Keith Sonnier

Keith Sonnier has long been interested in experiential art environments and the effects of artificial light. Keith Sonnier: Dis-Play II brings one of the artist’s signature environments together with his film and video works. The presentation includes both the immersive installation Dis-Play II (1970) and Film and Videos 1968–1977, a selection by the artist of moving-image work that charts his decade-long exploration into media and sound.

After graduating in 1966 from the MFA program at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, Sonnier relocated to New York, together with his future wife and fellow artist, Jackie Winsor, he quickly entered a circle of artists willing to experiment with the reduction that Minimalist forms brought to bear on the expansiveness of nontraditional materials. In New York they encountered the work of Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, and Eva Hesse and became closely connected with explorations of alternative materials. Those relationships allowed Sonnier to utilize the methodology of Minimalism within the greater frame of temporal installations and ephemeral art. Looking back over his career, he described his peers at that time as making art “that was defined by its defiance of the traditional idea of what could be considered art.”

Though Sonnier has not explicitly defined his practice within the rubric of Postminimalism, his work reverberates with Robert Pincus-Witten’s sense of the movement as a chronological advancement of material chance as opposed to its restriction. Sonnier was represented with found and industrial materials, he reached beyond those categories to pursue materials notable not only for their ephemerality, but also for their strong material basis, the pairing of these two artists, both so associated with artificial light, brings new energy to the medium and displays a surprising range of outcomes.

3. Sonnier, “Keith Sonnier Interview with Barbara Bertozzi Castelli,” p. 16.
4. Ibid., p. 1T.
5. E-mail from the artist’s studio, May 24, 2018.
Keith Sonnier was born in Mamou, Louisiana, in 1941. He graduated with a BA from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 1963 and received an MFA from Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, in 1966. Among Sonnier’s professors at Rutgers were Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Morris, and many members of the Fluxus Group such as Allan Kaprow, Henryk Friedricks, and Robert Watts. In 1968 Morris included Sonnier in the briefly influential exhibition 9 at Leo Castelli. His practice has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent international venues including the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, New York (2018–19), Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (2002–03), Kunsthaus Bregenz in Austria (1999), Sprengel Museum in Hannover (1993), Weitwahre Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC (1989), Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia (1988), Museum of Modern Art in New York (1971), and Stedelijk van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands (1970). Sonnier lives and works in New York City and Bridgehampton, New York.

selected bibliography

checklist
Dis-Play II, 1970
Film: rubber, fluorescent powder, strobe light, black light, neon, and glass

Film and Videos 1968–1977

Ar-Ju, 1968
Filmed performance, 12 min.


Dis-Play, 1969
Black-and-white video, with sound, 10 min., 6 sec.

Blow, 1969
Color 16-mm film, with sound, 8 min., excerpt (10 min. total)

Painted Foot: Black Light, 1970
Black-and-white kinescope, with sound, 11 min., excerpt (16 min. total)

Rubdown, 1970
Black-and-white video, with sound, 11 min.

Positive-Negative, 1970
Black-and-white 16-mm film, silent, 10 min., excerpt (13 min. total)

Light Bulb and Fire, 1970
Black-and-white 16-mm film, with sound, 11 min., excerpt (20 min. total)

Negative, 1971
Black-and-white 16-mm film, with sound, 10 min.

Color Wipe, 1973
Color video, with sound, 12 min., excerpt (30 min. total)

The TV Hybrids, 1971

T-Hybrid-V-II, 1971
Color and black-and-white 16-mm film, with sound, 3 min., 20 sec., excerpt (1 min. total)

T-Hybrid-VIII, 1971
Color and black-and-white 16-mm film, with sound, 3 min., 58 sec., excerpt (9 min. total)

T-Hybrid-V-IV, 1971
Color and black-and-white 16-mm film, with sound, 6 min., 27 sec., excerpt (12 min. total)


Mat Key and Radio Track, 1972
Color video, with sound, 12 min.

TV In and TV Out, 1972
Color video, with sound, 12 min.

Animation I, 1973
Color video, with sound, 4 min., excerpt (14 min. total)

Animation II, 1974
Color video, with sound, 4 min., excerpt (25 min. total)

Send/Receive Satellite Network: Phase I, 1977
In collaboration with Liza Béar
Color video, with sound, 6 min., 36 sec., excerpt (25 min. total)

Send/Receive Satellite Network: Phase II, 1977
In collaboration with Liza Béar
Color video, with sound, 7 min., 2 sec., excerpt (30 min. total)


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