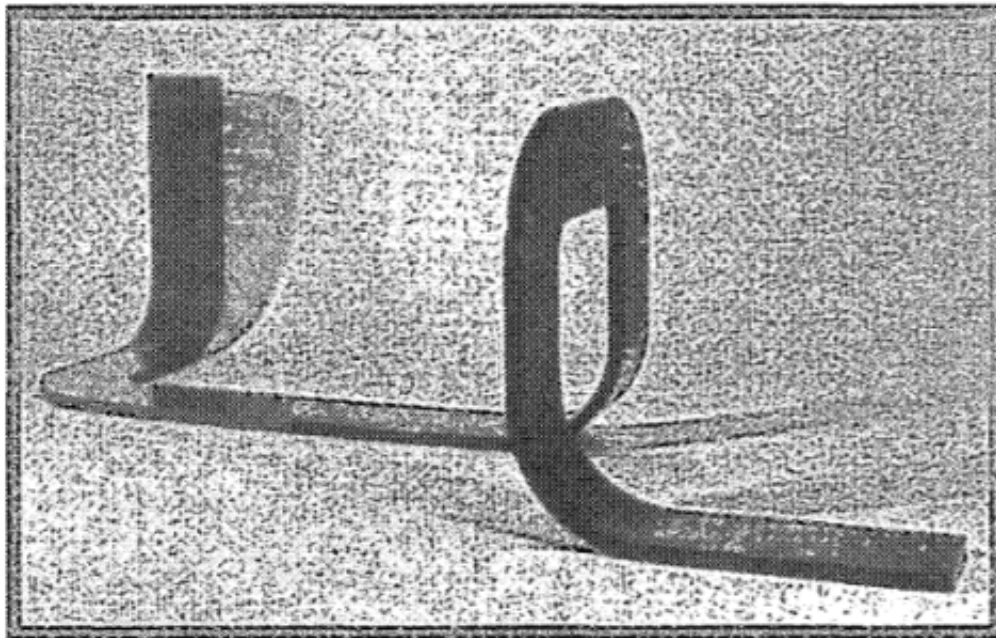


# Artweek

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## Tony DeLap at the Orange County Museum of Art

Viewing years of a master artist's work at one time, in one place, is always a reverential experience. Tony DeLap, in particular, brings these to fruition with his evolution of artistic ideas, perseverance, skill, originality and individual style.

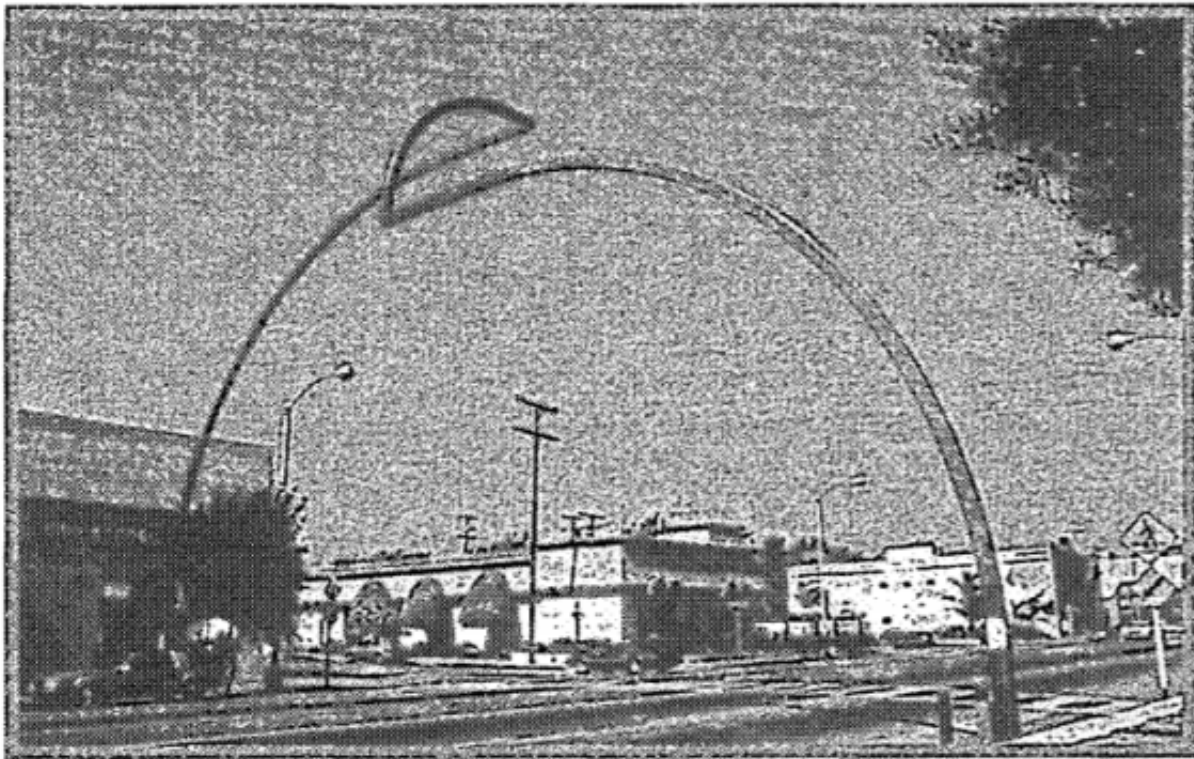


In an almost forty-year survey at the Orange County Museum of Art, DeLap, artist and magician par excellence, displays his superb drawings, monotypes, paintings, sculpture and assemblage. Ninety understated, minimal and geometric pieces mix illusion and fool-the-eye trickery with highly sophisticated, hard-edged, well-crafted forms. It is not surprising that DeLap's work is housed in many eminent museums, including the Tate Gallery in London, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Hirschhorn Museum in Washington, D.C.

In centuries long past, artists (mostly painters) developed trompe l'oeil techniques that tricked the audience into believing the reality of a fabricated image. DeLap continues in this vein; however, rather than showing a concern for deception of objects, his focus is on a spatial, optical and luminous trompe l'oeil. In his geometric illusions (DeLap calls his art reductive geometric abstraction), shape, space and light are the subject. They appear, disappear, reappear, or are overlaid by other shapes. Interplay of non-dimensionality with dimensionality is enhanced further by DeLap's architectural sensitivity to position and arrangement, his skill as a craftsman, his artistic striving for perfection, and his sleight of hand, tongue-in-cheek philosophy. DeLap

finds just the right configuration to make the elusive magic happen, even choosing colors that enhance the strength of each work.

The meeting point of shape, space and light is "edge," a dominant concern in all of DeLap's work. Linear precision of a well-crafted hard-edge tantalizes; it transforms a simple geometric construct into a dynamic form with scale far larger than its actual dimensions. Gherkin, a significant '60s acrylic on canvas piece, demonstrates DeLap's passion for the three-dimensional even on a two-dimensional plane. A large, black, symmetrical monolith filling the canvas embraces two green circles in its right and left side grooves. A master of edge and illusion, DeLap employs a new sculptural vocabulary. He maximizes the negative shape of a minimal white background and contrasts the powerful outline of flat black and circular green. The solid shapes become enlivened before our eyes as the edge of one shape affects the negative edge of the other.



Originally from Oakland, DeLap was asked to establish the graduate Studio Art Program at UC Irvine in 1965, where he taught for twenty years. Under DeLap's tutelage, innovative art emerged and a new crop of art students became the focal point of the rural Orange County campus. In the mid-'60s, DeLap was one of the California Light and Space artists. Their work redefined light and, consequently, redescribed space in terms of light. With transparent industrial fabrications such as resins and fiberglass, light filtered through and radiated from the twists and turns of their newly created forms. Having been drawn to the art of magic since he was a boy, the California Light and Space movement suited DeLap. It involved light, scale, color, experimentation and, most of all, illusion.

The current exhibition abounds with examples of DeLap's illusionary art. The quality is high and consistent; and so many works can be discussed that exemplify his unique and magical vision. Two forms, which DeLap calls "twists" rather than sculptures, were created as a tribute to Charlie Chaplin--Modern Times II and III. Named after a renowned Chaplin movie, each structure is based on the principle of modularity--separate but interrelated components. The ribbon-like bowed forms twist and turn, enclosing an empty space into a three-dimensional space. Made from wood, fiberglass and lacquer, these twists are without any sense of top, bottom, front, side or back. They have no axis and can be placed in any position. In these, DeLap shatters the traditional idea that sculptural form has six sides, and maintains a defined position in space. Here DeLap reinvents form, creating a new sculptural experience.

As edge results when shapes meet, shadows result when light confronts shape. With shadows, DeLap adds another artistic dimension to his mysterious trompe l'oeil effects. The Man Who Walked Through Walls displays DeLap's wry humor and the classic manner in which he constructs and positions form. A skillfully turned piece of wood leans against a wall. Its shape resembles a backwards "3" on its side. The undulation of its curve, its relationship to the wall, and the shadows that emanate when its wooden shape halts the light, imbues the form with a sense of enclosure through which one could walk. Here we see how DeLap masterfully incorporates empty space as a viable artistic component.

As in his twists, drawings and paintings, emptiness becomes full, and illusive shadows real. It is uncanny how DeLap maximizes the dynamic potential of a few simple elements; Less is always more in his art. Now you don't see it and now you do: therein lies his magic. And the seeing is so beguiling.

- Roberta Carasso

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Tony DeLap closes January 14 at the Orange County Museum of Art, 850 San Clemente Dr., Newport Beach.

Tony DeLap, (above) Modern Times III, 1966; (below) The Big Wave, 1983, at the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach.