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# SHAPING SPACE

*the dynamics of three-dimensional design*

**THIRD EDITION**



## TIMELESSNESS

All art is finite—it exists only a certain amount of time before it decays or otherwise comes to an end. Some works are created in materials designed to withstand the ravages of time, such as marble, but nothing made by human beings is truly permanent. There are ways, however, other than the permanence of an individual piece by which art can transcend chronological time.

One of these is classical appeal. Certain designs last through time because they transcend contemporary aesthetic trends to express more universal standards of beauty or truth. Throughout this book, we have shown numerous very old works that still stand today as examples of good design. In Chapter 4, for instance, we admired not only Michelangelo's *David* (Fig. 4.20), sculpted 1501–1504, but also the figure called *Gudea Worshipping* (Fig. 4.17), created around 2100 BC. We don't think of Michelangelo as only a Renaissance artist; we think of him as a consummate artist whose work will always be loved. Some more recent works have also outlasted our society's tendency toward short-lived fads. Mies van der Rohe's lounge chair (Fig. 10.17)—called the *Barcelona Chair* because it was first shown at the Barcelona Fair in 1929—is still being manufactured. It is already referred to as a classic since its beautiful lines, textural contrasts, pleasing proportions, and elegant workmanship have kept it in demand.

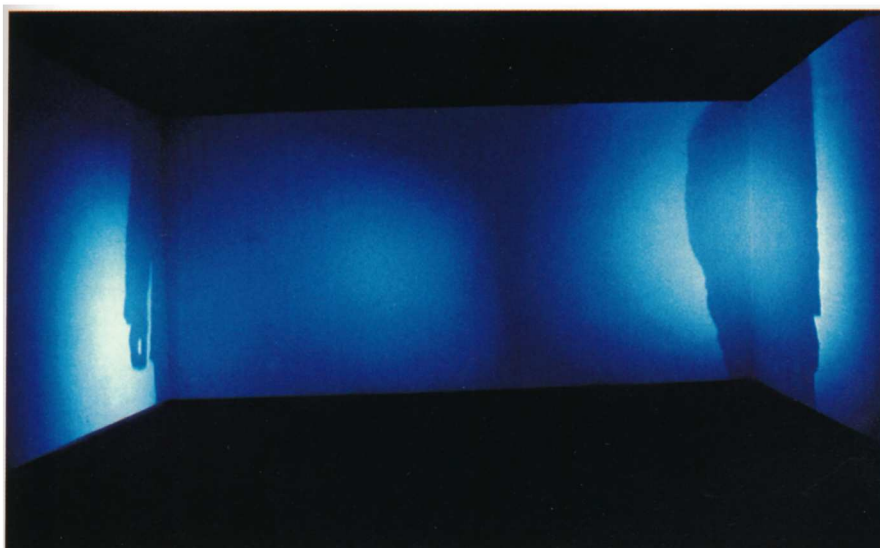
In contrast to the long-lived method of transcending time, certain interactive pieces are outside of time in the sense that they do not exist until someone becomes involved with them. Nan Hoover played video projections of light phenomena across the walls of her installation piece *Movement from Either Direction*. But the piece did not really come to life until a viewer walked into it, adding his or her own shadows (Fig. 10.18). The more the viewer moved around, the more active the piece became. The viewer's intervention thus became an important part of the work. The work did not exist in its "completed" form until someone stood before it, and each time a different person was there to complete the work, it was different.

Finally, much art presents us with the opportunity to transcend time by becoming so fully involved with a work that we forget ourselves, lose track of the passage of time, and experience the vastness of the moment, beyond time. This is an inner experience that cannot be represented in a photograph. But to get some idea of what can happen, consider Beth Galston's *Lightwall* (Fig. 10.19). The installation consisted of two panels of mirrored Plexiglas strips, one on the uneven floor and one suspended from above. Four light projectors trained on the strips created reflected linear patterns on the walls that changed subtly through time as a computerized dissolve unit changed the lights. When people entered the installation, the reflections played across their bodies. The combined effects had the potential for lifting participants out of their normal consciousness and into a world in which space and time took on entirely different dimensions. Lois Tarlow described some typical responses:



**10.17** Mies van der Rohe. *Barcelona Chair*. 1929. The Knoll Group, New York, New York.

Visitors entering the dark room invariably uttered sounds generally reserved for fireflies and falling stars. They approached the strips tentatively, uncertain as to whether they were connected by invisible barriers. Finding easy access, the viewers roamed among the free-hanging mirrors, thereby jostling them and causing the streaks on the walls to lurch about wildly. People spoke in hushed tones. One young man said, "I'd like to live here forever."<sup>4</sup>



**10.18** Nan Hoover. *Movement from Either Direction*. 1995. Video installation. Bonn, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Photo © 1998 Nan Hoover.



**10.19** Beth Galston. *Lightwall*. 1983. Mirrored Plexiglas strips, projectors, computerized dissolve unit. Size of gallery space: 35 × 35 × 12' (10.68 × 10.68 × 3.66 m). Installation at Kingston Gallery (collection of the artist).

<sup>4</sup> Lois Tarlow, from Beth Galston, "Alternative Space," *Art New England*, June 1984, p. 6.