

MIT List Center

Dan Graham

My name is Dan Graham. I'm an artist whose work is halfway between art and architecture.

Graham's Yin/Yang Pavilion is an architectural structure divided into two intertwining halves. The floor or the yang half of the circular pavilion is covered with white, raked gravel, while the yin floor contains a shallow pool.

It's the balance between male and female, coming from Chinese Taoism. Often that is used as symbols for New Age things. In the '90s everything was New Age. So in a way this was a send-up.

The pavilion walls are made of concave and convex two-way mirrored glass, a material appropriated from 1970s corporate architecture. Graham uses the glass to subvert its associations as a medium for surveillance, enabling the viewer to become in an in-body perceiver.

My work is both transparent and reflective. People on either side can see each other through the reflectiveness. And the distortions are anamorphic, which means that as you move around, you see distorted versions of your body, as oversize or skinny. I want people to experience the piece as an open-ended situation where you have the pleasure in looking, and you're not too much afraid of looking at yourself or people looking at you.

Graham made the work in 2003 as part of the MIT Percent-for-Art, a program of the List Visual Arts Center. Begun in 1968, the program allocates a portion of the budget from each new building project or major renovation on campus to the purchase or commission of art for a public space.

Graham thought the outdoor terrace of the Steven Holl design dormitory was the ideal spot for Yin/Yang Pavilion.

I was very lucky to have the proximity to the windows. So the piece changes as the light changes. So like the Chinese philosophy, there's always a shift as time changes.

Additional commentary on Steven Holl's dormitory is available on the List's website.