

# ACE GALLERY BEVERLY HILLS

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## HELEN PASHGIAN

### *COLUMNS AND WALL SCULPTURES*

EXHIBITION THROUGH MAY 2012

While meticulously constructed, the artwork of Helen Pashgian shows no trace of the artist's hand at work; instead, it concentrates on the final impression creating a tension between visual and cognitive perception. The artist's intimate, small in scale works are enigmatic studies of light and color. Her larger pieces seem to defy their own creation in their intricate and minimal molding as elliptical volumes of light. A slow read is encouraged from the viewer, as one gains partial visual access without finding the origin of the image. While using light and color as exploratory materials, Pashgian has created ethereal works from industrial materials for her exhibition at Ace Gallery Beverly Hills. As stated by James Turrell, "Helen Pashgian is a pioneer of the Los Angeles 'Light and Space' movement... [She] had the ironic stance of working in such a light drenched arena while maintaining the position of being an underground artist... [Her] efforts are now known."<sup>1</sup> Pashgian, amid other artists working in Los Angeles in the late sixties such as Turrell, Robert Irwin, Mary Corse, DeWain Valentine, Doug Wheeler, Larry Bell, and Peter Alexander, has investigated the properties of light in solid form for close to fifty years. Though Pashgian's work may vary greatly in scale, regardless of size, her sculptures remain pristine and mysterious.

Pashgian has recently created a series of eight-foot tall freestanding columns that take the form of vertical double-ellipses. Every column acts as conjoined twins, which elliptically fall in and out of each other. There is no end nor beginning, rather an envelopment of space and all that inhabit it. By making these sculptures large-scale, Pashgian has created a multitude of angles with which to play with light. The columns at times are just pure, self-supporting, luminescent color, in others Pashgian has placed varying elements into the columns that change as viewers engage them from different approaches. The elements inside, whether they are a flat bar, metallic cylinder, or untraceable color, might appear to be an armature, but as each differs, no solid conclusions can be drawn. Mysterious as the

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construction is, Pashgian has created tactile color with inner light sources emanating from the sculptures.

Similar to her columns, some of the wall pieces have varying elements contained within; however, unlike her columns, Pashgian's wall works appear to float. It isn't immediately apparent how they are affixed to the wall. The enclosed elements not only appear to be shadows, but also cast shadows from within the pieces. As Kathleen Stuart Howe put it, "These interior elements at one moment capture a burst of light, then, as one moves around the sculptures, become solid forms that seem to push against the diaphanous surface... only to subside and dissolve into a ghostly presence."<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to her larger works, Pashgian's small, twelve-inch squares are filled with intriguing contradictions: each conveys a sense of movement despite being fixed, each is small in size yet implies scale, each is predominately black yet colors come forth, and each is flat yet sculptural in nature. She takes what could be from a viewfinder, and frames it with a square, making for an intimate dynamic experience. There is a strong sense of movement within these smaller works – a blurring effect, trails of light following larger sources – but at the same time there is an uncanny stillness, as if she has trapped light in a frame. Light may be as old as time, yet Pashgian has found a way to reinvent how we look at it, taking a relatively small space and rendering it vast and expansive. In slight relief, she has layered her boxes, condensing luminance and giving the impression of three-dimensions. Even though focused lighting may enhance the pieces, she has found a way to make colors glow in a natural light.

Pashgian does not reveal how her works come to fruition; instead, she leaves the viewer with what is there. Be they matte or so shiny that they glow, there is an obsession with texture and craft so meticulous that it is apparent that the artist has planned every vantage point. **Helen Pashgian is currently included in the following exhibitions: The Getty Center, Pacific Standard Time: Crosscurrents in L.A. Painting and Sculpture, 1950-1970, and the related Pacific Standard Time exhibition at The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Phenomenal: California Light, Space, Surface.**

Born in 1934, Helen Pashgian currently lives and works in Pasadena, CA.

<sup>1</sup> Turrell, James. Foreword. *Helen Pashgian: Working in Light*. Claremont, CA: Pomona College Museum of Art, 2010. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Howe, Kathleen Stewart. *Helen Pashgian: Working in Light*. Claremont, CA: Pomona College Museum of Art, 2010. 10.

For further information and visuals please contact Jennifer Kellen, Director  
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Gallery Hours: Tuesday through Saturday 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM