

HYPERALLERGIC

Fred Eversley's Joyful Light

Eversley's parabolic sculptures draw us into a self-aware and ever-shifting encounter with space and perceptual phenomena.

by Natalie Haddad | May 1, 2021



Installation view, *Fred Eversley: Recent Sculpture* at David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles (all images unless otherwise noted: Photo by Jeff McLane / Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery)

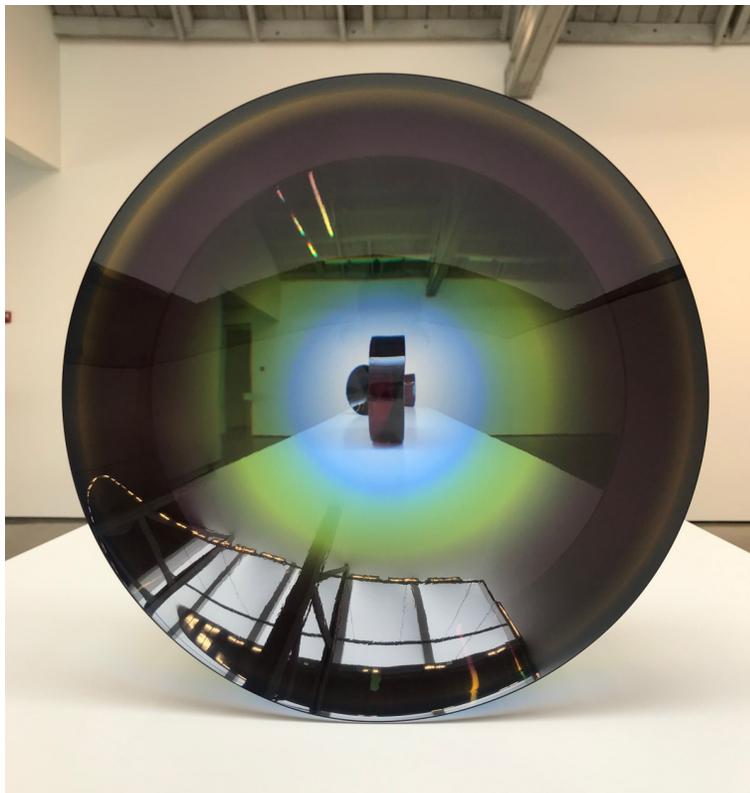
LOS ANGELES — Fred Eversley has been making art for more than 50 years. *Recent Sculpture* at David Kordansky Gallery is by no means a survey — its 15 sculptures all date from 2018 to 2020 and focus primarily on the form that has most occupied him over the years, the parabolic lens. But the exhibition's concentration allows the breathtaking effects of his work to come through all the better.

A pioneering figure in California's Light and Space movement, Eversley left a career in aerospace engineering for art; he moved to Southern California to work at Wyle Laboratories, where he designed and constructed testing facilities for NASA. As a result, he brought to his art practice technical expertise as well as a rigorous scientific grasp of energy.

The works in *Recent Sculpture* — 10 parabolic lenses and five horizontal lenses that resemble shallow bowls — continue the artist's longtime fascination with the parabola and its optical and acoustical properties. He uses a centrifuge to create his translucent forms and achieves their luminous surfaces through repeated sanding and polishing.

The results are mesmerizing. The works seem at once organic and synthetic, material and immaterial in the way they change with the vicissitudes of light, seeming, at times, to exist wholly through reflections. The crystalline sheen makes the hardened polyester look as if it is suspended between liquid and solid states. Eversley has expanded his palette from his original magenta, yellow, and cyan, with some works composed of two or three gradated colors. In "Untitled (parabolic lens)" ([1969] 2020), the colors radiate out in concentric circles, from white at the center to light blue, green, indigo, and black, with some variation depending on the light. From certain angles red or yellow hues flicker in and out. The soft gray at the center of a black lens suggests the moon shrouded by fog and darkness.

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The exhibition's layout enhances the kaleidoscopic effects. The five horizontal lenses sit on a central table bookended by the parabolic lenses, which are displayed at varying angles on two long platforms; from almost any angle, the center of a lens captures the distorted images of the sculptures it faces, refracted onto its concave interior walls.

Some sculptures captured by the lens appear to float in space; looking through the deep royal blue of one work feels like staring into the cosmos or an oceanic abyss. The convex forms of the horizontal lenses create the opposite effect, saturated with color at the center and radiating a halo of light around the edges, like a solar eclipse.

In contrast to the work of many of his Light and Space and Minimalist contemporaries, Eversley's sculptures are relatively small. The parabolic lenses are under 20 inches in diameter and around six inches deep, and the horizontal lenses are just slightly larger in diameter.

Because of their intimate size, they neither tower over us, like John McCracken's monoliths or Larry Bell's tinted glass walls, for example, nor immerse us, like James Turrell's light installations, but rather draw us into a self-aware and ever-shifting encounter with space and perceptual phenomena. Eversley has called his work "kinetic art" in the sense that it prompts us to move, but the label doesn't capture the joy of the experience.

Eversley's virtuosity is matched by an understated wit. The correspondence between the parabolic lens and the eye can conjure associations with surveillance or panopticism, underscored by the layering of our own reflections with the distorted views and reflections of others.

Likewise, their associations with science, technology, and space travel evoke dystopic science fiction (or reality) at times: A ruby red lens viewed head-on almost recalls HAL 9000, the sentient computer in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and Eversley's centrifuge is fashioned from a turntable once used to making atomic bomb casings. (Critic Claire Barliant notes in a *Bomb* magazine review the rebelliousness of rerouting doomsday technology toward art.)

Yet *Recent Sculpture* makes a strong case for Light and Space, and Eversley's elegant, jewel-like sculptures, as especially welcome, essential even, in times of unrest. His artworks provide a space for curiosity and play. They embody "Light and Space" by creating an atmosphere of lightness unencumbered by our worldly realm.