

HUMI 16 Extra Credit Visit a Local Gallery or Museum Option

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Galaxy 5 and Inversion X

What is a galaxy? Is there a parallel universe? Two different artworks challenge our mind about how we should see the world we are living in: *Galaxy 5* (Fig. 1) catches our eyes in a colorful three dimensional form, and *Inversion X* (Fig. 9) projects a multi dimensional space-time paradigm into a flat white canvas by using only black lines.

Galaxy 5, 2019, Yunan Ma, Triton Museum of Art

Galaxy 5 (Fig. 1-5) is a big round fiber artwork made by San Francisco Bay Area artist Yunan Ma (Fig. 5) in 2019. The label states it is made of corriedale wool. It is about three feet in diameter. The artist supports the work by a copper tube ring, three feet in diameter, on the edge. This work is currently on display in the Triton Museum in the city of Santa Clara as part of Yunan Ma's "An Ode To Planets" solo exhibition (Fig. 6-8, "An Ode to Planets.").

Yunan Ma was born and raised in Taiyuan, Shanxi, China. She graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design in 2013 and later studied Knitwear Design with Midori Sargent in Academy of Art University and got her MFA in 2018 ("Yunan Ma Design."). During the Artists Reception event held in the Triton Museum of Art on January 24, 2024, I had the privilege to meet Ms. Ma in person and took some photos with her and her artworks. I also had the chance to ask her some questions about her creative approach. She told me she was mainly influenced by her grandma and other female family members during her childhood before she decided to work

on knitting art. She also said her earlier career experience in fashion design built up the necessary technique skills for her to pursue this niche field of fine art creation.

The artwork *Galaxy 5* is part of the set of *Yunan Ma Fiber Art* that were made of the finest natural fibers including merino wool, alpaca wool, mohiar, silk, cotton, and novelty accent which were carefully selected from top yarn mills around the world. It is part of her *Galaxy* series with many other similar objects displayed in this exhibition. This particular artwork is one of the largest items with six colors in 12 rings. Roughly, it is in a perfect circle. The texture of the six outer rings are different from the texture showing on the six inner rings- the six outer rings are rather smooth on the surface but the six inner rings are fluffy. The order of the colors in the six inner rings are in reverse than the colors showing on the six outer rings: Ma uses Rock Blue in the outermost ring, then Cade Blue, Antique Fuchsia, Matte Beige, Magge Orange, and Rusty Orange, moving inward. Then the colors are reversed and moved from Rusty Orange, Magge Orange, Matte Beige, Antique Fuchsia, Cade Blue and finally back to Rock Blue in the inner ring. The division lines between the six inner rings are soft edges, fuzzy and irregular. The boundary between the inner rings and the outer rings are distinctly divided by height: the surface of the six outer rings are at the same level, all lower than the inner rings. The widths of the six inner rings are almost identical and shorter than all outer rings. The division lines between the six outer rings are crisp. The width of the Matte Beige outer rings is much wider than than all the other rings and is about one third of the total width of the combination of six outer rings. Overall, the shape and color of this art object, despite the title given by the artist imply an outer space concept, remind us about the shape and color of a sea anemone. This three dimensional artwork heavily uses organic shapes and is an abstract art. This art is by design a decoration art for hanging on the wall to bring lively color into the display environment. The overall warm color

tone and the natural texture of the wool create a sense of genial and lukewarm to the display setting. The smooth six outer rings produce a sense of peace and safety while the fluffy six inner rings, in the texture similar to the fur of the famous “tribble” in the original Star Trek series, foster a welcoming and friendly feeling.

This particular artwork caught my attention mostly because of its size and colors. All the pieces in this solo exhibition are very nice and many of them share a very similar overall design concept. I think they are all in a very unique design that no other three dimensional artworks have ever explored by other fine artists. Ma utilized a classical knitting technique which historically were exclusively only used to make functional objects, such as cloth, jacket, or blankets. She magically incorporates them into her design to create these decorational three dimensional fine artworks. We are all familiar with the color and texture of these objects in our daily life. But Ma repurpose their usage to foster a new kind of art. They are both near and remote to us at the same time in that sense. The use of wool also makes me feel the warmth of wearing a wool jacket while appreciating it visually. Differ from a sculpture, which usually needs to take a much larger space to display, this three dimensional takes much less space to display. Therefore, it is more accessible and approachable as artwork for a home setting. Overall, it is really a nice fine art object I wish to own for my family room.

***Inversion X*, 1977, Al Held, Anderson Collection**

In contrast to the colorful organic forms observed in *Galaxy 5*, the giant six by eight feet acrylic painting *Inversion X* (Fig. 9) illustrated by Al Held uses only black lines to draw three dimensional geometric shapes on a white canvas. This work is part of the permanent collection exhibit in the Anderson Collection, hosted on the Stanford University campus, right next to the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University.

Al Held was an American Abstract expressionist (McCoubrey). He was born in New York City in 1928 (Sandler) and learned his artistic training in the Art Students League of New York (Held and Tucker) and Académie de la Grande Chaumière, Paris (Held van de Guchte). Held painted this work while he was a professor of art at Yale University, where he taught there for 17 years from 1963 to 1980 (Held).

This work is huge! Six feet tall and eight feet wide. There are only two colors in the canvas, black lines on a white canvas. The black lines outline some simple three dimensional shapes in different widths. However, these three dimensional shapes are fragmented and pieced together in a complex fashion. Some of the lines are thin, some are thick, while others are doubled. The use of different thickness and number of lines help the viewers to distinguish one object from the other in the painting. Some objects in the work are cubes, some are spheres, some are triangular prisms. They are all broken and fragmented by each other. The segmentation of these objects creates a sense of multiple parallel universes co-existing in the same canvas. Held prompts the viewers to think about what they are seeing from that. The more carefully they looked into this canvas, the more confusing the viewers will experience. It is an abstract art. The lines to depict these objects were simple but different from each other so the viewers can recognize different broken objects more easily. For example, the largest object in the work is a big cube rendered by very thick lines. The second largest cube is rendered by a double black line, which represents white frame. The upper right part of a large sphere, rendered by a thick black line, is partially visible in the work. A sphere almost the size of the canvas is rendered by a thinner black line. Many triangle prisms, cubes, and rectangular boxes were rendered by hair lines. There are no shading or cross hatch marks to represent the volume of these objects. Therefore, spheres in this work are rendered as simple as flat circles. The sense of the volume of

the other objects are represented by the usage of one point linear perspective. For each object depicted in the work, the artist uses the one point linear perspective to render the object to create a three dimensional feel. However, Held uses different vanishing points for each object and puts them into the same view, one segmented another. Therefore, each vanishing point leads the viewer to see a different “universe” in the artwork. The composition of all these 10-20 “universes” then presents a strange viewing perspective. By carefully examining the left, right and bottom edges of the canvas, we observed many artist marks (Fig. 10-12). I believe Held uses them to pull strings from one side of the canvas to the other side to draw straight lines for a perfect execution. It is an interesting technique I learn from this work.

I appreciate Held’s usage of simple black lines on white canvas for this work. The choice of framed wire approach to render the objects simplified the composition of how he crammed multiple worlds into one view. I also appreciate that he chose to only use simple objects here. I wonder why he decided not to use the shape of pyramids but use triangle prisms instead. The use of different thicknesses and kinds of black lines also help me to see all the objects clearly. The white background guided me to focus on the essential essence of this art. Held’s perfect execution of straight thin lines and perfect circles are also breathtaking. It is a work that is full of objects that everyone can easily understand, forming a picture which no one can fully comprehend. It makes me wonder if I live inside such a world without being aware of that.

Conclusion

After the invention of photography in the 19th century (Osterman), contemporary artists shifted their focus to create images that cannot be captured by a camera to increase their competition advantage. Ma uses colorful wool with her unique knitting technique to “sculpt” *Galaxy 5*. Held uses a large white canvas with intersection of simple lines to illustrate *Inversion*

X. The kinds, forms and styles of these two artworks are very different. However, both bring us to think again about the reality that we are living in that no photography by camera can capture.

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