaded connotations throughout Minimalism and Post-Minimalism. Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic text on "The Mirror Stage" was translated into English in 1968, and mirrors were being used by artists as means to provoke a literal reflection on the act of viewing. Jonquil's interest in the act of reflection and has led to some lofty ambitions. In the case of *In a Perfect World*, mirrors and fiberglass rods, along with an intricate series of geometrical calculations and an understanding of quantum physics, serve the artist to communicate his belief that we all, at any given moment, occupy utopia.

Minimalism brought the subject-object relationship to the forefront of the act of viewing in the 1960s, and works such as Dan Graham's mirror-based installations in the 1970s placed increased importance on the interactions between viewers themselves. With the advent of Relational Aesthetics and participatory art in the 1990s, a viewer's interaction with artworks and other viewers have become primary relationships in the art-viewing experience. Jonquil's sculptures do not necessitate a social atmosphere in terms of multiple viewers, but a social component is inherent as he asks us to contemplate our place in the world. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61), a French philosopher whose theories were integrated into the discourse of Minimalism in the 1960s, argued that

**"It's about a fracturing of the environment and of yourself in that environment"**

subject and object are reciprocal, interdependent, and also made clear that viewing is an embodied experience: "I do not see space according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me."<sup>2</sup> In Jonquil's work, reflections allow the eye to take in multiple views at once, and an allover sense of space is palpable. Even his two-dimensional works provide a sense of three-dimensionality.

The upsetting of the linear picture plane has been cause of radical artistic developments – perhaps most notably Cubism – and the canvas's potential for both illusionism and object-ness continues to be mined by painters today. Jonquil is adamant about the fact that he does not think pictorially: "It's really hard for me to think about a flat image, and illusory space that you enter metaphorically." Still, there can be no denying the appeal of illusion – in terms of manipulating reflections – in his work. Symbolic representations may hold little value for Jonquil, but, that notwithstanding, he is interested in painters like Lucio Fontana and Yves Klein, two artists whose grandiose theories sought transcendence through the canvas – Fontana by piercing it, and Klein through texture and color. Clare Bishop notes that Merleau-Ponty, when writing about art specifically, considered painting exclusively. The artists associated with Minimalism, however, Bishop writes, felt that "painting mediates the world, and does not allow the viewer to experience perception first hand."<sup>3</sup> Donald Judd exemplifies this position when writing about the object-paintings of Frank Stella in 1965: "Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism and literal space; space in and around marks and colors."<sup>4</sup> The "problem" of illusionism, however, is one that Jonquil persistently parses.

Past works such as *Looking Both Ways* and *Self Portrait* (both 2009) invite the participation of the viewer in such a way that the picture is not activated without him or her. These are works for

the individual. In *Looking Both Ways*, the viewer climbs a ladder to look into two mirrors placed side-by-side at 90-degree angles. The viewer's line of vision is split, so that one eye sees a dart stuck into the wall, while the other eye sees a drawing of the same thing. This dual view allows the mind to simultaneously interpret these two views as one reality – both an object and a drawing. Minimalism blurred the lines of painting and object by eliminating linear perspective and attempting to negate a hierarchy of viewing by stripping away a sense of composition by focusing on basic geometric structures. This work, however, utilizes the mirror's reflection to unify drawing and object. In *Self Portrait*, graphite is drawn in an allover manner onto board, so that no line or perspective is visible, just an opaque, slightly reflective surface. There is no "image" to be seen until the viewer steps in front of the board, and is reflected back to him or herself. Again, reflection is utilized to upset notions of an illusion based on linear perspective. Although *Self Portrait* is technically two-dimensional, it is not activated until a person engages with it – it necessitates a three-dimensional component.

In "Art and Objecthood" (1967) Michael Fried famously decried the theatrical element that he argued was inherent to Minimalism, marked by a sense of duration that exists because of the Minimalist object's engagement with both viewer and space. In Jonquil's work, however, a sense of theatricality – as well as interaction – is embraced. This is exhibited perhaps most clearly in *Void for Burning* (2013), a project that makes sculpture of a void. Thin sheets of nitrocellulose, a highly combustible material sometimes referred to as "flash paper," are dampened with water and draped over shallow geometrical objects. The objects are removed once the nitrocellulose sheets have dried, and have taken on the geometrical form – ghostlike veils encasing a mysterious volume. Then, in a flash, they are gone. As a material, nitrocellulose most interested Jonquil for its ultimately immaterial properties. It naturally degrades to nothingness

over time, but most spectacularly, when lit on fire, it quickly flashes and then disappears – no smoke or ash is left behind. When set alight, as they are throughout the exhibition, the veils reveal what's underneath – emptiness. This fascination with the void cannot be discussed without reference to Yves Klein, who designated himself "the painter of space," striving for ways to give currency – quite literally – to the immaterial.

The sculptures in *In a Perfect World* embody the seamless combination of illusion and solid material that Jonquil is so adept at – he

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knows how to harness a mirror's image to disrupt visual perception. Four sculptures, comprised of glass mirror and fiberglass rods, are placed on each wall of the gallery. Each of the sculptures is in the shape of a diamond, triangle, kite and square, and each has one, two, three or four rods. Despite their obvious differences, every sculpture, through a combination of the rods and reflections, creates a fifth, uniform shape, based on a form from Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion Map (1944). Although viewers are free to look at each sculpture from any angle they desire, the same "fifth shape" will appear. Jonquil works with Google SketchUp to draft his sculptures, and makes his calculations for the angle of each piece of mirror beginning with the immaterial "fifth shape," a spherical form composed of four circles. As he notes, "The immaterial parts determine the proportions of the physical parts." These are perfect-looking geometrical forms, charged with a tense energy because of the bent rods that are inserted into holes in the glass, waiting to spring straight. These are perfect-looking geometrical forms, charged with a tense energy because of the bent rods that are inserted into holes in the glass – they are charged, waiting to spring straight. The idea of perfection is particularly relevant here because these sculptures are meant to allow for reflection – quite literally – on the existence and location of utopia. ●

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes by artist were recorded during a studio visit with the author, February 23, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", *The Primacy of Perception*, Ed. James Edie, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1964, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup> Clare Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, Tate Publishing, London, 2005, p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Judd, "Specific Objects", *Arts Yearbook*, 1965, p. 94

