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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.

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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 Bryan Smith.


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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 indistinguishable as the run of our architecture. My icons do not raise the blessed savior in elaborate cathedrals. They are constructed concentrations celebrating barren rooms. They bring a futil light.5

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:


2. Dan Flavin, "...in daylight or cool white": an autobiographical sketch, "Arg jamais 4, no. 4 (December 1963), 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.
