
Refraction - Ephemera

Jason Peters: Refraction

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Jason Peters: Refraction Brochure

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Lighting the five seeds of Chronos, 2014.

undermine or threaten their assumptions of reality. As viewers find repeating patterns of elements and begin to recognize the materials, they move past their unease and become more and more accepting. They can then focus on the appeal of ordinary objects, the malleability of space, and the vitality of the whole. As Peters states: "I can shift the focus from individual pieces to the environment as a whole, helping viewers experience the ways in which my work changes that environment: the spaces in between, surrounding, and within each piece become as important as the works themselves and create a kinetic experience of stationary objects."

Peters understands that his work will be experienced in as many ways as there are viewers – each viewer approaches the work with unique expectations, values, and social conditioning. The artist explains: "I try to set up a situation where nothing is as it seems, and our notions of reality are exposed as mere assumptions, based on perceptions and experiences that may or may not bear any actual relationship to the way the world works." By destabilizing perception, the environment shifts viewers away from accustomed ways of thinking and seeing, allowing their minds to fabricate an experience beyond the bounds of ordinary physical existence. The potential outcome of this experience is a new insight or an altered perception of the reality in which viewers conduct their lives. Essentially, viewers' perceptions of the world are transformed by the experience.

Peters' title for his installation – *Refraction* – alludes to this altering of viewers' perceptions. Refraction is caused when a light wave travels from one medium into another and causes the speed at which it

is traveling to be changed. At the boundary between the two different media, the light wave changes direction. A common example used to explain refraction is a spoon in a glass of water that appears to break apart – the parts are perceived to be in two places. This phenomenon is a metaphor for the experience of Peters' works, which may cause viewers' perceptions of reality to fracture and be replaced with new insight.

Refraction is also a concept contained in Peters' response to the work of Seguso. Another example of refraction – white light passing through a prism and separating into a rainbow of colors – is a metaphor for artists' manipulation of materials until they are transformed into works of art. Both artists create their work with materials of humble beginnings – Peters with cast-off and mass-produced items and Seguso with one of the most abundant of natural materials, silica. In a more direct reference, refraction refers to the way light travels through the vases' clear, translucent, and opaque areas of glass and in different ways, projecting altered patterns of light, color, and shadow. Light is used by Peters to similar effect. His open forms allow light to pass through, projecting intricate patterns of shadow, while the interior lit forms have a subtle glow reflected in color on the walls.

What clearly separates Seguso and Peters is each artist's distinct intention vis-à-vis the viewer. Seguso's objects are familiar manifestations of beauty and craftsmanship and immediately comprehensible to viewers. Viewers' assumptions of the world are essentially unchanged by the work. In contrast, Peters' installations require an investment of emotion and time on the part of viewers. He asks them to contemplate, explore, and scrutinize the unusual environments with which they interact. Peters' work exhibits a profound respect for viewers and their ability to access the wondrous possibilities of the mind – a much more difficult, but tremendously rewarding endeavor.

Virginia Oberlin Steel
May 11, 2014

All quotes are from Jason Peters' Artist Statement: www.jasonpeters.com.

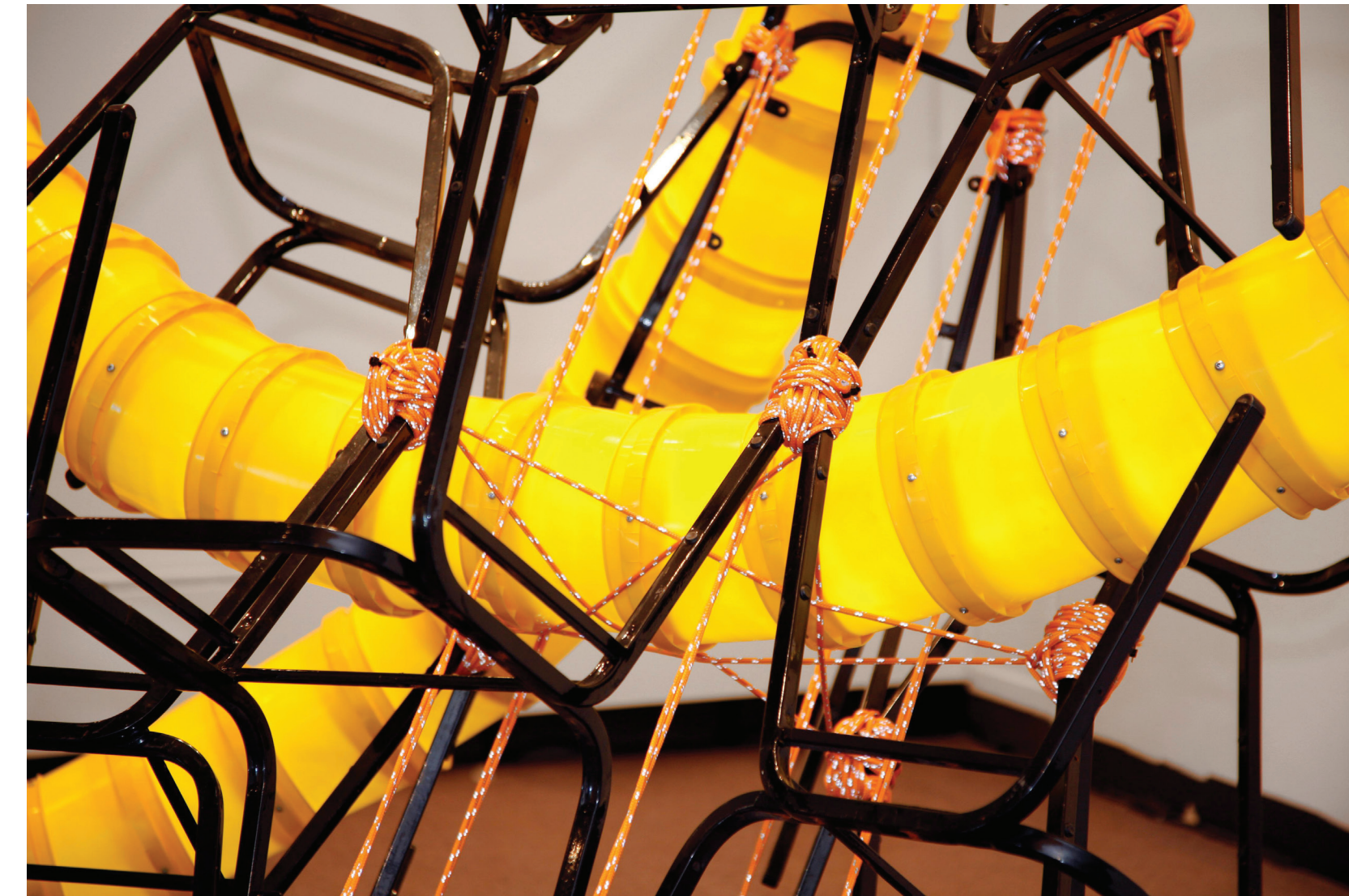
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Cover image: *The bond of five Joys*, 2014 (detail).



Fairfield University
Walsh **ART** Gallery

1073 North Benson Rd.
Fairfield, CT 06824

Jason Peters: Refraction



April 24 – June 27, 2014

Jason Peters: *Refraction*

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Jason Peters is known for large-scale sculptures that animate and recast the spaces they inhabit. His work entitled *Refraction* falls under the classification of installation art that, over the past 40 years, has become an increasingly significant mode of contemporary art-making and presentation. Installation artworks are multi-sensory environments made for the specific spaces they occupy, often for temporary periods. An important aspect of installations is that viewers are required to take an active part in experiencing them.

For the Walsh Art Gallery project, Peters was asked to respond to the concurrent exhibition in the Bellarmine Museum of Art, *La Ragnatela/The Spiderweb: Works by Giampaolo Seguso from The Corning Museum of Glass*. This show consists of 33 vases by Seguso (b. 1942), who has continued – and indeed expanded – the centuries-old Venetian tradition of making exquisite blown glass art objects using the *filigrana* (or “filigree”) technique. This method is distinguished by the use of glass canes, which are melted, stretched, and artfully manipulated, to create decorative patterning. The resulting networks of colored glass are readily apparent in the works on view in *La Ragnatela*, which is translated as “spider web;” an obvious nod to the related decorative motifs. In these pieces, the linear elements often contrast with areas or bands of color – in large swaths, confined to shapes, or in irregular patterns. Upon first consideration, it is difficult to recognize



The bond of five Joys, 2014.



Sumerian Column, 2014.



Giampaolo Seguso, *Giraffa Gialla*, 2001.

any possible kinship between these two artists – in light of their very different processes, materials, and intentions. However, Peters succeeds in finding and accentuating several connections.

For each of his installations, the qualities of the site provide the context within which Peters’ work is conceived and constructed. As the artist explains: “This process is necessarily informed by my own experience of a particular space or environment, as well as the availability of various objects.” Peters created *Refraction* in direct response to the specific architectural and spatial characteristics of the Walsh Art Gallery. The Walsh has two distinct areas, which are defined by an abrupt change of ceiling heights and further delineated by rectangular columns.

The materials Peters uses as modules to build his installations are multiples of both discarded and manufactured items. In past work he has used cast-off umbrellas, tires, crutches, metal stools, wood pallets, plastic stacking chairs, and banquet chair frames. He has also re-purposed consumer materials, such as plastic utility pails and various types of electric lights. For the Walsh installation, Peters selected familiar materials, but he chose them in a range of colors he observed in Seguso’s work. He had never before considered this palette of colors, but they captured his imagination. To achieve corresponding colors he acquired plastic pails in white, yellow-gold, and red, as well as bright orange rope twisted with light-reflecting silvery gray.

Prior to beginning the Walsh project, Peters envisioned a “spider web” of rope lengths suspended in loops from the ceiling to echo the complex network of linear elements in Seguso’s filigree glass vases. Entangled within the rope web were to be long curving cylindrical forms in red, yellow, and white, referring to Seguso’s

sinuous, meandering shapes. Peters’ cylindrical formations are made by fitting the closed ends of plastic pails into the slightly larger openings. LED lights are threaded through holes drilled in the ends, stretching the entire length of the serpentine shapes to illuminate them from within, giving the colors a luster like those in the glass vases. The suspended rope was to reflect the light from overhead and appear to glimmer as viewers moved throughout the gallery, just as the reflective qualities of glass animate the vases.

Since Peters works in spaces over which he has limited control, encountering and overcoming obstacles is an essential part of his creative process. Upon arriving at the Walsh, he became aware that the ceiling could not accommodate rope suspended from various points. So he began “editing backwards” to revise his concept for the work. Peters’ solution was to build grounded linear structures as braces for the interconnected pail forms. For this purpose, he used black chair frames to fashion open symmetrical structures held together with an elaborate system of lashing, coiling, crisscrossing, and knotting of the orange and silver rope. The serpentine forms undulate in lyrical, lively, or tentative ways through the linear geometrical structures, articulated by the flexible rope handiwork.

Peters work process is akin to composing a jazz piece in that improvisation plays a key role. Just as jazz musicians listen and respond to each other’s playing, each of the artist’s decisions is calibrated by both the work itself (as he completes it) and the space as a whole. The materials used in *Refraction* interact as three contrasting thicknesses of lines, each with its own voice and rhythm. Peters has assembled and fine-tuned the syncopation of line, color, light, and space into a vibrant, dynamic new entity.

Refraction is an intervention in the Walsh Art Gallery, designed to be experienced by viewers walking through the space over a period of time. At first, viewers are confronted with an environment that seems to



Attempting Neoplatonism, 2014.