DAN FLAVIN

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.


Dan Flavin was born in 1933 in New York City, where he later studied art history at the New School for Social Research. From 1963, he exhibited nationally and internationally. 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. Flavin died on November 29, 1996.

Support for this exhibition has been provided by Calvin Klein, Inc., and the members of the Dia Art Council.

Site Map

1. icon I (the heart) is in the light of Sean McGovern which blesses everyone, 1961–62. Oil on gesso on masonite and pine, red fluorescent light. 25 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 4 5/8 inches, excluding lamp and fixture. Estate of Dan Flavin.


4. icon V (Coran’s Broadway Flesh), 1962. Oil on masonite, porcelain receptacles, pull chains, clear incandescent "candle" bulbs. 31 5/8 x 31 5/8 x 9 7/8 inches, excluding bulb and fixture. Private Collection.

5. icon VI (Ireland dying), 1962–63. Oil on masonite, painted steel receptacle, glass cap, red incandescent bulb, socket disc flasher. 25 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 10 3/8 inches, excluding bulb and fixture. Collection Donald Judd Estate.


7. icon VIII (the dead niggers icon) to Blind Lemon Jefferson, 1962–63. Oil on masonite, porcelain receptacles, pull chain, red incandescent bulb, socket disc flasher. 25 1/8 x 25 1/8 x 10 7/16 inches, excluding bulb and fixture. Private Collection.

8. the diagonal of May 22, 1961 is the day Constantin Brancusi, 1963. Yellow fluorescent light. 8 feet long. Collection Dia Center for the Arts, Gift of the artist.


That artificial Column was disposed as a regular formal consequence of numerous concentrations celebrating barren rooms. They bring a limited light. 'Similar wood wedge-cut segments extended vertically—a hewn sculpture (at its diagonal, the selection of gold light obviously conjures the traditional religious artefact, if ironically.' Forced by his father to attend a Roman Catholic seminary, Flavin had cul­tivated an educated rejection of traditional theology. Two of his first fluorescent works of 1963 were dedicated to William of Ockham, a medieval philosopher and founder of Nominalism who proposed that faith in God must be held separately from any rational deduction from facts of this earth. Flavin's invocation of Nominalism—known in the more popular dichotomy that "no more entities should be posited than are necessary" (Ockham's Razor)—could be considered a Rosetta stone for Minimalism. Flavin's art neither rejects nor summons faith since the question of God is never raised. For, art is matter and is, therefore, no proof of anything spiritual. Created by an artist steeped in traditions of art and canons of Catholicism, Flavin's icons and fluorescent works offer nothing less than a reconsideration and deconstruction of art's past through both the systematic use of form and light and the lack of irony. Thus, he pris the transcendent aspirations of art against the practical commonality of the commercial light fixture, allowing neither to prevail. 1

1. 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.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. untitled (1970) is an eight-foot tall version of a work made in 1967, an artificial barrier of blue, red, and blue fluorescent light (to Flavin Starbeck Judd. untitled was also installed in Donald Judd's Spring Street loft in New York.

5. Dan Flavin, quoted in etc. from Dan Flavin (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969), p. 176. The notes are taken from a record book dated 9 August 1962, which is related to a common eight-foot strip with fluorescent light of any commercially available color. At first, I chose "gold." ...I put the paired lamp and pan in position at an angle forty-five degrees above the horizontal because that seemed to be a suitable situation of resolved equilibrium but any other positioning could have been just as engaging.

Flavin later dedicated the gold diagonal to Constantin Brancusi in reference to the systematic elementary structure of the Romanian artist's Endless Column.