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Robert Therrien at Angles Santa Monica, California

In the late 1970s, Robert Therrien began to give Minimalism a Brancusian spin, and since then he has been making sculptures that are rigorously simple, formally, but also poetically evocative, with overtones of the representational. Many of Therrien's sculptures tend to call up associations with 19th-century Americana: old-fashioned-seeming images - the church, the snowman, the coffin, the pitcher - are embodied in forms that look handmade and that have a weathered, antique appearance. Now, in this marvelous installation, he has extended his way with the object into the environmental realm.

Constructed mostly from wood, Therrien's architectural interior is suggestive of a small New England church transported to the Twilight Zone. To get to this space, you pass through an opening in a gallery wall and climb a flight of stairs. At the top of the stairs, you're near the ceiling of the gallery in a small theater that expands downward toward one end. The space is windowless and lit by a few naked light bulbs hanging from black cords. The walls are sheathed in overlapping sheets of cardboard that are visibly stapled in place. Everything is painted white except for a set of benches coated in red enamel. On two adjacent sides, the benches - eleven in all - step down in tiers like pews in a church balcony toward the installation's most enigmatic feature at the far corner of the room: a square hole measuring about six feet deep and 10 feet on a side.

Like his object sculptures, this installation is marked by an exceedingly economical yet highly individualized sense of form. Overall, there is a functional but slightly eccentric esthetic reminiscent of 19th-century vernacular architecture. The glossy red benches have a stark sculptural presence like some of Scott Burton's furniture works. And the lowered square chamber offers a pristine, luminous and somehow pregnant Minimalistic void. The various sorts of spatial experiences offered - the way you are continually invited to move from one elevation to another, from compression to openness and from shadow to light - makes the installation particularly gratifying to visit.

As for its metaphorical aspect, there's a numinous feeling about the place that might have to do, in part, with the way it evokes an archetypal urge to assemble and worship an intensely shared faith, obsession or delusion. You can imagine various scenarios here: religious rite, pseudo-scientific quackery, political intrigue or forbidden recreation (gambling, sex, blood sport, etc.). The atmosphere is cultish, as though the place were designed by and for some mysterious secret society. The cardboard walls add a low - rent feeling, which suggests an economically marginal community. But because no specific

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object of devotion is defined, you find yourself projecting your own fantasies into the empty white hole. Ultimately, Therrien's magical sanctuary gets you contemplating the play of your own imagination, which, it might be said, is on some level a part of all religious experience.