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DON MILLER'S ARCHIFORM V

Silence. My footsteps, followed by the click of the gallery attendant's counter, disturb it. As I stop to take in my surroundings, I find that the eerie lack of sound has returned. I ignore it, remembering that I am here to view the exhibit and to be receptive to what the works of art are saying to me, not to hear what the silence does not say. My ears are now used to the unusual tranquility, and I find myself surrounded by the work of eight different artists. My eyes are now in control of my sensation and they perceive each piece as a window into the souls of their creators...or maybe, they are windows through which I can explore what is hidden in my own soul.

With this in mind, I explore the gallery, finding that the styles, media, and subject matter of each artist are quite varied. Many pieces are aesthetically pleasing to the eye in their combination of color and texture. On one side of the room, a robins-egg blue vase, decorated with big, beautiful butterflies, thrown by Douglas L. Johnson catches my eye. I picture it sitting on a clear, glass coffee table in the living room of my future home, adding the perfect decorative accent. When I look up, across the room, I see a watercolor done by

William Ammerman illustrating a brightly painted red barn and sunny-yellow silo, set upon a rolling green hill against a clear blue sky. In his Wisconsin Icon, I see the surroundings of the rural, Wisconsin town from which I came. To the left of the entrance of the gallery, Mary Barrett's Stone Bone Landscape hangs. Although drawn and colored with a dry pigment (versus paint), it reminds me of a Georgia O'Keefe-style painting that my mother did in its strikingly large, expertly shaded depiction of stone and bone. So far, the pieces that have caught my attention have stimulated memories of my home and my hopes for the future. These pleasant thoughts quickly fade as soon as my eyes fall upon Don Miller's Archiform V.

At first all I can do is look at it, whatever *it* is. I am taken aback by the crude, rust-colored, rectangular mass that seems as if it could not decide whether it wanted to be a painting or a sculpture. It hangs on the wall as if it were lynching the joy I had just found in the previous pieces. I want to move on, to skip over this piece, but there is something underneath its crisscrossing layers of wood, stabilized adobe, found objects, and acrylic paint that has taken a hold of me. As I study the rough texture of the adobe and the dark crevices created by its layers over the toothpick-thin pieces of wood, I feel uneasy for some reason; exactly why, I am not sure.

As I explore the relief, my eyes are drawn to what I perceive as the point of emphasis, a smooth round stone in the upper left portion of the piece, which sticks out like a sore thumb against an otherwise rough, angular background. From there my eyes follow gravity's natural pull, and I am taken down both vertically and spatially deeper into the red lower level of the painting. I follow the small bumps along a line which runs through this sublevel until I reach a "wall." A new set of bumps on this raised wall takes me to the right corner where I see three small, elliptical shaped stones mounted diagonally from my initial point of interest. From here a line on the perimeter leads me up the right side of the painting where another stone sits in the upper right corner. Then my eyes travel left along a deep, dark crevice back to the original point of emphasis; I have taken in the entire piece.

The initial shock and discomfort from my first encounter with Archiform V now subdued, I am able to scrutinize the piece and determine that it is a skillfully assembled work of art. I see the elements of: line (subtly around the top and right perimeter and through various sections in the middle), texture (the rough, sandy adobe and smooth stones), color (an earthy mix of reds, tans, and copper), and form as well as mass (the varied raised and lowered portions, rocks, etc.). I also notice some principles of design (unity, balance, and emphasis) which Don

Miller has expertly implemented to create a visual flow in his piece.

By this time I have realized the feeling I initially experienced but could not describe. I was afraid...afraid of the darkness in the crevices and the bloody red in the center, because it seemed as though it was something that had come from within me. That is what caused my uneasiness. Archiform V forced me to look inside myself at my rough imperfections, dark secrets, and fragile emotions as I looked at it.

After viewing this piece, I have seen enough, because I have experienced a work of art on a level far deeper than any other work of art I have ever experienced before. I have viewed a piece which initially did not appeal to me at all, and after seeing it as a window through which I was forced to examine my own soul, I have come to appreciate it as an exceptional work of art.