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### Spatial relationship

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences  
School for American Crafts  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

**Spatial Relationship**  
**by**  
**Jeong Ju Lee**

October 16, 2012

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## **Abstract**

My sculptural furniture and jewelry works derive from my interest in the human body and its spatial relationship to surroundings. Inspired by the organic forms from nature with the human elements, the furniture presents the interaction between the work and the viewers as it is conceived as both functional and sculptural. The jewelry makes a statement on the body as a wearable sculpture, focusing on the organization of space as well as considering the movement on the human body.

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## **Introduction**

I am interested in sculptural furniture and jewelry forms, which combine natural shapes with human elements. I intend to explore the relationship between my work as it relates to the human body and its spatial surroundings. The work can be a vehicle that not only reflects my thoughts and feelings, but also engages people in a tactile manner. As an artist, I try to invite people to the work so that they will interact with it.

Natural phenomena such as a dune, a desert, a wave, even the human body are a part of the reservoir of my inspiration. My own translation of these forms modifies how I am impressed by them. The inspirations may be interwoven with metals as visual elements: scale, mass, contour, shape, line, surface texture, and color. However, the material influences my creative process and helps to render the work in spontaneous ways.

My understanding of materials has been evolving. While I have been working with metals, I have come to know their strength, ductility, and malleability. Through combining hammer forming with surface texture, I have become intrigued

with their characteristics. Even though I start on the work without knowing its properties entirely, I have been challenged by unexpected problems, and discovered new solutions. That is how I learn to respect the materials, and I have also learned that making and thinking are cohesive things.

Furniture can be understood as an art form that not only accommodates the primary function of the object, but also accompanies secondary functions that can be discovered within our daily life. The knowledge of materials and techniques allows me to have new ways to express myself through the form. Above all, I would like to examine the dialogue between these two art forms: furniture and sculpture. I want to explore how the object is related to our surroundings, and how far its functions interact with people. My goal is to define furniture that is conceived as both functional furniture and sculpture.

As one of the sculptural forms, I am passionate about the possibilities of what is acceptable as a piece of jewelry. When jewelry conforms to the contour of the human body, a piece of jewelry can be seen as a wearable sculpture, by understanding its adherence to the body. This jewelry should be viewed as integrally connected with its wearer, and perceived as an intimate and sensuous

part of the body. Its form develops three-dimensionally, as it links the human body with material seamlessly.



## **Inspirations**

I begin my studies with a way of looking at something. Observation of the routine life that surrounds us actively gives an impetus to my imagination. I can find an idea while taking a long walk down the street and having a dialogue with my friends, which sometimes generates concepts that are “new”, sometimes to be thrown away as trash. In this way, however, I learn about how people think differently, how I can relate to others, and how my work can generate a response from people.

When I am creating something, I look to both natural structure and the variations of nature for my inspiration. I try to embody these forms in each piece. When I look at the phenomenon of a desert, I am fascinated by its beauty and properties. I also look at the human elements, combined with natural forms. For example, the curvature of a shoulder and the subtlety of the chest are both inspirations to me.

The ability of materials, such as copper, steel, silver and gem stones, introduces me to see the different ways of constructing each piece. While I am

making the work, I adopt to the transformation of the materials. The material's ductility and mildness allow a piece to enfold such a wide range of volume, subtle or deep textures and qualities. While working with metal, I am also inspired by technique itself. I have learned how to apply it, bringing out unique results which lead me to new ideas.

My art has been inspired by some artists such as Richard Serra, Frank Gehry and Jackson Pollock. I had a chance to see Richard Serra's one person exhibition titled Rolled and Forged at Gagosian Gallery, NY. In his work, *Elevations, Repetitions*, 2006, Serra involves the viewers with their physical experience through the space. The work consists of sixteen blocks of steel which have different heights. Because of the massive scale, I had to keep moving in and out of the work in order to realize the shapes and forms.

As I walked through the planar steel structures, the work reshaped its configuration, letting me think about how I engaged in the work. It is about perspective, scale, and exploration. This work has a continuous movement even if I remain in one spot.

I was aware of how I moved through the space, and how I tracked this

place. I was curious, measuring the horizontal elevation by my own eyes, and understanding my relationship to what surrounded me. The planar steel structures became something to explore, and suggested to me a reciprocal relationship through the space. (fig. 11)

What is exciting to me about Frank Gehry are the materials he chose to use, when he built *Gehry Residence*, Santa Monica, CA 1977-78; 1991-94. Originally built around 1920, Gehry extended the old house using unconventional materials as building products. His intention is to experiment with industrial components such as corrugated metal, plywood, and chain link. The house is like a laboratory that allows the architect to explore new ideas that no one has seen before.

Another element that I was amazed by in this house is the shape of the windows. Placed on the corrugated metal wall siding, each window has a tilted and distorted cube form with wood frame and glass. Gehry seems to make the window look like it is jumping out of the house. It is amazing to see light, leaves of cedars, and the patterns of the chain link that are reflected through the window.

He has opened up the possibilities of the materials, and the resulting form

is an assemblage of familiar materials that present whole new meanings. (fig. 12)

The work allowed me to think about the house as a piece of sculpture as he took the house apart, and reconstructed it with the industrial materials. With my own works, I try to create a form that embraces a new vocabulary with my own artistic vision.

I think the art forms are ultimately about the surface. Jackson Pollock's paintings have strongly influenced my artistic imagination. Among his numbered series that he created between 1948 and 1951, the most inspiring painting for me is entitled *Number 8* in 1949. His technique combines his body motion with the flow of paint and gravity. He did not use a brush, an easel or anything that is considered a conventional material. He rather dripped, poured, and splattered color directly from cans of house paint into the canvas on the floor.

Intertwined layers of colors reveal a delicate surface and a tightly woven composition. There is no separation between inside and outside in his line and space. He was able to discover a new arena of painting by applying paint to the canvas from all directions. It seems that Pollock was able to imagine and control the flow of the paint with great exploration.

Pollock once said that “ the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through.” It seems to me that his artistic vision is the process of the painting itself. I was looking for the way to express my feelings and ideas in a three dimensional object in relation to the surface. Pollock’s dynamic and free expressions that carry wide dimensions and movement have really appealed to my aesthetic. (fig. 13)

## **Arbor**

The central concept for this piece is “The shape of reciprocal relationships.” I have attempted to achieve this by combining the organic beauty of form with the natural properties of the material, and the rational logic of the structure. This work is about the openness of interactive relationships. This chair is designed to attract the viewer’s attention. The human figures on the copper sheet are dynamically developed through the positive space while the viewer is encouraged to look at the negative space. (fig. 1, 2)

The legs have a sculptural volume that almost seems to deny possibility; it is meant to achieve a sense of drama. To create organic form, I applied hammer forming and raising to the five individual sheets of copper, and welded them in and out. The variety of the curvatures of the sheet gives one the image of undulating waves. The movement of figures is a crucial element in this work. One person is raised in the front, leaning toward another, and then he/she exists as one of a pair, standing vertically against each other, where finally, one figural essence melds with the other. So, the leg embodies interactive ideas of human relationships.

Copper wire is a very attractive material. It is strong and light. It is good for expressing the openness of a relationship. The structural strength depends on the amount of wire used, its thickness and how it is connected to the sheet. I utilized six gauge and four gauge thicknesses, and welded them for reinforcement. To attach the seat to the leg portion, I drilled holes into the sheet using slightly different angles for each. As the seat is suspended on the leg section, it forms a new shape which represents great visual as well as structural strength in the form. By using wire and sheet in turn, the exterior and interior attain an organic relationship.

The richness of this work comes from two intriguing elements. The curvature in the back winds in and out like sinuous waves. The opening in the seat takes the viewer to the inside of the chair so that once people see its configuration, they are invited to sit in it. The viewer might recognize how these elements are welcoming, leading them right into the chair.

Interaction with audiences has become an important influence in the construction of the furniture itself. The viewer can be invited to look through the spaces of the chair. For the artist, it is fascinating to see how the audience

approaches the work. They may pass by the work, or sit on it and look through the opening of the chair. I believe the artist can encourage the viewer to experience the work in an open approach, hoping that they might discover their own feeling.



## **Chrysalis**

The image of movement and lightness has become an essential element for the body of work. The primary purpose of the art work is not only to conceive it as furniture, but also to organize the space that expands the movement of the viewer. The chair can provide the viewer with emotional and physical experiences that cannot be found in any other media. I have come to know that the creation can affect the viewer's behavior emotionally as well as physically. (fig. 3, 4)

Furniture built from copper provides contrast with the impression of weight and lightness. Solidity and perforation are powerful generators of this form. Natural forms such as a dune, a shell, a plant, and even a human body are the greatest influences to my forms. I was hoping to express one form that is transforming into another form. An image of a cocoon and the idea of a metamorphosis came to my mind because it goes through a transformation from a solid shell into a free structure. I intend for my forms to have a variety of expressions so that no one can recognize its entire shape from one specific viewpoint.

Taking up the idea of metamorphosis, I applied a hammer to form the six

individual sheets of copper, and welded them, leaving a number of narrow leaf shaped openings. The variety of the curvatures in a mass gives the image of a cocoon, egg shell, or caterpillar. To represent transformation into another shape like that of a butterfly, I develop patterns associated with transitions.

The diverse patterns are linked to the big mass through the openings. The lines consist of 1/2, 5/16, 3/8, 1/4 inch thickness of copper rods. Offering the appearance of a thick disk in a whole, they emerge from several holes of the large convex form and create undulating wave patterns. Some sections of the seat are densely built up to sustain themselves; others, especially underneath the convex volume, are loose. The patterns have made the seating structurally strong as well as aesthetically plausible, never reproducing the same ones.

Distinctly divided from the back, for the viewer, the seat offers a great accessibility to the chair. The seat, which only consists of lines, brings light and transparent qualities to the work. The work provides the opportunity for the viewers to interact with it in several ways. There are particular directions the viewer can take. They might look at the large voluminous back through the openings, imagining what is inside. They might discover that there is a seat to be seated on.

## **In gestation**

The primary purpose of the furniture is to provide a place for the people to have a seat, or take a rest. For me it is natural to come up with the idea of a nest. The work represents the process of incubation, just like a nest is a site of refuge in which animals lay eggs and raise their offspring. (fig. 5, 6)

The seat consists of a massive nest structure with a low back and a narrow hemispherical shape on one side. It doesn't have an enclosed form, leaving shallow openings. I applied a hammer to the three pieces of copper sheet to create deep and shallow depression shapes. Then I began to play with lines in a free way using copper rods. As the curved lines go in and out of the three- dimensional structure, the creation becomes more flexible and expressive.

What makes the work become strong is the fluency of lines. A part of the furniture is made out of the wire to be fully exposed to the viewer. The furniture does not have a closed form. The ends of the wire do not quite meet, creating an opening through which the viewer can see the inside. It takes me a great deal of planning ahead, but through the creative process, I want to mediate the direction,

which leads the viewer into the work.

I got excited about how the entire structure stands up. Most legs are made out of steel rods which are welded directly to the sheet, though a small number are made of copper to respond to the bulk of the color. There are a number of stays underneath the nest structure, but the chair seems to have only one leg which contains a bunch of steel rods. It makes the chair surprisingly supportive in spite of being off balance. This particular process seems to cause the whole creation to pop up in the air.

I was very intrigued by Richard Serra's *Torqued Ellipses* series when I visited the Dia Museum in Beacon, NY. The works are about the viewer's movement through space. As I walked in and out of the work, I felt I became a part of the work having my own subject, because the shape of the piece changed depending on where I was positioned. *Torqued Ellipse* makes the space shift and move symbolically expressing the creator as the concept of a womb. This work allows the people to engage with the creation and leads the viewer to develop their own experiences.

My work is also about the openness of interactive relationships between

the viewer and the furniture. The idea of openness creates a variety of experiences to maximize the movements of the human body. I understand that the chair can offer the opportunity to see work differently from various perspectives when the work reveals its character and entire shape.

## **On the air**

This work focuses on linear elements and a curved surface that emphasize the organizing of the space. This work gives the opportunity to explore convexity that is based on the organic form. With the dramatic quality of the form, the convex shape brings subtle gesture when it flows on the contour of the woman's shoulder. (fig. 7)

It is necessary to select sterling silver as the medium. Sterling silver is characterized by its ductility and malleability when it is formed on a solid surface. The richness of this design comes from surface texture achieved by chasing. The total composition looks structural because the twig shaped wires are completely soldered together on the sheet through the holes. Structure appears to be self-supporting as well as visual.

I have come to know that an awareness of space has become a crucial element in the work. I am fascinated by the infinite possibility through the whole piece which comes from between the positive and negative space. There is complex emotional tension keeping the surface subtle and deep through the

structure. The most dynamic tension exists across the curves as the form expands three-dimensionally in its volume.

## **Ring or not**

*Ring or not* brings strong sensibility of the relationship between the object and the body. The sterling silver is formed into sprouting wing like shapes in which sterling silver wires are attached entwining around the neck. Agates adorn this necklace, producing a glint in the work because of their fineness of its grain and their translucent quality. (fig. 8, 9)

Chased sterling silver adorns this neck piece becoming a sensuous part of the body. When it is worn across the entire body, including chest, shoulder and neck, for the desired effect, the piece enhances the beauty of the woman's body as an extended part of the body. Drawing attention to the organic inspiration of the form with the sparkle of the natural stones, this work is animated through the coexistence of function and aesthetics equally. For these reasons, this work is considered to be a body ornament, experimenting with what is perceived to be wearable.



## **Bosom**

As it displays a dramatic thread of continuity in which the linear and planar elements are intertwined in the structure, the work focuses on emphasizing the spatial relationship. By using sterling silver wire and sheet in turn, the interior and exterior attain an organic entity. The form evolves into the combination of curves and surface texture. (fig. 10)

The bunch of vine like shapes grow in and out of each other creating tremendous excitement about their spatial relationship. I was searching for the form which lay in the repetitious details. Curved and chased elements vary in their directions and scales. In this work, there is a clear understanding of altering shapes which enhances the voluminous mass.

## **Conclusion**

This body of the work is referred to as the mediator that enables people to communicate with the object. This is a way for me to connect with the viewer in a meaningful way.

The creative process has been constant with the demonstration of the interaction with the viewer and the body of the work. Creating the open relationship has been essential in constructing the furniture itself. The image of openness is fluid through the body of work, executed as both furniture and sculpture. Instead of considering the space as a separate aspect of the work, I bring it in to be a part of the work. I believe that this approach opened up a new way of thinking and making.

It is essential that each piece should merge with the body; the human body, combined with the piece of jewelry. By understanding its coherence with the body, the forms embrace new potentials, expanding what should be expected as a piece of jewelry. Infused with line, movement and space, there is vitality in its aesthetic existence, taking on new meanings.



fig 1.

*Arbor*, 2005

copper, 34 x 28 x 33 inches



fig 2.

*Arbor*, 2005

copper, 34 x 28 x 33 inches



fig 3.  
detail of *Chrysalis*, 2007  
copper, 50 x 29 x 25 inches



fig 4.  
*Chrysalis*, 2007  
copper, 50 x 29 x 25 inches

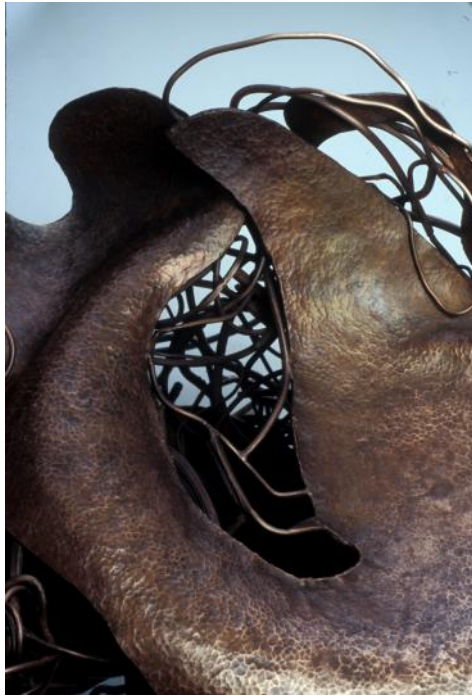


fig 5.  
detail of *In Gestation*, 2007  
copper, steel, 47 x 26 x 24 inches



fig 6.  
*In Gestation*, 2007  
copper, steel, 47 x 26 x 24 inches



fig 7.

*On the Air*, 2006

sterling silver, 7 x 6 x 3 ½ inches





fig 8.  
*Ring or Not*  
sterling silver, agate  
12 x 12 x 12 inches



fig 9.  
detail of *Ring or Not*  
sterling silver, agate, 12 x 12 x 12 inches



fig 10.

*Bosom*, 2007

sterling silver, 5 x 7 x 2½ inches





fig 11.

Richard Serra

*Elevations, Repetitions*, 2006



fig 12.

Frank Gehry

*Gehry Residence*, 1977-78; 1991-94



fig 13.  
Jackson Pollock  
*Number 8*, 1949

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