

Jennifer Steinkamp

Exhibition on view March 14 - June 29, 2008

The Artist

Born in Denver in 1958, Steinkamp was the oldest of five children and lived in several places before her family settled near Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her father was a computer parts salesman and her mother directed the League of Women Voters for the state of Minnesota. Throughout her childhood, she excelled in activities in which she was allowed to express herself visually and attended the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California to earn both undergraduate and graduate degrees. She was inspired by two classes early in her studies: video art and motion graphics -- but took a hiatus from her schooling and worked for a few years as an animator and art director for commercial firms in California and New York. Her experiences and mentors, both in school and out of school, pushed her to launch an independent career based on her unique blend of digital art and practices. Early in the 1990s she had her first solo exhibition and currently teaches at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Steinkamp's repertoire of works is often site-specific. She has created work for architecture as specific as a four-sided information booth at Union Station in NYC, a balcony window at the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, and a rotunda at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, to name a few. Even the works that travel from museum to museum as in our exhibition must be designed and redesigned to fit the architectural spaces in which they will appear.

For more information go to <http://jsteinkamp.org>

Themes

Steinkamp has sought from the beginning of her career to explore architecture, virtual space, and optical illusion. She has also addressed issues such as feminism, gender and populism, always combined with the use of technology to create aesthetic experiences that engage the physiology of the human body. Although she is influenced by the overall phenomenon of technology and its visual displays throughout modern culture, she has specifically mentioned that she was influenced by Op Art, the experimental film movement, and other elements of 1960s culture. She also mentions the famous Dada artist Marcel Duchamp, a pioneer of installation and conceptual art. Many of her works have imagery drawn from nature including trees, flowers, and water that allude to her long residence in California but she is not an outdoor enthusiast. She says, "My sister has a ranch with cows, horses, and pigs, and it smells," she says. "That's why I make fake nature."

Connection

Other Artists Who Have Explored Effects of Light

Color and light have been the subject for artists throughout art history. Research other artists who have used either the depiction of light effects or actual light in their works.

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio

Claude Monet

Note: While at the Gallery, visit our work by Claude Monet.
For a lesson plan about this work, visit http://www.albrightknox.org/ArtStart/Monet_I.html

Dan Flavin

Note: While at the Gallery, visit our work by Dan Flavin.

James Turrell

Note: While at the Gallery, visit our work by James Turrell

Questions for discussion or writing assignments:

Compare and contrast one of the above artists' works with a work by Jennifer Steinkamp. What is the same? What is different? Refer to the [elements of art and design](#).

How has the use of color and light in art changed from Caravaggio to Turrell?

Elements of Art and Design

While Steinkamp's work involves complex systems of technology, it also utilizes the basic principles of art. All six elements of visual art and nine principles of design can be found in her work.

Six Elements of Art

Line
Shape
Form
Space
Color
Texture

Nine Elements of Design

Balance
Emphasis
Movement
Pattern
Repetition
Proportion
Rhythm
Variety
Unity

Connection: Go over these principles with your students before your visit and ask them to find an example of each of these principles in Steinkamp's work when they visit the exhibition. Paper, including sketchbooks or notebooks, and pencils are welcome in the exhibition.

Sound

Music and art are linked in many ways. Steinkamp uses both to create multi-sensory experiences for the viewer. Often her works are produced in collaboration with musicians, composers or sound engineers such as Jimmy Johnson and Andrew Bucksbarg.

Interactivity

Steinkamp's works take into account the perceptions and movements of the viewer and makes them a vital part of the overall artistic experience, creating an interactive environment. In the larger scale works that incorporate video projection, the viewer's form appears as a black shadow moving among the other visual elements of the work. Some works use motion sensors that are triggered as observers move through the space and activate changes in color, pattern or sound.

For example, when a viewer stands in front of Steinkamp's *Loom*, 2003, his or her shadow seems to be woven into the work as if it were woven between the interwoven strands of color that make up the work. If the viewer moves, the shadow will seem to weave itself between different layers.

Connection: Reality vs. Virtual Reality

After the exhibition, encourage your students to discuss: What is "real" about Steinkamp's work? What is "virtual?"

Vocabulary and Terms

Digital art - Artwork that is created and/or modified on a computer

Interactive environment - An installation space intentionally designed to involve the viewer's participation through their movements, sounds, or other effects that they create as they move through

Virtual space - A place/location that can't be physically inhabited but can be accessed or experienced by the human eye or mind

Optical Illusion - An image that deceives the human eye by forcing it to see something that isn't there or to incorrectly perceive that which is there

Op art - Art movement of the 1960s that included optical illusions

Dada - A cultural movement that peaked in 1916-20 that included an anti-art component that rejected traditional literature, the visual arts, and theater as meaningless

Installation art - A work of art using sculptural materials and/or other media installed in a room or other space and intended to alter or modify the way viewers experience that space

Conceptual art - A work of art in which the idea or ideas behind the work are more important than its execution. Often the artist is not the actual maker of the final artwork.

Mood - The overall feeling of an artwork and the emotions it evokes. Remember this can be different for different viewers.

Site specific - Term used to describe art designed and commissioned for individual locations

Connection: **The Colors of Light**

It's a good idea to practice before you demonstrate!

Materials:

You will need a slide projector and a prism (an equilateral triangular one is best) and a pretty dark room.

Load the projector with a clear slide, a slide with a red filter, a slide with a blue filter and a slide with a green filter.

Find objects that are the same and vary in color: red, yellow, blue and white napkins are a good choice.

1. Project the clear slide's light through the prism and see if you can get it to break into its spectral colors red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Often you will see this to the right or left of the slide projector.

Research: Why does this happen? There are a lot of good websites that explain this phenomenon. Have your students find them and explain in their own words! Older students may already know.

2. Show each colored napkin or object under each different color of light and ask the student what color it APPEARS?

Research: Why does this happen? There are a lot of good websites that explain this phenomenon. Have your students find them and explain in their own words! Older students may already know.

The Primary and Secondary Colors of Light:

This might take a day to plan how to work, but it is not only a learning experience for you, it is WELL worth it!

Materials:

You will need three slide projectors and a pretty dark room, with a large sheet or scrim at one end.

Load one projector with a red slide or cover the lens with a red filter, one with a blue filter and one with a green filter. Note: Good results are really only possible if you use theatrical light gels in primary red, primary blue and primary green (available through a theater instructor or your theater tech person or a theatrical supply store)

Experiment with your projectors - focus each into a square all the same size in the same place on the sheet or scrim. The square need not be large but it can't be VERY small - about two feet on a side is good. The square will be white when you are successful.

Now put on some music, and dance between the projector and the scrim. Have fun! Move around! What colors do you see?

You can turn off one of the projectors and overlap the squares of the other two to find the secondary colors of light and how they are made.

Questions:

How does this happen? What are the primary colors of light? What are the secondary colors? How does this differ from the primary colors of paint and pigment? Can you explain why they are different? Again, many websites explain this very well.

Connection: Make your Own Interactive Artwork

Materials: Blank slides mounts (available from photographic supply stores - look for the ones with the clear acetate in them or you will have to buy the clear acetate, cut it to size, and put it in the slide mounts) and Sharpie markers of all different colors, broad and thin point.

Give each student the assignment to make his or her own slide or slides (five is a nice number for each student) using the Sharpie markers and then play them all together for a light show. If you have more than one projector, experiment with overlapping them.