

The light and space movement assignment



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The Light and Space Movement: An Embodiment of the Sublime Throughout its history, the radiant light and tempered atmosphere distinctive of California's environment, as well as its landscape and culture, has been a source of inspiration for artists. In the first half of the twentieth century, the style of California Impressionism was prevalent. Artists involved in this movement adopted the attention to light characteristic of French Impressionists, and applied this to California landscapes.

As Minimalism gained momentum as an art movement in the 1960's, art left behind the notion of universal beauty and moved towards a new aesthetic experience which embodied a concept of the sublime which could adapt to the tensions of modernity. Thus emerged a new kind of movement called Light and Space which explored how geometric shapes and light could affect the environment and the viewer's perception. The Light and Space Movement was officially introduced in 1971 in the Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space exhibition at the UCLA University Art Gallery.

The exhibition featured work by Peter Alexander, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, John McCracken and Craig Kauffman. Using large scale installations they created immersive environments with light as the primary material using glass or plastics including polyester resin, Plexiglas and Fiberglas as conductors. By reducing art to its purest elements, light and space, the focus shifted from the work as an object to the perception of the viewer. The interaction of the viewer with the installation is fundamental as it can only be activated by one's perceptual gaze.

Once this occurs, the viewer is provided with an overwhelming sensory experience that can be characterized as the modern concept of the sublime (Friel, Megan). The modern aesthetic experience embodies the tense space between reality and unreality and the visible and invisible using light as a physical presence (Stiles, Kristine). This tension can be seen in the work of Light and Space artists Robert Irwin, Doug Wheeler, and namely James Turrell. Wheeler demonstrates the power of light's presence in his "light encasement" installation, a