

Spiritual Space(s): Patterns of Convivencia

The Atrium Art Gallery  January 10 – April 9, 2005

Artist's Statement:

This exhibit draws from diverse bodies of work over the past 12 years in order to explore a theme that is fundamental to my vision but most often overshadowed by other dramatic factors, such as politics, religion, or cultural peculiarity. The theme is the salutary power of pattern, both as seen in nature and especially in the works of man.

Moments of pattern and geometric convergence can provide a calm reassurance of potential—or even latent—order in a chaotic, entropic, and rapidly-changing world. The persistence of geometric patterning in the religious art and architecture of many faiths hints at the twofold efficacy and sublimity of these designs. Nature herself becomes replicable at the molecular level with crystalline and cellular patterns of exquisite geometries. The imaginative abstraction of natural patterns into decorative units of ornament by architects and designers serves to transcend the stark inanimate walls of a building and provide a visual lifeline to our organic human roots. Conversely, structural geometries of leaf and architecture exhibit underlying and more or less invisible patterns of strength and adhesion common across disparate forms. This universal character of organized pattern, combined with its implicit reference to a transcendent order, forms the bulk of its power as an expressive vocabulary, and perhaps explains why geometries are such a powerful tool of meditation and connection with the sublime.

There are, however, two other aspects of visual and manmade pattern which intrigue me. First is the fact that it almost always accompanies an effort of improvement: structurally, environmentally, aesthetically, or spiritually. The appearance of an organized geometry signifies an investment in beauty, harmony, and integration. Sometimes the effort is apparent on a large scale, such as at the San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers whose octagonal domed structure houses an extraordinary effort to preserve and propagate rare and fragile tropical plants. Other times the investment can be as simple as a carved wooden fretwork that decorates a window-frame or dado. In either case, the ambition is to exceed the ordinary and enhance human experience.

Lastly, I am guided by a recent adventure savoring geometries in the architecture of Islamic Spain. This experience emboldens me to extrapolate the power of pattern into the social sphere. One of the greatest achievements of Muslim governments in southern Spain, and the reason Spaniards today refer to that period as one of "convivencia" (from the Latin for 'living-together' but meaning more explicitly a conscious and organized state of co-existence and harmonious relationships) is the prolonged enjoyment of ethnic egalitarianism and enfranchisement there. I am inspired by the Andalusian parallels between a cultural vision expressed simultaneously as a well-integrated, diverse social body and as an artistic aesthetic of finely-articulated, interlaced geometric designs. It seems that the world today is sadly lacking in such inclusive gestures and that to the extent that an art like photography can illuminate and invoke such models, then the potential for healing is enhanced.

Gallery Statement:

The Atrium Gallery is a program of The Institute for Health & Healing — a national leader in bringing integrative health models to hospitals in the Bay Area. The Gallery offers cancer patients, staff and the community healing art to help inspire feelings of tranquility and encouragement. Art that can buoy the human spirit serves to complement traditional Western approaches to medical treatment.

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1350 South Eliseo Drive (at Bon Air Road)
Hours: 8:00 am–7:00 pm, Monday–Friday