

Art Adventure I Sam Dalkilic-Miestowski



Light as Art

Driving around in the dark looking at Christmas lights is a great American holiday past time. There is something spiritually uplifting and magical driving in the warmth of the family car and viewing miles and miles of glistening lights. Personally, the greatest joy for me is taking a short-cut down a dark road and discovering a patch or two of small homes in the middle of nowhere with elaborately decorated Christmas lights. The feeling of discovering these twinkling homes is very fulfilling to me. One thing is for sure, "Light as Art" in an art form unto itself.

Chicago-based artist John David Mooney specializes in light as a form of art. Mooney has created a number of large-scale public light sculptures all over the world, including in California, Scotland, Australia, and Italy, to name a few. Over the past 20 years Mooney has created several enormous large-scale light projects in Chicago.

In 1997 John David Mooney was commissioned to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Chicago Tribune. Mooney used the Tribune building as his canvas and used hundreds of pink and blue neon lights diagonally placed inside the windows in a pattern as his brush strokes. The result was breathtaking. The title was "Light Muse."



One of my personal favorite of Mooney's creations was his 1989 Lightscape and 1989 Light Dance sculptures. I was an intern to the John David Mooney Studio during this summer project, and it brings back great memories. Mooney was commissioned by IBM to create a work of art celebrating the company's 75th anniversary. Mooney used the IBM building, created by architect Mies van der Rohe, as his canvas. Almost 7,200 windows were incorporated into his Lightscape. He used thousands of custom fabri-

cated light fixtures, flood lamps, and hundreds of rotating white and blue beacons – all donated by various corporations. The primary colors of the lights were red, white and blue. Mooney enlisted the help of hundreds of volunteers from all walks of life to accomplish his masterpieces. As a 20-year-old art student, I had an enormous adrenaline rush working with IBM executives, architects, artists, and other professionals working in a high paced, chaotic, and stressful environment. Mooney asked me to find more volunteers for him. I called the Ball State University School of Architecture in Muncie and the school sent many students to assist in the show.



I remember meeting the professor I called when he and the students came in to the Chicago studio. He was looking for somebody middle-aged. He was surprised to find a 20-year-old art student who made the cold call. The Ball State school of Architecture would remain an integral part of the John David Mooney foundation for many years to come.

At the same time of the Lightscape 89 commission by the IBM Corporation, Mayor Daley commissioned Mooney to create another light sculpture to celebrate the Chicago International Sky Nights festival. Mooney created Light Dance 89. It consisted of many World War II carbon arc searchlights strategically placed along the lakeshore in a scripted "Light Ballet." Much like a symphony reading the music and playing their instruments, and being guided by the conductor, Mooney wrote a light score for all of the search light brigade volunteers. At certain times, all of the lights would simultaneously change positions according to their directions. It was a visual spectacle which could be seen all over the city. This was especially exciting to me as I was an R.O.T.C. cadet at the time. I was using the very same search lights which were used by soldiers in World War II, yet I was using them as a medium for art.

Even though most of Mooney's light sculptures are often temporary, their impact can leave a lasting impression. In a way his art is for all. Instead of creating a piece of art which can be bought or sold in the traditional forms through galleries, Mooney's art affects all who can see it regardless of age, race, religion, education or income level. Mooney continues to create cutting edge light sculpture to this day.

To arrange a personal tour of the gallery call The John David Mooney Studio Foundation, located at 114 W. Kinzie St., Chicago, at 312-822-0483 or visit www.mooneyfoundation.org.

Email your comments to samowner@sbcglobal.net.

Holy, holy, unholy

There are a great many very religious people for whom Sunday has a special meaning. For most Americans who are religious but not very, Sunday has always been a day off. They go to church a couple of times a year, usually on Easter, but most Sundays they go about doing the things they can't do on a day they work. Sundays are rapidly changing in character and becoming more like Saturdays. It hasn't been long since the big stores in the mall were closed Sundays. They're all open now and it has changed the way people spend the day.

I agree with Americans who like Sundays to be more like Saturdays. Many churches are open just once a week, although some devout Catholics go to church every day. There are 350,000 houses of worship in the United States so they're a substantial part of any community and, of course, they pay no taxes. To this extent, whether you're religious or not, you support all the churches, synagogues and mosques. There are now about 2,000 mosques and their number is growing.

There are a great number of religions and many different sects within each religion. Most of them have their own houses of worship. (Some of them are not called "churches.") Something like 12 percent of all Americans are not believers in any religion and never go to worship. Many more are simply indifferent to religion and not committed to any of them. There are more Christians than people of any other faith: two billion one hundred million worldwide.

Many of the different world religions have adherents in the millions; Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shinto, Taoism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism are all big. There are more than 2 million Zoroastrians. I've never met a Zoroastrian that I know of, but I like the word and if I ever do meet one, I'll ask what he believes that a Christian, a Jew, a Buddhist or a Hindu does not.

There are 1.3 billion people whose faith is Islam, 850 million who are Hindu (or is it Hindi?),

and 370 million Buddhists. Jews comprise the sixth biggest religious group and, compared to their influence, that isn't many. There are only 15 million people who subscribe to Judaism. Religions like "Baha'i" and "Confucianism" are further down the list in their number of believers.

I'm a typical American to the extent that I have no idea what

Confucians believe that Christians do not believe. Of course, I would not want to have to explain exactly what the difference is between what Baptists and Presbyterians believe or what Catholics and Methodists believe, either. I don't think many Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics or Methodists could do it, either. They know where their church stands and they like it.

Every religion has buildings of its own – churches, synagogues or mosques – which are, in most cases, bigger than they ever need to accommodate their congregations. My mother sent me to the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church on Sundays and in the years I went, I never saw it half full. I haven't been back but I'd bet it still doesn't fill up on Sunday.

I do not believe that the members of most congregations would be able or willing to support their church without substantial help from people who have nothing to do with their religion. Many of those anonymous supporters are not even religious. Most of the help churches get comes in the form of tax relief. On Fifth Avenue in New York City, St. Patrick's Cathedral is tax exempt. The next block down is occupied by Saks Fifth Avenue, the store housed in a substantial structure that pays millions in taxes.

In most cases, people do not sit down to think about all the world's religions and then choose one based on a religion's beliefs. Religion, in most cases, comes with your mother and father. What they are, you become. It seems natural to be Catholic if your father and mother are Catholic, or Baptist if that's what your parents are. You won't find many Hindu kids in Cleveland born to Presbyterian parents.

See you in church – maybe.

Andy Rooney

