

Elias Crespin at Cecilia de Torres

The optical kinetic works of Venezuelan sculptor Elias Crespin would appear to focus our attention on the following three premises: the variant forms that may emerge in a single work of art, the manipulation of light as intrinsic to these forms, and the passage of time through the observation of a work that moves in slow transition. In each case, the ensemble of primary shapes with which Crespin's art is constructed functions according to a systemic control device that allows such elements to flow—to pulsate—evenly in time and space.

The recent exhibition in New York, entitled *Parallels*, included two wall-length installations, *Piano Flexionante 2* and *Piano Flexionante 3* (both 2012). The earlier work employs shorter stainless-steel bars suspended with nylon threads from the ceiling wherein a digitized motor-driven program operates the choreography. The bars begin their sequential variations on a theme while perpendicular to the facing wall in which shadows derived from the overhead halogens play off one another.

Much the same is true in the slightly later version, *Piano Flexionante 3*, except that the standardized bars are longer and consist of varying alloys such as aluminum and nickel silver in relation to stainless steel. In addition, the program used in *Piano Flexionante 3* suggests a greater complexity, thus giving the shadows from these bars a more hallucinogenic quality as seen on the wall behind. In either case, these two installations dominate the gallery as their undulating motions weave in and out of unexpected and unpredictable spaces. They suggest an utterly rapturous *ballet mécanique* that significantly updates Fernand Leger's film from the 1920s.

There are seven works by Crespin shown in the large gallery plus an earlier work in the backroom, entitled



Installation view of Elias Crespin's *Parallels* exhibition at Cecilia de Torres, New York, 2012.

Tetralineados Transparente (2010). This work is not assembled with alloys but with a linear sequence of clear acrylic plates. As with the later works, the plates are suspended from the ceiling against a white wall, giving the shadowy configurations a heightened perceptual presence as one engages with the work. Kinetic works, like this and others by Crespin, are in constant flux and therefore difficult to describe. A single image reproduced on a magazine page or on-line without sequential motion cannot transmit the experience. Trendy journalistic rhetoric, such as "time-based art," also falls short in communicating the profound way in which Crespin's work may indulge us perceptually, seemingly without effort. Rather, I prefer the phrase used by the aesthetician Michael Kirby: "the art of time." This comes closer to how I understand the works in this exhibition.

Crespin programs movement—the variations, the duration, and the tempo. The passage from one movement to another is quite subtle. If one looks away from the piece—suspended in mid-air—for more than 30 seconds, a new variation emerges radically different from what had been seen previously. Upon entering the gallery last April, I observed the delicacy and power of Crespin's

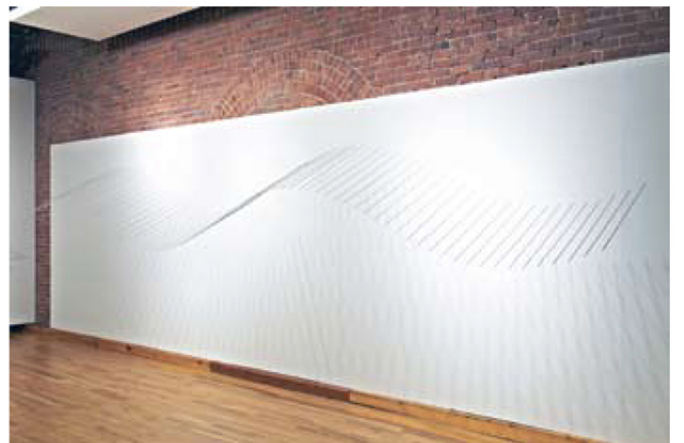
mobile-like, kinetic works for the first time, and was ethereally transfixed by the poetry of these forms in motion.

In addition to "the art of time," one might also describe works, like the majestic *Pentaconcentricos Laton* (2012), which consists of linear concentric brass pentagons descending from the ceiling, as being "forms in motion"—namely because the forms do not exist except in motion. This, of course, recalls an earlier theoretical premise put forth by the Hungarian Bauhaus artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) who constructed his *Light Space Modulator* that initially began in Weimar in 1922 and was later completed in Dessau in 1930.

In fact, Elias Crespin's work represents a genuine

advance in the development of our visual intelligence that may parallel our concept of being in the world, which is also perpetually in motion. In this sense, the title of his exhibition, *Parallels*, is appropriate even as it may tend to understate the originality, dignity, and pleasure embodied in these marvelous kinetic forms. In some ways, they reassure us that the quality of life, which (some would argue) vacillates on the brink of disappearance, is still present when we choose to see art from such an eloquent and understated point of view.

Robert C. Morgan



Elias Crespin, *Piano Flexionante 3*, 2012, kinetic sculpture, dimensions variable. Installation view at Cecilia de Torres, New York, 2012.