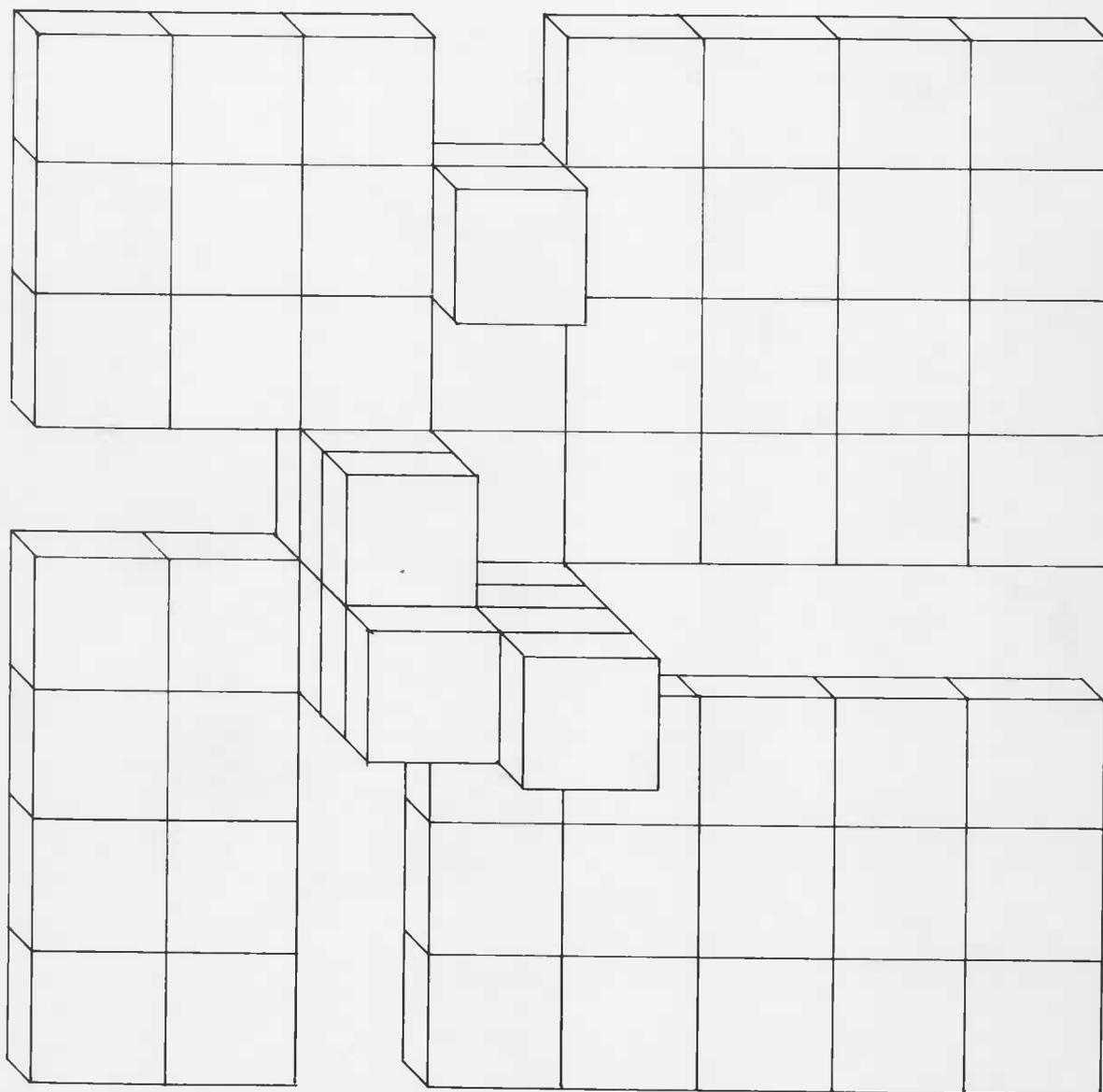


# Peter Lowe



GARDNER CENTRE GALLERY  
University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton

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In the 'Realistic Manifesto' of 1920, Pevsner and Gabo said, "The realisation of our perceptions of the world in the forms of space and time is the only aim of our pictorial and plastic art." 'Pictorial space', 'Illusory space', 'Real space', these are phrases bandied about the world of art criticism as though they referred to entities in their own right like real post-offices or pictures of post-offices rather than indicating certain kinds of relationships like 'in front of' or 'at the back of'.

Looked at from this point of view the statement by Pevsner and Gabo seems very innocuous. It becomes more interesting when one sees that they rejected aesthetic taste and illusion as a basis for their work. Almost in the way that Descartes, as a starting point for his philosophy, rejected every proposition that he could not be absolutely sure was true, so Pevsner and Gabo proposed to start afresh with what they knew to be certain, namely that they perceived the world in terms of space and time.

Peter Lowe's work is in their tradition and he might well subscribe to that part of their manifesto. As such he is faced with the same problems and is open to being misunderstood in the same way.

His problem is this. Given that space and time are not entities in themselves but are ways in which we relate objects one to the other, how can he direct our attention to purely spatial relationships? For objects have other characteristics. They are coloured, they have various shapes and sizes and more importantly they often have emotional, symbolic or aesthetic significance to us.

His solutions to this problem are relatively simple. He deliberately reduces the number of colours (in some works to a single colour). His shapes also are simple - more simple as his work has developed for he is now more likely to use a square as a basic module whereas in his early work he would use a shape where the sides bore a  $1 : \sqrt{2}$  relationship.

This simplicity, however, should not lead us into the mistaken assumption that the relationships between the parts in any one of his works are equally simple. Certainly his work is methodical and is preconceived. He invariably knows what kinds of relationships he wishes to explore. But this is his starting point. When the work is finished there are many more relationships that he did not have in mind.

This is not accidental, it is an inevitable consequence of his method of working.

If he has any affinity to mathematics it is not in the sense that the pythagoreans believed certain mathematical relationships to be more beautiful than others, it is more that he sees in mathematics another pursuit to do with grasping relationships, sometimes quite unexpected ones.

If you ask him if he intends his work to have any emotional or symbolic significance he will tell you that he does not. But his attempts to simplify the elements he uses in his work frequently lead to a charge of 'coldness' or being 'clinical'. In such cases it is the viewer who insists on overlaying the work with emotional significance. Similarly no matter how hard the Russian Constructivists disavowed aesthetics, their work is seen in terms of our individual aesthetic conventions.

Peter Lowe and they are interested in objects for what they are, not for what we can use them for, as representations of something else or as triggers for emotions.

It is not so much, therefore, that his work is limited in its scope but alien to a culture that is brought up on visual images.

Philip Hughes