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Christian K. Laine—Architect and Critic.

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There is no easy method with which to analyze Virginio Ferrari's latest work for a private residence in Highland Park. *Nine Elements* is a bizarre concoction of non-symmetrical cubes and planar shapes that architecturally free fall and melt into the clapboard surface of this North Shore suburban house. It is intervention, deterioration disintegration, metaphor or transformation? The spectacle is difficult to decipher or unravel, since it deals with the artists' attitudes toward shapes, aesthetics and environment, which are ultimately the teacher of his forms.

Like many of Ferrari's works, *Nine Elements* is a dance, playing with symmetries of every kind, jumping over them, mocking them and disrupting them. Form is an object of sheer poetics. It defies definition and language; and yet, it is of no minor consequence. The sculptor gives us shards with which to analyze and to touch—broken surface reflection from a pool that the hand stirs up with the motion of the mind. *Nine Elements* are simply ripples that are destined for the mind's periphery.

In the same vein are Ferrari's *Tumble Cubes*, which present another iconical study of kinetics, mostly a splinter of frozen space or a segment of time stood still. The idea, much like *Nine Elements*, attempts to capture the clean sweep of motion in transformation—one cube that magically rolls along in perspective. (Ferrari here uses the metaphor of the wind in the desert.) Symbolically, what we see are a simple blur of images—transitional shards that we are left to contemplate.

And it is this hindsight, this after thought to which Ferrari's work owes its rhythm and inspiration. The concept is reminiscent of the famous Albrecht Durer engraving where Melancholia sits and conducts an inspirational study and analysis on geometric forms, their meaning and their relation to time and place. Much like Durer, Ferrari used these geometric abstracts as a kind of typology for discourse between one's mortal soul and its eternal abyss, citing the most basic syntax of human dialogue. In this light, Ferrari's forms are like a clock in which he pursues and locates a sense of timelessness.

It is most interesting then, how the sculptor juxtaposes these themes and forms in relation to fluid but static architectural space and environment for even greater meaning and definition. In his installation at One Illinois Center (1977) with the 30 rolling spheres in perspective, he invited the viewer to existentially participate with his symbols of immovability and permanence, as if one could really rearrange a predetermined destiny or reality. We try in the most abstract sense, (The weight of the material is a direct contradiction to its accessibility to move made manifest by its shape—a sphere.) Like the actual installation, which has visually overrun and almost over spilled the sight, we become aware of our physical limitations in a conscious state. Yet, the sculptor makes no attempt to mock limitations; he is only interested in our understanding of the forbidden realms of frozen artistic and intellectual participation with his sculpture and his greater philosophic themes. The effect is almost Nietzschean—a scream.

Ferrari never seems satisfied with the fixed nature of course of the universe; he demands flux, as he attempts such allusions through metaphor, though we are helpless to accommodate or to respond. In such works as *Falling Cubes*, he explodes statics, disregarding the notion of fixed situation or environment. In a very devastating way, one cube actually finds its way off the tableaux and is mercilessly cast adrift to the harsh, vulgar realities of the floor.

In his pivotal work, *Dialogo* of 1971, in which he first attempts the kinetic possibilities and understandings of motionless objects, four elements, two of which represent the human form, converse and interact with attempted wrapping and conversational situation. As a whole, the piece and its surfaces are a direct relation to the environment and the very "closed" geometry of Ralph Rapson's architecture for the Albert Pick Hall for International Studies at the University of Chicago. Ferrari wishes neither to change the setting nor to alter Rapson's geometric exercise, but rather to intervene with a strong counterpart.

The same theme is investigated even further, in *Curiously and Observed*, where the sculptor uses two highly stylized columns that deliberately upset the very essence of closed, motionless geometric expressionism. At the apex of one column, the top remains intact, while the other opens like a box that mystically unfolds to demonstrate the concept of its three-dimensional volume and enclosure.

As a conceptualist artist, Ferrari has brought these works to an astonishing counterbalance of contrasts in both form and materials. His sculpture is a continuity of space-time, turned on space-time. And as an environmental art, Ferrari feels that his work need not be monumental to embrace or superimpose another layering of definition to the space. Instead, he uses form and metaphor as a synthesizing device—with or without an architectural backdrop—where the work fits, both poetically and philosophically into a greater landscaping vision. *Nine Elements* is thus explained.