



Berlin, 4 April 2023

Museumsinsel Berlin, Pergamonmuseum
Liam Gillick. Filtered Time
6 April – 15 October 2023

CATALOGUE TEXT

Liam Gillick: Filtered Technique

Contemporary LED stage lighting is almost infinitely programmable in terms of color and can be easily set to function on a timed program, either internally or with the addition of an external device. Mapping of video onto the wall relief panels and onto the floor is done using dedicated software such as MadMapper. Sound is run from small digital players in each room running to small speakers. Sound is sourced from field recordings, online resources and edited in Audacity and DaVinci Resolve before being output as WAV files and played from memory cards. The color that is mapped onto the panels is achieved as follows. High resolution TIF images supplied by the museum are opened in Affinity Designer. The software is one of a number of vector based illustration softwares, the most famous of which is Adobe Illustrator. I moved to the Affinity set of softwares as you can switch within each application between vector and pixelated workspaces. The software is not bloated with a lot of unnecessary features nor is it connected to an expensive and restrictive subscription model. Working on a Mac Studio M1 Ultra and using a Wacom Intuos Pro tablet and stylus I traced each image by hand. Each section of the relief is a new vector based layer rather than the pixelated painting one might do in Adobe Photoshop. At first I used the Pen Tool in Pen Mode for each color area. Each node in the shape was then selected and converted to Smart Mode, which automatically smooths corners and edges. At times I used Pencil Mode which allows tracing in the traditional sense, but it was easier to achieve a decent outline for each color shape using the Pen Mode and creating thousands of nodes in a process of repeatedly clicking around a chosen color area to create a single linked vector based border line that could be endlessly manipulated and is non-destructive. After completing the first panel of an Assyrian Genii I considered ways to accelerate the process. I realized that if I used Boolean operations on the vector geometries I would not need to trace each outline. The process is as follows.

Trace one part of an image, for example the helmet of a Genii. Then draw a simple rectangle shape below this that intersects with the helmet shape. This rectangle will be the face of the Genii. Make sure both vector shapes are at 50% opacity in the layer window. Perform a boolean Divide Geometry action upon the two layers. This creates a perfect border between the two color layers along the bottom edge of the helmet. After making sure the helmet is still a solid unbroken vector shape, select the adjacent face layer and manipulate the nodes with the Node Tool to continue to shape the border of the face are that does not connect to the helmet. This process is repeated until the point where most of the figure is now traced in different colored vector based layers with perfectly matching borders. Using this process there are moments when dealing with a layer such as the neck or any other are bounded on all side by layers that are already

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traced – when it is possible to produce a new layer of defined color with no tracing at all but entirely by performing repeated boolean operations upon the layer concerned until it has been completely isolated and perfectly borders its surrounding color layers. All tracing results in color vector layers which are infinitely scalable, with color and opacity that can be easily adjusted. Once tracing is completed and a color choice has been made a PNG image is output from Affinity Designer. This image is imported into Davinci Resolve video editing software. Davinci Resolve is noted for its color correction tools and its spline based keyframe Fusion editing page. Between the color manipulation abilities and visually expressed effects in the Fusion page, Davinci Resolve allow for complex shifts in color, tone, opacity and movement. Once a sequence is satisfactory, it is output to a Quicktime video file. The quicktime file is then played from a BriteSign Player through a video projector and mapped onto the wall relief panels in the museum. BriteSign players are originally sold as digital signage players but they offer stability and consistency when wishing to project video for long periods of time.

The conclusion from this process of tracing is as follows. The reliefs were not created by individual artists in the contemporary sense, instead, consistent and repeated elements suggest a catalogue or visual syntax that is evident across most relief panels. Carved lines are often entirely straight and details such as hair, eyes, and lips are consistent as is the general composition of the panel I considered. Armlets, necklaces and earrings are almost always the same. This suggests to me that there is a lexicon of elements for each relief carving. And they were drawn out or initially inscribed onto the panels by a draftsman who had specific rules and dimensional principles to follow. Therefore it suggests there would have been some kind of master panel to copy or drawn set of rules to follow. It is possible that his knowledge would not require specifically documented regulations or master panels but be passed along through processes of apprenticeship – the learning of rules of dimension, practice and execution. This would be consistent with our understanding of the history of masonry, tailoring, ceramics, applied and fine arts from the medieval period onwards. There would be certain principles to be followed and these could be taught and internalized.

For an artist today, the experience of tracing the relief patterns is akin to the role of the carver of the artifacts. One is following a repeated set of principles with some deviation with a rapid realization of the most efficient way to reproduce an outline. Certain areas are relatively easy to achieve but require some skill such as the clean sweeping lines of a robe but can be achieved by drawing a straight line and then refining the subtle curvature afterwards. Others are repetitive yet consistent in their own way, such as hairstyles and decorative jewelry. Having been through the process myself, I would propose that this was a collaborative exercise with one main draftsman inscribing the panels while others stood at a distance to see if the main elements were correctly positioned. Certainly standard measuring devices and guides were used for we find the same curves, straight lines and compositional spacing repeatedly. As an artist it is obvious that the best way to achieve this consistency would be to use some kind of template. Following this period of inscribing, apprentices or other skilled workers would proceed with the carving in teams. This is evident to

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me in the lack of a consistent hand in the execution of the carving. Some relatively straightforward areas such as the bags carried by the figures, the earrings and necklaces, are less precise and refined than other areas. It suggests to me that there would be different hands involved in the production of the panels, possibly taking over from each other at various moments and calling in a specialist when required. I have given little attention to the cuneiform text written across each panel. It is clear that they are of great importance and significance to the works and are of equal value yet indifferent to the relief carvings themselves. It is clear during the process of tracing that the inscribed texts have a destructive effect on certain detailed carving which suggests to me that the person writing the texts has greater authority over the final appearance of the work than those who were carving the relief panels. However it is unclear whether or not the texts and carving are done by the same hands. It is quite possible that they are and it is quite possible that these two roles, carving and inscribing, were viewed as equally important and integrated for reasons connected to expressing the power and meaning of the objects – like signing a painting, or producing a text based artwork today. It is also possible that each person or team had their own defined roles, equally significant and expressed with a degree of indifference to each other.

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