

Selected Bibliography

Flavin, Dan. "...in daylight or cool white": an autobiographical sketch," *Artforum* 4, no. 4 (December 1965), pp. 21-24.

corners, barriers and corridors in fluorescent light from Dan Flavin. Saint Louis: The Saint Louis Art Museum, 1973. Texts by Dan Flavin and Emily S. Rauh.

Dan Flavin. Installationen in fluoeszierendem Licht 1989-1993. Frankfurt am Main: Städtische Galerie im Städel, 1993. Texts by Beatrice von Bismarck, Dan Flavin, and Klaus Gallwitz.

Dan Flavin. Munich: Kunstbau Lenbachhaus, 1994. Texts by Dan Flavin, Helmut Friedel, Uwe Kiessler, Christian Ude, and Ulrich Wilmes.

Dan Flavin: drawings, diagrams and prints 1972-1975, and installations in fluorescent light 1972-1975. Fort Worth: The Fort Worth Art Museum, 1976. Texts by Jay Belloli, Dan Flavin, and Emily S. Rauh.

Dan Flavin: fluorescent light etc. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada for the Queen's Printer, 1969. Texts by Mel Bochner, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Brydon Smith.

Dan Flavin: three installations in fluorescent light. Cologne: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum and the Kunsthalle Köln, 1973-74. Texts by Dan Flavin and Manfred Schneckenburger.

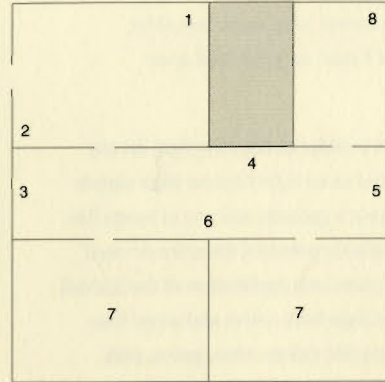
"monuments" for V. Tatlin from *Dan Flavin, 1964-1982.* Chicago: Donald Young Gallery for The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in collaboration with Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, 1989. Text by Dan Flavin.

Zeichnungen, Diagramme, Druckgraphik 1972-1975 und zwei Installationen in fluoeszierendem Licht von Dan Flavin; Fünf Installationen in fluoeszierendem Licht von Dan Flavin. Basel: Kunstmuseum Basel and Kunsthalle Basel, 1975. Texts by Carlo Huber, Donald Judd, and Franz Meyer.

Dan Flavin was born in 1933 in New York City, where he later studied art history at the New School for Social Research. He has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1963. In 1983 Dia Center for the Arts opened the Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton, New York, a permanent exhibition of his works, designed by the artist in a converted firehouse. It is maintained by Dia and open to the public each summer. In 1992 Flavin created a monumental installation for the reopening of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. He lives and works in Wainscott, New York.

Support for this exhibition has been provided by the members of the Dia Art Council, the major annual support group of Dia Center for the Arts, and the Dia Art Circle. In-kind assistance has been generously provided by Philips Lighting Company.

Site Map



All of the works included in this exhibition are drawn from Dia's extensive collection of Dan Flavin's work.

1. *untitled (to a man, George McGovern)*, 1972 fluorescent light fixtures with cool white tubes, overall 120 x 120", edition: 2/3
2. *untitled (to the real Dan Hill) 1b*, 1978 fluorescent light fixtures with pink, blue, green and yellow tubes, 96" high, edition: 1/5
3. "monument" for V. Tatlin, 1964 fluorescent light fixtures with cool white tubes 96" high, edition: 4/5
4. "monument" for V. Tatlin, 1968 fluorescent light fixtures with cool white tubes 96" high, edition: 4/5
5. "monument" for V. Tatlin, 1966 fluorescent light fixtures with cool white tubes 144" high, edition: 2/5
6. "monument" for V. Tatlin, 1968 fluorescent light fixtures with cool white tubes 32 x 168", edition: 4/5

7. European Couples

Eight selections from the series of nine:

untitled (to Barbara and Joost), 1966-71 fluorescent light fixtures with daylight tubes 96 x 96", edition: 1/5

untitled (to Christina and Bruno), 1966-71 fluorescent light fixtures with yellow tubes 96 x 96", edition: 1/5

untitled (to Heidi and Uwe), 1966-71 fluorescent light fixtures with cool white tubes 96 x 96", edition: 1/5

untitled (to Janet and Allen), 1966-71 fluorescent light fixtures with pink tubes 96 x 96", edition: 1/5

untitled (to Karin and Walther), 1966-71 fluorescent light fixtures with blue tubes 96 x 96", edition: 3/5

untitled (to Katharina and Christoph), 1966-71 fluorescent light fixtures with green tubes 96 x 96", edition: 1/5

untitled (to Pia and Franz), 1966-71 fluorescent light fixtures with warm white tubes 96 x 96", edition: 1/5

untitled (to Sabine and Holger), 1966-71 fluorescent light fixtures with red tubes 96 x 96", edition: 3/5

untitled (to Thordis and Heiner), 1966-71 fluorescent light fixtures with soft white tubes 96 x 96", edition: 1/5

8. *monument 4 those who have been killed in ambush (to P.K. who reminded me about death)*, 1966 fluorescent light fixtures with four red tubes each tube 96", edition: 2/3

European Couples, and Others

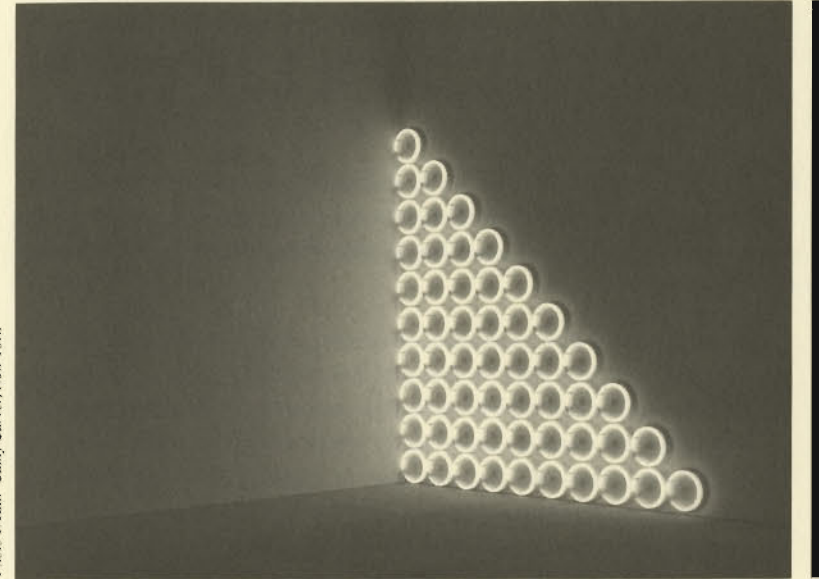


Photo credit: Cathy Carver, New York

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548 West 22nd Street, New York City

DAN FLAVIN

European Couples, and Others

In 1962 Dan Flavin introduced his first aesthetic experiments with electric light art: square monochrome paintings with attached fixtures and bulbs, which he deemed "icons." He used the term ironically in relation to its traditional religious context, explaining:

...my icons differ from a Byzantine Christ held in majesty; they are dumb—anonymous and inglorious. They are as mute and indistinguished as the run of our architecture. My icons do not raise up the blessed savior in elaborate cathedrals. They are constructed concentrations celebrating barren rooms. They bring a limited light.¹

By 1963 Flavin had come to eschew any form of painting or collage in favor of simple, unadorned, commercially produced fluorescent light fixtures and tubes, and has worked exclusively in that medium ever since. And by 1965, he had effectively summed up the major components of his art:

In time, I came to these conclusions about what I had found in fluorescent light, and about what might be done with it plastically: Now the entire interior spacial container and its parts—wall, floor, and ceiling, could support this strip of light but would not restrict its act of light except to enfold it.... Realizing this, I knew that the actual space of a room could be broken down and played with by planting illusions of real light (electric light) at crucial junctures in the room's composition. For example, if you press an eight-foot fluorescent lamp into the vertical climb of a corner, you can destroy that corner by glare and doubled shadow. A piece of wall can be visually disintegrated from the whole into a separate triangle by plunging a diagonal of light from edge to edge on the wall; that is, side to floor, for instance. ...What has art been for me? In the past, I have known it (basically) as a sequence of implicit decisions to combine traditions of painting and sculpture in architecture with acts of electric light defining space...²

Despite his dedication of each untitled work to a person or a personal reflection, and his own deep awareness of the overwhelming historical symbolism of light in art,³ Flavin has always refused to attach any symbolic or referential significance to his works:

It is what it is, and it ain't nothin' else...Everything is clearly, openly, plainly delivered. There is no overwhelming spirituality you are supposed to come

into contact with. I like my use of light to be openly situational in the sense that there is no invitation to meditate, to contemplate. It's in a sense a "get-in-get-out" situation. And it is very easy to understand. One might not think of light as a matter of fact, but I do. And it is, as I said, as plain and open and direct an art as you will ever find.⁴

Having employed generic mass-produced light fixtures in order to deny his light art any transcendental significance, and having also denied those same light fixtures their simple utilitarian function by calling them art, the irony of Flavin's gestures and use of terms like "icon" is obvious. Less obvious is the almost limitless plastic potential the artist devised and has demonstrated over the past thirty years in his systematic application of the limited vocabulary of commercially available light fixtures and light bulb colors and sizes: four basic lengths: two, four, six, and eight feet; and nine possible colors: blue, green, pink, red, yellow, and four variations of white. The circular fixtures constituting *untitled (to a man, George McGovern)* were added to Flavin's vocabulary in 1972.

Flavin's simplified formal vocabulary can be related to the work of his contemporaries, such as Donald Judd, who have been labeled Minimalist artists for their reduction of formal devices, and their emphasis on serial and rational rather than gestural forms, and phenomenological rather than symbolic or narrative results. Flavin also proclaims respect for the work certain Modernist abstract artists such as Constantin Brancusi, Piet Mondrian, and the innovators of the Russian avant-garde, particularly Vladimir Tatlin, to whom his most sustained series of work—"monuments" for V. Tatlin (1964–1982)—is dedicated. Far from incidental, the relationship to Tatlin's art illuminates both formal inventions in Flavin's work and its context within the history of art.

Displayed in a 1915 exhibition with Kasmir Malevich's painting *Black Square*, Tatlin's first major public work was his sculptural corner installation of collaged industrial materials. Both works were installed in corners of a gallery, thereby claiming the unused margins of their exhibition space, while making overt reference to the traditional religious icon hung in the corner of a room in a common Russian home. Tatlin and Malevich's occupation of the corner with their new abstract "icons" was an attempt to create an entirely radical, unique, and dynamic artistic vocabulary that expressed the human aspirations of the impending industrial and social revolution of the twentieth century. Flavin's career-long preoccupation with the corner of the gallery implicitly echoes the Russians' gesture to engage space usually not utilized for traditional painting and sculpture; nevertheless, his corner works deny the religious symbolism and utopian social ambition of the artistic avant-garde epitomized by Tatlin's work.

Tatlin's greatest work was his unrealized spiral tower *The Monument to the Third International*, for which Flavin's "monuments" are named. Yet, Flavin notes, "I always use 'monuments' in quotes to emphasize the ironic humor of temporary monuments. These 'monuments' only survive as long as the light system is useful (2,100 hours)."⁵ The artist's appropriation of commercial light fixtures—a quintessential product of our highly industrialized society—is presented not as a timeless celebration of a revolutionary culture as Tatlin's was, but as ontological fact: tangible and temporal.

Flavin employs a humorous, historical reference to Tatlin precisely to separate his work from the kind of artistic symbolic significance Tatlin ascribed to his own work. Yet, at the same time, he clearly reveres the tragic human person of Tatlin and his "frustrated, insistent attitude to attempt to combine artistry and engineering."⁶

The eight corner works dedicated to European couples, also featured in this exhibition, were selected from a series of nine corner pieces (in the nine commercially available color tubes). These works maintain a similarly ironic relationship to their context as art, as light, and as objects dedicated to eighteen actual people (nine couples). The embedded irony serves to underscore, by contrast, the sincerity of the works' unadulterated, radiant, ephemeral presence as phenomenal objects.

Michael Govan

1. Dan Flavin, in *Dan Flavin: three installations in fluorescent light* (Cologne: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum and the Kunsthalle Köln, 1973–74), p. 83. This commentary is taken from a "record" book entry dated August 9, 1962.

2. Dan Flavin. "'...in daylight or cool white': an autobiographical sketch," *Artforum* 4, no. 4 (December 1965), p. 24. Flavin later revised and republished this text in several exhibition catalogues.

3. Flavin attended a Roman Catholic seminary; although he rejected that path, he began his art education with religious art. Flavin is also a knowledgeable collector of art past and present.

4. Michael Gibson, "The Strange Case of the Fluorescent Tube," *Art International* 1 (Autumn 1987), p. 105.

5. Quoted in Suzanne Munchnic, "Flavin Exhibit: His Artistry Comes to Light," *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1984.

6. Ibid. Quoted from a wall text written by Flavin for The Museum of Contemporary Art's Temporary Contemporary exhibition "'monuments' to V. Tatlin from Dan Flavin" (1984).