

2013

Modular Envelops

Rotem Tamir

Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>

Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

© The Author

Downloaded from

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/3086>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

Modular Envelops

A thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture + Extended
Media at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

Rotem Tamir

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bezalel Academy for Art and Design
Jerusalem, 2007

Master of fine Arts Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013

Director:

Kendall Buster, Professor, Department of Sculpture + Extended
Media

Virginia Commonwealth University

Richmond, Virginia

May 2013

Acknowledgements

Well...how many times do you get the chance to dedicate something to people who have helped you along the way. And there are a lot! In every place I had been and every adventure I have been a part of, there was at least one person there who helped me and taught me and believed in me. Teachers and Faculty from my past have become good friends and the people who believe in me the most.

In these acknowledgements I want to thank the people who I met as a result of art. Two main characters are Mirit Cohen Caspi who was my teacher, but has become a second mother, a colleague and a true friend.

Lance Hunter who taught me how to sculpt and with whom I spent many days sitting on his roof in south Tel Aviv, growing vegetables, looking for the falcon and philosophizing about art.

It wasn't easy for me to study so far from home. During the past two years there were many difficulties, both as an art student and as a human being. I would like to thank Amy Hautt, Kendall Buster and Siemon Allen, and Gregory Volk whose doors were always open for me and who never judged me in my hard moments. And of course, to my soul friend, Omri, who is also my life partner and my colleague and who I also met as a result of art.

I mentioned just a few people but of course there are a lot: Family, friends, faculties and peers who each, in a specific moment, gave exactly the help I needed.

Forward:

If a person had entered my studio this past year, he could have easily assumed that my interests ranged from modernist architecture to geometric abstraction to Russian constructivism from the 1920's. Someone who would have entered my studio two years ago could have easily thought that I was dealing with flight: the invention of flight, building kites, birds, maybe engineering and imaginary architecture. Of course when I tried to build a small island in the sky I was interested in flight, but my point is that I don't have a favored subject matter as I don't have a favored form or material or color to work with in my studio. My studio is a versatile place: things change visually, materially, and formally according to each project.

Around nine years ago I tried to create a perfume of a memory. At the time my studio took place mostly in my kitchen. My kitchen was full of laboratory instruments; for separating oil from water, for weighting and heating and filtering different materials, full of boxes to collect different materials from which I wanted to extract the smell. It was a great time. After that I moved to catching sound, a very quiet sound. That time I learned how to plan acoustic spaces, how sound moved in the air, I started to deal with acoustic materials. In every project I get a chance to meet and talk with at least one person who specializes in the subject that I am dealing with. I think that with every project I gain a new friend. The point is that the thing that never changes, from the moment I understood that I am going to be an artist, is my investigation technique. Meaning: the primary concept stage, the collection of data, the documentation, the development of

the concept, the conclusions and the unexpected by-product that eventually becomes the artwork. Actually, the day I discovered that this research method can be applied to every subject, was the day I knew I wanted to be an artist. I actually remember in detail this moment of discovery.

Of course I do not consider myself an astronaut after one year of learning about flight, but I do enjoy switching hats and imagining I am an astronaut. I can simply say that I am playing but in a very serious and disciplined way.

The Original idea/ The First step:

The project began with my wishing to go out and work in nature in response to the changing landscape with which I would interact. I wanted to leave the sculpture exposed to the climate and through time allow it to contain in it the unique properties of the place and become part of that place.

Moreover, not only would the sculpture become part of a given place but also it might be used as a biotope for the natural system in which it stood.

I didn't look to build another monument. Instead I wanted to use light materials and a flexible structure so that it could be carried and manipulated easily in relation to the scale of my body (110lb x 5.2'). Therefore, there was no way to carry around tools such as a hammer, a drill, etc. in order to work outside. It was clear to me that I needed to invent an instrument that would allow me to improvise in nature however I wanted to.

In a conversation *About Women* with the intellectual Yeshayahu Leibowitz, he said: "*As far as physical strength, on average, men have an advantage over women. It is possible that in most of human history that is known to us, physical strength was the crucial thing in social reality: hunting, agriculture, warfare, all these are primarily activities that require*

*physical strength. It is possible that the big change, which occurred in the past two generations, in women's social status, is a result of physical strength ceasing to be being a decisive factor in social reality. Office work is perhaps more important nowadays than physical labor and even women drivers or pilots, physical strength does not increase or decrease their performance."*¹



The original idea of building a structure outside resulted from thinking about art and the creative process in relation to studying, designing and building small ecological sustainable systems. One of the major interests that I have, in regards to planning sustainable environments, is in the basic thought/principle that you can plan and design a place that will attract life to enter it. By doing this, you turn the place into a system. In other words, the artist / human being plans and creates the conditions and the means, and this creates possibilities. When I imagined the outdoor sculptures I might build, I thought about creating a place that would attract events to it.

* Picture above; first prototype of Modular Envelope while I was testing it outside at the James River in Richmond VA, November 2012, photo by Rotem Tamir

¹ Conversation between Avi Katzman and Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Documented by Benny Bruner 1994, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4z5rJgp8RA>

“The only real difference between fine household furniture and its campaign counterpart was that the latter could be quickly folded up, packed away in boxes, transported, and-without the use of nail, tracks, or tools-reassembled”



“The box shown with sand drawer and blotter extended.”

“The box shown open to reveal a baize-lined fitted interior with a pen and ink tray.”



“The box shown with internal Compartment open. The panel at the back of the compartment conceals three secret drawers.”



About the development/Process/journey:

In the introduction for the book, "The Art of the Project" I found an explanation for the project artist's identity:

*He or she is someone who collects, observes, classifies, enumerates, compares, who is rigorous and disciplined while at the same time humorous and irreverent, the practitioner of what we could call inter-in-disciplinarity. Although the project is devised and carried out with an exactitude that can border on the manic, the investigator remains unofficial, amateur, a nonspecialist who mixes subjectivity and objectivity, high-minded speculation and parodic subversion.*²

I found that the 'Journey stage' is the most fertile step in the process; when it's main characteristic is the 'unknown'; you don't know how long it will take? Where you will go? What you will learn? Who you will meet? And what fruits this journey will bear. The word: *Journey* consists in itself the aspect of *Time*.

The development of every project is similar in essence to the development of an artist. I think that the structural skeleton of the way is the same whether it is a short singular art project or a lifetime project. Every project has its own nature: materially, structurally and rhythmically. Although this project began from thinking about interacting with the outside world, it eventually happened to be built and developed almost entirely in the studio.



² The art of the project, projects and experiments in modern French culture edited by Johnnie gratton and Michael Sheringham, First published in 2005 by Berghahn Books. P10

After working on small models, sketches and writings, in order to find the basic form and materials, I built the first prototype. The form came from the Origami world and the flexible joints and the general material language came from kite buildings. It is very important to my working practice as an artist to have interests that change through time. In this way, over time I collect knowledge from different disciplines and these are used as a kind of database for solving problems that always exist in the creative process.

* The picture above was taken while I was trying to build a small floating island. I made this type of kite call *Sutton Flowform* and tested it in Sandbridge Beach in Virginia, on October 2011, photo by Rotem Tamir

How to Make:

The sharing of information in accessible media, especially books about how to make or build something, have always been one of my favorite things. With these I can learn easily and by myself and without depending so much on my geographic location or my budget. Registering for classes is much more expensive and from my experience, you sometimes get less knowledge over a longer period. I call these books "knowledge books": and this refers to any book that shares a specific knowledge in a clear, simple and accessible way. I found that these kinds of books, perhaps unexpectedly, encourage my imagination more than any story or novel. I think it is because they do not try to direct your imagination by telling you what such and such looks like. These books just show you possibilities. In a way they are just providing a framework in which you can begin to imagine. Moreover, you can express your imagination by making it.

My interest in these books is connected to *how* I am interested in presenting my work to my viewer: I am not interested in the

viewer entering my mind nor am I interested in entering his mind. I am interested in creating the essential environment in which the mind will feel safe enough to begin imagining- each individual by way of his or her own mind. This is similar to the original idea for a project and my interest in planning systems, which is to plan and build a place that will be used as a fertile ground for optional events. This is not a mere representation of an event that had already happened because the unexpected thing that happened to me as an artist during the process, in it's nature, will never be able to stay unexpected once it's happened. The way I perceive unexpected moments and events during the creative process is necessarily connected to the fact that I am a main character in the process. Even if, in some imaginary life, I would be able to control the unexpected moment and bring it to the viewer, as it was unexpected to me, the viewer will still never be able to perceive the moment I experienced in the same excitement and desire in which I had perceived it.

Therefore it is necessary for me to build a place (every time a different one) that will keep the quality of the unknown and the journey that is in the nature of inventing something. Maybe I can say that this is the heart of my interest in Art; how can the individual creative process, which depends on so many known and unknown components, be transmitted to the viewer, not in a representational way, but to actually translate the language that had already been created in the studio into a new space in which the viewer, in a way, can become the artist.

In the beginning of the book "*The poetics of space*", Gaston Bachelard relates imagination to a place:

For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense

of the word. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty. Authors of books on "the humble home" often mention this feature of the poetics of space. But this mention is much too succinct. Finding little to describe in humble home, they spend little time there: so they describe it as it actually is, without really experiencing its primitiveness, a primitiveness which belongs to all, rich and poor alike, if they are willing to dream....

..We shall see the imagination build "walls" of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection- or, just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts. In short, in the most interminable of dialectics, the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences the house its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams. It is no longer in its positive aspects that the house is really "lived", nor is it only in the passing hour that we recognize its benefits. An entire past comes to dwell in a new house.³

place, n.¹

1. A (public or residential) square. 2. A small residential square or a side street (esp. a cul-de-sac) lined with houses; a short row of houses which originally stood by themselves or on a suburban road; any group of houses not properly classifiable as a street.

³ The Poetics of space, the classic look at how we experience intimate places by Gaston Bachelard, Translated from the French by Maria Jolas, published by Beacon Press 1994 Edition p.4-5.

II. Senses relating to space or location.

3. a. Room, available space. Also: a space that can be
b.Space (esp. as contrasted with time); continuous or
unbounded extension in every direction; extension in space

4. a. a battlefield. Obs .b. Ground contested by opposing
forces in battle. Obs. rare.

5. a. a particular part or region of space; a physical
locality, a locale; a spot, a location. Also: a region or part
of the earth's surface .b. the amount or quantity of space
actually occupied by a person or thing; the position of a body
in space, or in relation to other bodies; situation, location

4

space, n.¹

1. Time which is free or available for doing something;
leisure; opportunity. Chiefly in to have (also give) space.

7. a. Physical extent or area; extent in two or three
dimensions. b. Extent or area sufficient for a purpose,
action, etc.; room to contain or do something. Also in
extended use. c. Chiefly Sc. in early use. Extent or room in a
letter, periodical, book, etc., available for, or occupied by,
written or printed matter (cf. sense 11e). Chiefly in contexts
of restricted extent.

8. Continuous, unbounded, or unlimited extent in every
direction, without reference to any matter that may be
present; this regarded as an attribute of the universe,
describable mathematically (in modern science usually

⁴ "place, n.1". OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press. 12 May
2013

<<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/view/Entry/144864?rskey=0z4yLr&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

conflated with time: cf. space-time n. 1); (as a count noun) a mathematical construct or model of this.⁵

Environment, n.

1. The action of circumnavigating, encompassing, or surrounding something; the state of being encompassed or surrounded.

2. a. The area surrounding a place or thing; the environs, surroundings, or physical context b. The physical surroundings or conditions in which a person or other organism lives, develops, etc., or in which a thing exists; the external conditions in general affecting the life, existence, or properties of an organism or object. c. With modifying word: a particular set of surroundings or conditions which something or someone exists in or interacts with.⁶

Gaston Bachelard speaks about the home as a shelter, a place in which we feel safe and therefore feel free to dream. When I am developing my art work, whether it is in the studio or outside, I am creating a new environment and turning it into a home for me: a safe place in which I allow myself to dream. I am not presenting my dreams for my viewers, but building a new environment that is supported by the same linguistic principles, which I have already developed. In this context, I

⁵ "space, n.1". OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press. 12 May 2013

<<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/view/Entry/185414?rskey=j6pcvi&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

⁶"environment, n.". OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press. 12 May 2013

<<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/view/Entry/63089?redirectedFrom=Environment>>.

must say that I think one of the major duties of the artist is in creating potentials.

Developing a language:

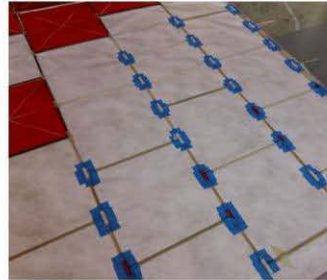
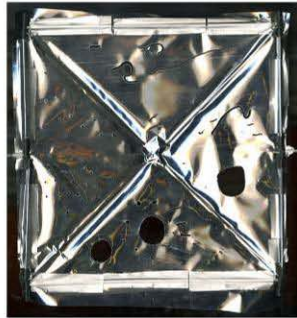
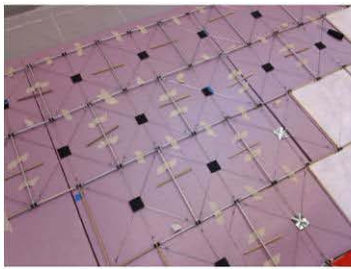
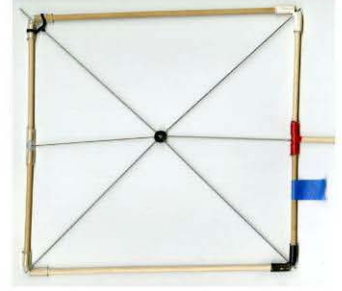
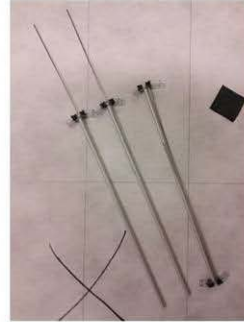
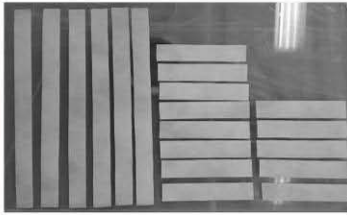
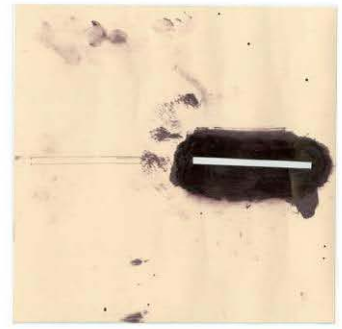
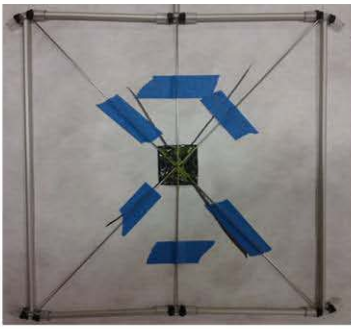
One of the reasons I systematically document every development that happens during the realization of a project, is to remember the characteristic of forms and materiality that took place in the evolution of the work of art. When I get to the final product - "the work of art" - I don't remember how I got there and it is interesting to save those documents because a small stone in one project could become a major one in another. Another reason to document and collect images from the process is because the various documentations allow for a deeper study in real time of the new language that is being developed in the studio. Meaning, while a new thing is invented in the studio, at the same time, a new and unexpected syntax can happen. Regular documentation keeps you conscious because you constantly need to do something (you need to document) and because you get a second look that is more of an "outside" view. I found that work, which is based on a "project", is a fertile ground to always stay surprised and get a lot of uncontrolled situations. The process itself is a foundation stone in my studio practice.

language, n. (and int.)

1. a. *The system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people, community, etc., typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure.* b. *The vocal sounds by which mammals and birds communicate; (in extended use) any other signals used by animals to communicate.* c. *A means of communicating other than by the use of words, as gesture, facial expression, etc.; non-verbal communication.* d. *Computing. Any of numerous*

*systems of precisely defined symbols and rules devised for writing programs or representing instructions and data that can be processed and executed by a computer.*⁷

⁷ "language, n. (and int.)". OED Online. March 2013. Oxford University Press. 14 May 2013
<<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/view/Entry/105582?rskey=ri7CuM&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.



Documentations from the process in the studio 2012-13

Beauty;

When the work stood in the gallery, while meeting with someone who had scheduled to play with the instruments, I was asked how I knew that this was the right structure that I should keep developing. I answered that every stage in building it was beautiful. Murray Gell-Mann in his Ted talk *on Beauty and truth in physics* explains it this way: He said, "what is especially striking and remarkable is that in fundamental physics a beautiful or elegant theory is more likely to be right than a theory that is inelegant."⁸ I also remembered my Mother used that term to express satisfaction from experiments that took place in her laboratory. Of course beauty refers to esthetics, but esthetics does not necessarily mean someone's taste. It also refers to correlation between one object or material to another. Symmetry is beautiful, or when one solution clarifies a few problems at the same time it is also beautiful.

Edgar Allan Poe deals with the term *Beauty* in his essay *The Poetic Principle*:

An immortal instinct deep within the spirit of man is thus plainly a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odors and sentiments amid which he exists. And just as the lily is repeated in the lake, or the eyes of Amaryllis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of these forms, and sounds, and colors, and odors, and sentiments a duplicate source of de" light. But this mere repetition is not poetry. He who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and

⁸ Ted Ideas Worth Spreading, Conference 2007,
http://www.ted.com/speakers/murray_gell_mann.html

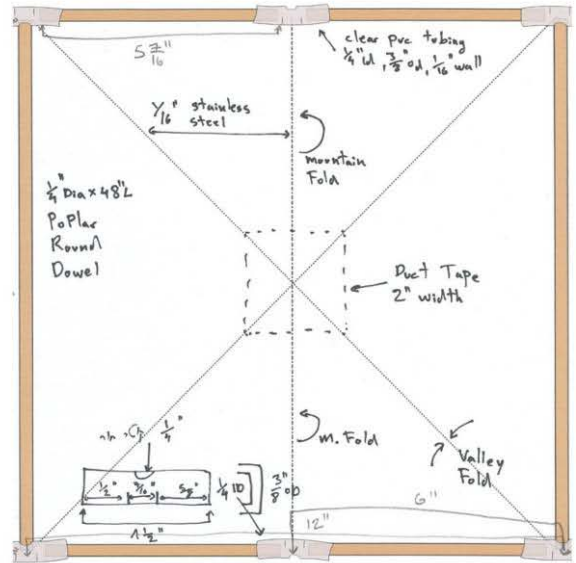
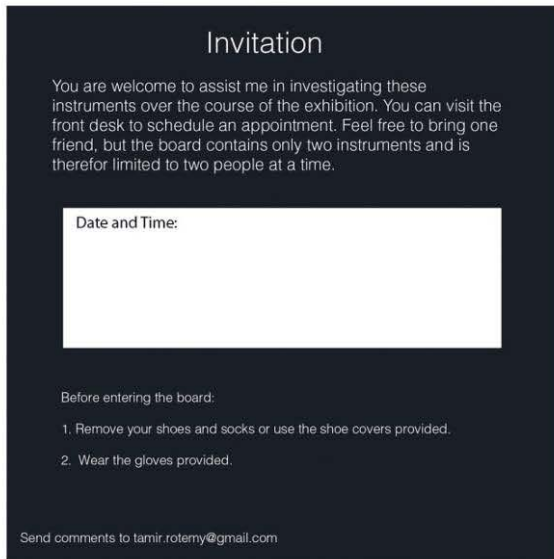
sounds, and odors, and colors, and sentiments which greet him in common with all mankind - he, I say, has yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us, but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements perhaps appertain to eternity alone. And thus when by Poetry, or when by Music, the most entrancing of the poetic moods, we find ourselves melted into tears, we weep then, not as the Abbate Gravina supposes, through excess of pleasure, but through a certain petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp now, wholly, here on earth, at once and for ever, those divine and rapturous joys of which through' the poem, or through the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses.⁹

⁹Edgar Allan Poe, "The Poetic Principle" (B), *Home Journal*, series for 1850, no. 36 (whole number 238), August 31, 1850, p. 1, cols. 1-6. Full text available on line and took from

<http://www.eapoe.org/works/essays/poetprnb.htm>



This image and the following images are from my MFA thesis show; Modular Envelops, Anderson gallery, Richmond VA



People were able to schedule a meeting with the artist and investigate the instruments. Above: the invitation card as shown from both sides.



Meeting Time- people playing on the board.



Meeting Time- people playing on the board.

© Rotem Tamir 2013

All Rights Reserved