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How to Look at Sculpture

September 6th, 2010

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David Schafer's *How to Look at Sculpture* (2006) positions the sculptural artwork as a pivot through which the material experience of the artist is symmetrically transmitted to the beholder. The act of creating the form finds equivalence in the act of touching that created the form.

He goes on to describe the sculpted form as an echo or response to the world which is "not an imitation of nature but a creation inspired by nature", and one that suggests we might look at nature in the same active way that we look at art: in a conscious exploration of its forms, as though nature were likewise created by design. His description identifies a separation between the product of nature and the product of the artist, implying that the latter is distinct from the former rather than a continuous part of it.

We understand sculpture as a deliberately generated thing, drawn apart from the continuum of natural forms in a way that a stone, a spiderweb, the curve of a cat is not. The will of the artist separates the artist from nature, we understand, and paradoxically the artwork – the very product of that separation – is an attempt to provoke the artist's reincorporation into the undifferentiated natural world.

Schafer's description implies that this separation might be folded back into the continuity of nature not so that the art might seem artless, but so that what is artless – nature itself – might be appreciated like a work of art. I wonder whether this folding could go the other way, with the sculptural form assimilated by the beholder in an undifferentiated continuity of sensual stimulus, indistinct from the natural forms around it – even, or especially, if it meant the sculpture went perfectly unnoticed.

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