

REVIEWS SEPT. 11, 2010

## Helen Pashgian

POMONA,  
at Pomona College Museum of Art

by Michael Duncan



Pasadena artist Helen Pashgian, a vastly under-recognized member of the Light and Space movement of the 1960s, has long fashioned industrial materials into sleek transmitters of the ineffable. Earlier this year, two of her small acrylic sculptures were included in the exhibition "Primary Atmospheres: Works from California 1960-1970" at David Zwirner, New York, alongside works by James Turrell, Larry Bell and Robert Irwin. Her recent Pomona exhibition featured six new sculptures (ranging from 2007 to 2009) that mark a high point in her career to date.

The untitled sculptures are freestanding, 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>-foot-tall, translucent columns formed from molded sheets of monochrome, matte-toned acrylic. Pashgian assembled the works into a kind of temple of oddly shaped monoliths, each a curved realm of deep-seeming moody space. The individual sculptures consist of two side-by-side vertical tubes whose conjoined tops resemble the symbol for infinity. Within each column, acting as horizontal braces, are rods of copper or acrylic. Light striking the square or round rods from overhead generates a variety of mysterious effects. For example, on one side of a deep blue-gray column appears a shimmering red-orange line that evokes a sunset horizon, while another section of the work seems to give off fiery sparks. The end of one small round acrylic rod deep within a dark green column looks like a comet trailing an angular expanse of light. The surface of a square rod within a gray column creates a shimmering window of light, like a miniature Turrell installation. These diaphanous effects subtly animated the large, dimly lit gallery. Although Craig Kauffman's experiments with translucent plastics come to mind, Pashgian's sculptures create a more profoundly evocative environment.

In an adjoining gallery were earlier works: seven of Pashgian's small, untitled cast-resin sculptures from 1968-69. Shaped as spheres or elongated capsules, the pieces contain wisps of color floating within seemingly viscous interiors. Crystal balls and lozenges that promise access to more sensuous worlds, these reductive sculptures are—as the Zwirner show title suggested—less primary structures than fantastic curios hinting at alternate realities. Pashgian's ethereal sensibility parallels that of abstract painters Mary Corse and Marcia Roberts, two other L.A. artists who more than hold their own in the largely male club of California Light and Space.

*Photo: View of Helen Pashgian's exhibition "Working in Light," 2010, at the Pomona College Museum of Art.*