

Sight Unseen



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EXCERPT: EXHIBITION

Shiny Cubes and Popsicle Sticks in a California Light & Space Artist's Retrospective

By Jennifer S. Li

It's a sweltering hot day in downtown Los Angeles when I visit California Light and Space artist Peter Alexander's career retrospective at Parrasch Heijnen Gallery, but I feel immediately refreshed upon entering. It isn't just the effect of the A/C, but also of Alexander's geometric polyurethane sculptures, their glistening surfaces at once enticingly reflective and mysteriously opaque. Three attenuated, spear-shaped works gleam like giant icicles against the walls of the first gallery. Sculptures resembling popsicles, colorful ice cubes, or slabs of Jell-O fill the main space.

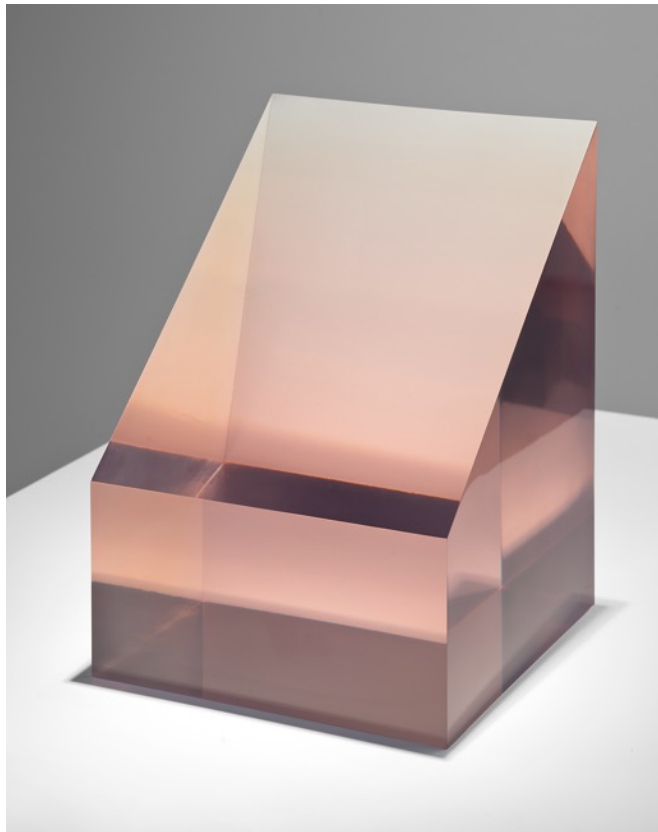
Like DeWain Valentine and other California Light and Space artists, Alexander's work was shaped by a surfer lifestyle and a deep love for the sea, sun and blue skies of his native Los Angeles (the artist grew up in Newport Beach and is now based in Santa Monica). Harnessing the pliant yet sturdy characteristics of plastics including resin, polyurethane, and acrylic — relatively new materials when the artist began his practice as a UCLA student in the mid-1960s — Alexander mimics the undulating, ephemeral qualities of light, water, sky and

parrasch heijnen

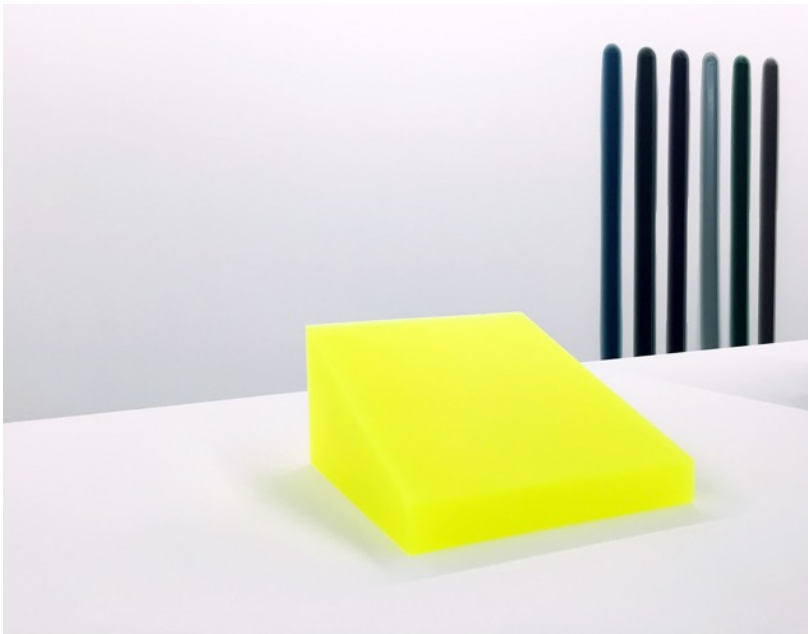
space in solid objects. *Small Cloud Box* (1966), a translucent blue-grey polyester resin cube swirled with water vapor, for example, seems to achieve the impossible task of capturing a piece of the sky. The gradient hue of *Pink Block* (1967) looks startlingly similar to Los Angeles's unique, pollution-baked sunsets. And some sculptures simply emanate an energy of their own, absorbing or reflecting ambient light to redefine the surrounding space and yield a new luminosity. Their slick, pristine, seemingly obsessive exterior polish also demonstrates why many of the California Light and Space artists were once categorized by the more dubious labels "Finish Fetish" or "LA Look." Whatever the moniker, there is no doubt about our obsession — see it before it closes on September 2!



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