

Mary Temple

*Half-Round*, from the series, *Light Installations*, (2002-Present)

Acrylic paint on existing architecture

2013

All of our moments in the light of day are temporary moments. Light shifts, the earth's relationship to the sun gradually changes and leaves us with our memories of light. The movement of light across the spaces in which we live is something we consider, in the day-to-day, only as a function of utility. Mary Temple gives us an opportunity to consider the fleeting qualities of the light we live with and our relationship to it is forever changed. Illuminating its boundaries, Temple inscribes the edges of temporary spaces created by light and shadow. This universal language, this imagery we can all read, offers us new ways to understand the wonder of our days and our lives as we see them stilled and exalted.

Painters have long looked to bring natural light inside the plane. Using paint, Temple creates a trompe l'oeil effect and light becomes the form. When light and shadow are the only elements, and each is rendered to oppose the other, the viewer is required to consider them on their own merits. As in reality, the light's edge yields to shadow and the two cannot mix, only meet. Without referencing the tradition of painting, Temple can evoke the work of painters spanning eras. The fashion of trompe l'oeil was in its ability to trick the eye, whereas Temple uses this tool to both experience the passage of time and raise questions about the distinction between natural and created. Is the quality of light to be measured in its genesis or its effect?

An unmistakable paradox of this work is that the artist can only render the idea of light or shadow but never both at the same point. The light pushes the shadow to its projected extreme. There is no more light because the false barrier is coated in light elsewhere. The exterior wall, or far side of the leaf, is bathed in the light that has been rendered in darkness by the artist. For that reason, as much as the light is painted, the shadow is the exercise of restraint on the part of the artist here, and nature always.

Passage of time mapped by shifting light is an ancient concept. Temple uses the temporality of light and shadow to mirror a brief moment of reality, even a composed reality. In *Light Installations*, the shadow is the unpainted mass and the rest is illuminated. Each compositional decision made by the artist is based on a memory of light usually based on a photographic document. Before paint is applied, a concept born of these elements is considered, altered and adjusted. The room is painted a base color and the brighter "light color" is chosen. The environment remains the same. Our frozen moment is in fact a composition completed to give us the initial feeling of its truth.

The experience of the natural light Temple creates is not only a trick using paint, but an opportunity to stop the passage of time. In writing about an exhibition at The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Richard Klein wrote: "Temple uses our memories of the phenomenon of sunlight, that most fleeting and ethereal optical occurrence not just to fool the eye but to fool the mind." The installations wholeness allows us to be certain it is real, for a moment. Then doubt sets in as no change occurs. Temple has given us a moment to consider light and when the reality of the painted light sets in, we begin to question everything in our environment.

When we regard the artist's false light, the brisk passage of time slows and our minds - like the

aperture of a camera - can capture a greater fullness of experience. No passing clouds or breeze affects the space. Our movement cannot alter the shadow; stillness prevails. The artist, using documentary images of the space in which *Half-Round* exists, constructs this installation that we cannot change. As we experience the work, we take the light for granted before we really understand it's nature, accustomed as we are to false light in painting, photography and film. In other artists' work, a false light taken as real is the overlooked labor of a larger structure, but here the light isn't framed, it is a frame.

The frame of a window is no different than the frame of a painting. Temple's interior light installations reference that frame while presenting a polygonal plane, or several, that are both the frame and its projection. The viewer is therefore presented with a reference to foliage and architecture by painted light and shadows. This light is painted directly on the wall with no impediment. One reason these frames exist is to set apart the reality of the space from the work. Our picture, while extended beyond the classic frame, is still a painting that begins and ends. Like laundry set out to dry and pulled taut by the wind, this white light is full of shadow and never quite square. Temple fills the frame with monochromatic light and shadow. With *Half-Round*, the room installation gives us many frames to consider.

Filling the room with her false light, Temple allows us to assemble the whole installation in our minds. Columns capture the light, as do three walls. The installation can be many compositions or one whole depending on the viewer's involvement. There is no right answer to this. All of the pieces within *Half-Round* are assembled to give the space a verisimilitude of environment, making the question of its reality all the more interesting. The viewer discovers the truth and could ask "if this light is not real, could it be?" If the markings of architecture and the environment seem true, the questioning continues. Can the temporary be made permanent?

Temple allows us a space to ask these questions, and room within our busy heads to consider it. This temporary false light, in its many frames, adds up to a whole scenario in which we can be fooled, correct our perceptions, and then subject them to a further challenge. The examination itself is intensely personal, though the theme is universally accessible. A viewer in *Half-Round* interacts with the work no matter their initial intent. We are given immediate access to the work, before we know where it begins and ends, implicating us in the active questioning of light and time and motion before we can steel ourselves against it. We become immersed and illuminated.

The quiet light in our spaces is easy to ignore. It practically begs to be forgotten. The real light shifts, as does the earth, in a deliberate manner. Sometimes we welcome the warmth of light into our rooms and sometimes its blacked out for rest or concentration. Natural light is beyond our control, but we have found thousands of ways to harness it for our uses, from the sacred to the mundane (and even the profane). We are fascinated by and dependent on light, but in our hurried daily movements frequently heedless of it - until a work like *Half-Round* generously and gorgeously stills time itself so that we can examine and explore.

-Jeff Bergman, September 2013