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Laddie John Dill

PressBook



LADDIE JOHN DILL, JIM GANZER

LIGHT SENTENCE, LADDIE JOHN DILL, 1973

laddie john dill

I was working with neon light and argon light and helium—different gases I had been experimenting with. And I was also interested in projection and ways of carrying light. The idea of sand was actually originally suggested by Chuck Arnoldi.

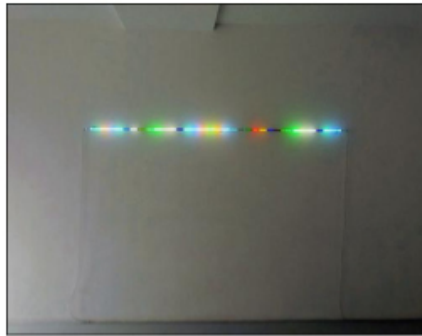
I started projecting images on the sand. Mundane images from a slide projector, like family shots, and the effect was incredible. I realized that sand, especially light grain sand, was like a movie screen. It picked up every grain and illuminated it.

I was interested in setting up some kind of complex structure that reflected light and also could give the illusion of piercing through a solid object, so I started working with plate glass.

I was used to working with glass with the neon art and knew how plate glass could light up. I had worked with this glass blower who would put these things together for me. I'd literally be over his shoulder, "Pull it here, pull it there, this link, that link." I'd write them [out] like a script; I ended up calling a lot of the pieces light sentences because they were like scripted things.

The sand is what held these architectural structures [made of plate glass] up. It appeared like an arbitrary mass—but it was actually very carefully poured and used the weight of it so that the whole structure would work. That piece was recently purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

ART | CRITIQUES


Laddie John Dill
Contained Radiance

12 mars-14 mai 2011

Paris 3e. Galerie Dominique Fiat

Laddie John Dill énonce des «phrases de lumière», délicats néons rectilignes de toutes les couleurs qui ponctuent poétiquement les murs blancs de la galerie Dominique Fiat, en de mystérieuses lucioles de verre.



Par Ornella Lamberti

Ces «light sentences», créées dans les années 70, sont de minces néons — d'un centimètre de diamètre — composés de cylindres de verre colorés; bleu marine, vert pomme, jaune canari, bleu fluorescent, blanc iridescent, violette... ou translucide. Un mélange d'argon, de mercure, d'uranium et d'hélium parcourt certains fragments, les illuminant, ou sont absents d'autres, alors «éteints». Les radiances lumineuses se montrent, volages, par séquences.

Les néons, exposés verticalement ou horizontalement, évoquent tour à tour des phrases en morse, des haïkus lumineux, d'étranges phasmes de verre. Un vrombissement entêtant, à l'instar de ceux que l'on entend dans les hôpitaux dépeuplés ou lorsque l'on s'approche d'un écran cathodique, sourd, plongeant la galerie et le visiteur dans une méditation hors du temps face à ces totems de lumière.

Et, si l'on observe les néons de près, un discret phénomène se manifeste: le mouvement des particules de lumière, vibrato hypnotique, intense, vrillant et vibrant doucement, dont on ne saurait déterminer la direction. Difficile de détourner le regard de cette alchimie, de ce «Grand Œuvre» de la matière en mutation, qui sait engendrer la lumière.

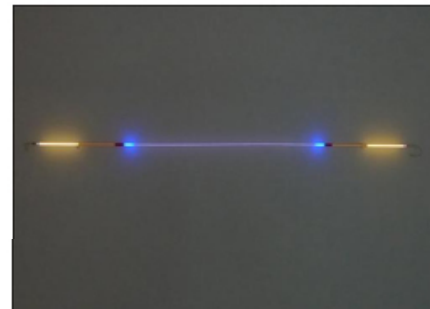
Fruits d'une alliance contre-nature, ces néons réunissent la technologie la plus froide — les néons sur lesquels l'on peut encore lire le numéro de commande du verre, ainsi ornés de mots polaires tels Snow White 6500 USA — et la sorcellerie de la lumière qui advient.

Laddie John Dill, artiste américain appartenant au mouvement Light and Space né dans les années 60, réinvestit l'acte de domestiquer la lumière de sa folie géniale et mystérieuse. A cette fin, tel Daniel Buren, il utilise la séquence colorée pour appuyer visuellement ce qui tend à devenir invisible, par habitude, à nos yeux. Car le regard s'use et il est bon de lui rappeler la magie du voir.

Œuvres

- Laddie John Dill, *Glass Painting Light Sentence*, 1971. Argon, mercure, verre. 235 x 1 cm
- Laddie John Dill, *Light conditions of Northern New Mexico Light Sentence*, 1971. Argon, verre. 1 x 235 cm
- Laddie John Dill, *The Third Waves Light Sentence*, 1971. Argon, verre. 230 x 1 cm
- Laddie John Dill, *Light on the Arno Light Sentence*, 1971. Argon, verre. 212 x 1 cm

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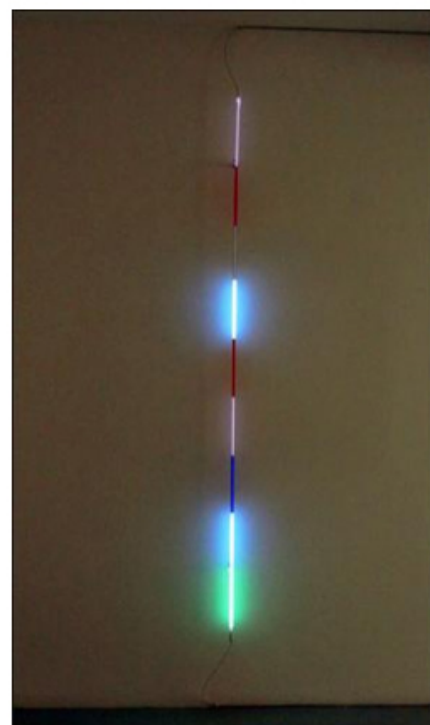
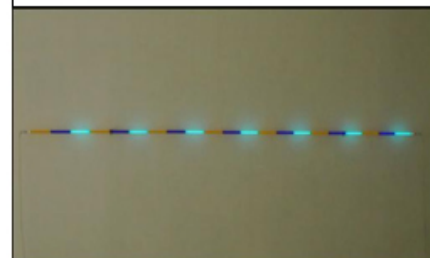


Créateurs

- Laddie John Dill

Lieu

- Galerie Dominique Fiat





GALERIE DOMINIQUE FIAT

Arts Laddie John Dill

Dernier jour pour voir les
« Light Sentences » (phrases lumineuses)
historiques de l'artiste californien
Laddie John Dill. Un must ! Galerie
Dominique Fiat (Paris III^e) jusqu'à 19 heures.

L'avis du Figaro : ●●●○

DF

GALERIE DOMINIQUE FIAT



Arts Laddie John Dill

Les musées français flashent sur cet artiste californien aux *Light Sentences* (phrases lumineuses) des années 1970. Galerie Dominique Fiat, Paris (III^e), jusqu'au 7 mai.

L'avis du Figaro : ●●●○

[Accueil](#) > [Le Journal des Arts](#) > [Archives](#) > [Les lignes de Laddie John Dill](#)

Les lignes de Laddie John Dill

Le Journal des Arts - n° 344 - 1er avril 2011

PARIS - Vous ne connaissez sans doute pas le nom de cet artiste membre du mouvement Light and Space, mais l'exposition de Laddie John Dill organisée par Dominique Fiat, à Paris, vaut le détour.

Construisant des lignes lumineuses avec du néon, du mercure ou de l'hélium, ces œuvres des années 1970 jouent sur l'opacité et la transparence, la couleur et la lumière, l'aura et la métamorphose. Des variations qui modifient l'espace de la galerie au gré de la journée.

Le Journal des Arts

Galerie Dominique Fiat, 16, rue des Coutures-Saint-Gervais, 75003 Paris, tél. 01 40 29 98 80. Jusqu'au 7 mai

À L'AFFICHE

Laddie John Dill ♥♥♥

GALERIE DOMINIQUE FIAT 16, rue des Coutures-Saint-Gervais (III^e) **TÉL.** : 01 40 29 07 19 **HORAIRES** : du mar. au sam. de 11h à 19h **JUSQU'AU** 14 mai.

Les *Light Sentences* de l'artiste californien Laddie John Dill, 68 ans, constituent des expériences d'alchimiste en jouant sur la présence et l'absence de mercure, uranium et hélium. Chaque « phrase lumineuse » est composée de morceaux de verre soufflé de tailles différentes, verre de couleur ou verre teinté par le gaz qu'il contient. Elles composent des halos variables, fantomatiques. Ces pièces historiques de 1970-1971 sont contemporaines des travaux de Dan Flavin et de Robert Irwin (longues de 2 m à 2,5 m, autour de 25 000 €). Le MoMA de New York a acheté une de ses installations après la grande exposition chez David Zwirner en janvier 2010. Le Centre Pompidou est tenté.

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California Sweet

The beautiful haze of West Coast minimalism makes Frank Gehry talk naughty

**'Primary Atmospheres:
Works From California 1960-1970'**

David Zwirner
525 West 19th Street
212-517-8677

BY CHRISTIAN VIVEROS-FAUNÉ

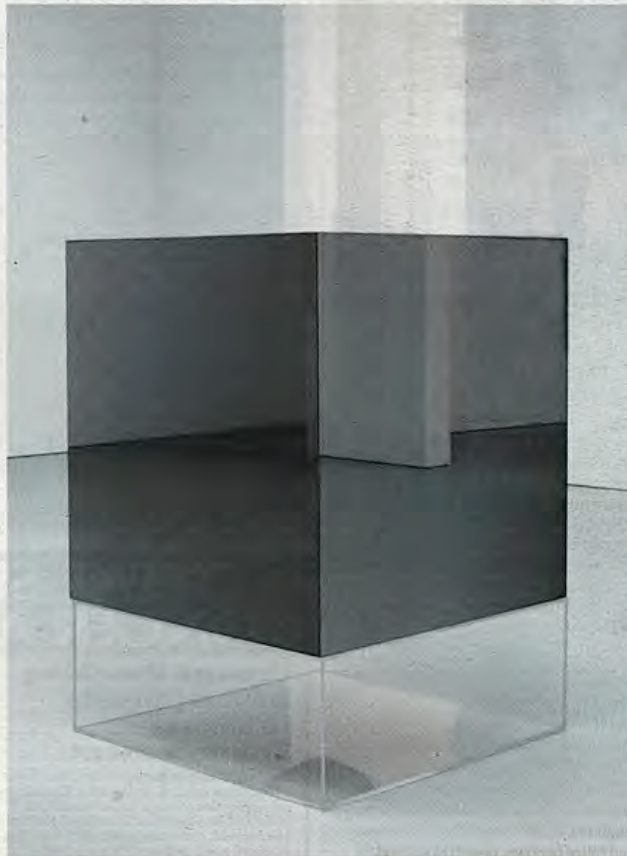
Minimal art—let's face it—is a bore. With all the cheerfulness of a leper's bell, it proposes that its preachy abstemiousness is somehow good for us. The 20th-century art movement that best echoes Puritanism, minimalism channels Cotton Mather across the ages. Instead of chafing wool, wood-plank architecture, and bans on graven images, we get rows of fluorescent fixtures, stacks of metal boxes, piles of cloth, and, most infamously, a mason's brace of cold bricks laid end to end. Regular folks hate it, and who can blame them? When I go to the supermarket, I hardly expect to celebrate empty shelves.

The purported benefits of minimal art are all about what its chief practitioners (Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Carl Andre) told us we couldn't have. In New York, where the movement set up its HQ in the 1960s, this temperateness meant scissoring out art's heart plus a lung along with dreaded ornament. What high-church minimalism prescribed was the perfectly machined object—mute, weirdly antiseptic, and expressive as a Viking stove. In the post-Pollock laboratory of shiny surfaces, only the husk of content need apply.

Pacific light was the thing here — as filtered, mind you, by the Moloch of American industry.

Over time, minimalism became our official public art. A vessel emptied of meaning that accommodates all comers, minimalist sculpture matched America's fuzzy relativism to a T. Given mounds of earth or tons of black granite, minimal sculpture could tolerantly—democratically, even—say one thing as well as another. Take the Vietnam Memorial, for example—that Death Star of content-crunching monumentality. Excepting the names of the poor fuckers chiseled into it, the austere pile hallows America's war dead just as easily as it might extol the athleticism of the Bataan Death March.

So we are grateful for a galvanizing (and literally) enlightening January exhibition at David Zwirner gallery. A show that makes clear that minimalism's



Courtesy David Zwirner, New York

Art

New York crew never did, in fact, possess the last gospel word on the aesthetic of reduction, this expert survey of what has alternately been called "California Minimalism," "Light and Space," and, condescendingly, "Finish Fetish" charts a key decade in the development of another pared-down strand of minimal art. This time, rather than obscure theory and stacked slabs of concrete, we get perceptual meditations on light and hedonistic color. Put into Jay Leno—speak: In the separated-at-birth sweepstakes, the gang profiled in this exhibition are, most definitely, the sunny, laidback ones.

Narcotically titled "Primary Atmospheres: Works From California, 1960-1970" and curated by Tim Nye and Kristine Bell, this otherwise snappy collection of physical artworks and luminous sleights-of-hand offers the most radiant portraits possible of what Will Self has

**Box of tricks:
An untitled 1969 piece by Larry Bell**

called "the surly gravity of L.A., pickled in its own nastiness of pollutants." Among other things, the show endorses the working cliché that much art looks a lot like the place it was made. If East Coast minimalism was all 1965 Soho lofts, square rooftops, and dying blue-collar businesses, its West Coast relative instead tripped out on Venice Beach haze (incredibly, there were oil rigs out there until the 1970s); the slick chrome and plastic surfaces of the city's signs and cars; and, most especially, L.A.'s artificially enhanced, at times comic, ability to pin a flaming halo on even the turdiest urban blight. Pacific light was the thing here—as filtered, mind you, by the Moloch of American industry.

It is appropriate, then, that one of the first works encountered in "Pri-

mary Atmospheres" should be Doug Wheeler's "light painting" of 1969. A large square of plastic with white neon embedded along its inside edges, this artwork blurs the distinction between its armature and the white walls enveloping it, while immersing the viewer in a visual sauna of steamy light. A nearby painting—a strangely glowing piece by the doyen of light and space art, Robert Irwin—reminds one that many of these artists (like most sculptors and art critics, though *pas moi*) were painters until their canvases, often quite literally, fell off the walls. What at first glance appear like staid dots of patriarchal oil on canvas, shimmers like lime jelly if stared at hard enough, acquiring the solidity of a relief.

The next significant perceptual payoff comes in the shape of light installations by another ex-painter turned Californian visual philosopher, James Turrell. A sort of King Midas of the phenomenological set, Turrell—when he isn't off chasing his own personal Moby Dick round the lip of Roden Crater—has long been famous for making forms appear when, speaking plainly, there is nothing actually solid there. Simple light projections reprised in two separate galleries, these ghosts resolve themselves into glowing, voluminous triangles—one mantis-green, the other bright garnet. Absences that turn taunting presences, these geometric phantasms provoke the Doubting Thomas in everyone to stick a finger, hand, or leg in it.

Eye candy of a less apparitional sort are what the other artists in the show are after, chiefly through the exploration of the kind of industrial materials that effortlessly draw our infinitely subdivided attention to strip-mall trash and flash: RVs, skateboards, and fast food signs, among other detritus. Stuff this West Coast bunch fingered for the first time as material for art, such elements became—in these and other works—perfect conduits for reverse transformations of "light, space, and color into material form."

"Primary Atmospheres" contains gems too numerous to mention. There's Peter Alexander, whose experiments with blocks of polyester resin cast pink transparencies ethereal enough for a meathead like Frank Gehry to compare them (favorably) to "pussy"; the vacuum-coated glass boxes of Larry Bell, which change color and opacity with every angle; and the back-painted wall-reliefs of Craig Kaufman, like Hall's lozenges oozing interior radiance.

And then there's John McCracken. The absolute nutter of the worldwide minimalist movement, this devotee of UFOs and astral projections has spent a lifetime making 2001: A Space Odyssey monoliths that embody color with the transcendence of reliquary blood. Fiberglass planks he polishes into alchemical totems, they materialize what Turrell, in a moment of verbal genius, referred to as the "self-reflexive act of looking at your looking." Which just goes to show: Sometimes less is not a bore, it's just plain magic.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2010

Art in Review

'Primary Atmospheres'

Works From California
1960-1970David Zwirner
525 West 19th Street
Chelsea
Through Feb. 6

Is there a New York gallery that does Minimalism better than David Zwirner? Coming a year after a transcendent show of Fred Sandback's string sculptures and coinciding with a gorgeous installation of colored light by Dan Flavin still on view, this ravishing, museum-quality exhibition presents minimalistic works from the 1960s by 10 California artists.

Perceptual experience is the unifying factor. Projected into the corners of otherwise dark and empty rooms, James Turrell's wedges of intensely colored light seem more than just immaterial. It is as if sections of a virtual reality had been imported into reality. Doug Wheeler's square panel, whose internal, fluorescent framing elements fill a room with hazy white light, creates a similarly magical but more diffuse luminosity.

John McCracken's thick planks leaning against the wall — one bubble-gum pink and the other fire-engine red — have the sheen of surfboards. If you squint you might see them as extrusions of pure color. Conjoined podlike forms with cherry-candy metal-flake surfaces by De Wain Valentine also exemplify the California "finish fetish" aesthetic.

Elevated on a low, clear pedestal, a three-and-a-half-foot cube of smoky, semireflective glass by Larry Bell seems to hover and contain a mysterious otherworldly interior, while Laddie John Dill's installation of glass sheets imbedded in fine sand and illuminated by buried green lights is like an extraterrestrial landscape in a science-fiction movie. Alternately, Craig Kauffman's vacuum-formed reliefs resemble giant pieces of jelly candy. Like the cast acrylic sculptures by Robert Irwin, Peter Alexander and Helen Pashgian, they unite optical intrigue and hedonistic sensual-



Muslin-and-steel "Bird Song" sculptures by the Indian artist Ranjani Shettar at Talwar Gallery.

ity. New York Minimalism was never so deliciously enchanting.
KEN JOHNSON

Ranjani Shettar

Talwar Gallery
108 East 16th Street
Flatiron district
Through Jan. 30

The Indian artist Ranjani Shettar was born in 1977 in Bangalore, a technological hub of a largely rural South India, and her sculptures reflect contrasting aspects of that environment. The large suspended pieces, each called "Bird Song," in her third solo at Talwar, are based on armatures made of stainless-steel tubing bent into curves. Over them Ms. Shettar has stretched muslin soaked and stiffened with a tamarind-kernel paste — a traditional glue used by village toymakers — and colored golden-brown with kamiri, a dye made by fermenting rusted iron and sugar cane. The results are semi-transparent, shadow-casting mobiles that look like a cross between kites, bas-

CATHY CARVER/DAVID ZWIRNER, NEW YORK
"Triple Disk Red Metal Flake — Black Edge" by De Wain Valentine at David Zwirner.

kets and the half-abstract birds of Georges Braque.

Smaller, wall-hugging sculptures in the second gallery use the same stretched-cloth format, but here the armatures, though invisible, are studded with

carved wooden tool handles that radiate outward like spokes from a wheel or rays from the sun. The effect is both lyrical and homely, with the different shapes suggesting the taut tops of drums and pieces of thin, flat bread.

The most recent piece, "Waiting for June 2," is little more than a handful of unpainted terra-cotta shards, shell-like and organically formed rather than hand-sculptured, and grouped together. Like most of Ms. Shettar's work, it represents a strain of Indian contemporary art still overlooked in a global context: abstract work that wears Indian-ness lightly but still stands apart from familiar international forms, themes and styles. The profile of such work may be on the rise, judging from Ms. Shettar's still-young career, which has included appearances in major biennials and one-person museum shows in the United States and Europe. At the same time she continues to live and work in South India, drawing on it as a source of material and inspiration.

HOLLAND COTTER



THE ART WORLD

WAY OUT WEST

California minimalism comes to town.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

New York light is clear and mild. Los Angeles light is soft and fierce. Edges stand out in New York. In L.A., they melt. (This applies to thoughts as well as to things: minds work a mite differently in America's two capital cities of cultural production—not that it matters greatly now for culture, swamped as it is in glowing, placeless pixels.) A splendid show, at the David Zwirner gallery, of California minimalism, mostly from the late nineteen-sixties, revisits an apotheosis of the continental divide. Back then, Southern California writers and artists attained global stature by glorifying local quirks. (Two words: Joan Didion.) A tiny art community in L.A. absorbed influences of triumphant New York minimalism—the stringent simplicities of Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, et al.—and responded with forms and ideas that were so distinctive it was as if the movement had been reborn to more indulgent parents. The development acquired critical rubrics: *Finish Fetish*, for sculpture that sported industrial plastics and resins and glossy car enamels, and *Light and Space*, for increasingly ethereal environmental works. They shared a serene sensuousness that couldn't have been more remote from New York's principled asperity. In point of fact, they advanced a philosophical argument about the role of art in life which has aged well. Most of the four-decade-old works at Zwirner feel as fresh as this morning.

Take Larry Bell's glass boxes: chrome-framed cubes, vacuum-coated with vaporized minerals (usually grayish, but gold in one instance). The transparent objects admit your gaze. The space inside them is a continuation of the space you occupy, simply inflected with misty tones. The works are echt minimalist in that they are understood almost before they are seen.

Mystery-free, they leave you nothing to be conscious of except yourself, affected by their presence. But unlike, say, Judd's sternly confrontational metal and wooden geometries, they don't mind seducing. They are as obvious as furniture and as dreamy as whatever mood you're in. Not only elegant, they precipitate a feeling of elegance: ease, suavity, cool. They look expensive, not just in their lapidary craft but by extension, assuming an ambience of taste in key with themselves. (You wouldn't want a Bell box in a railroad apartment; it would be like living with an indignantly offended aristocrat.) In the sixties, puritanical New Yorkers (me included) liked to deplore the air of lotus-eating chic that Bell shared with other California minimalists. Today, after what seems an eternity of having been pummeled by the big-ticket swank of stainless-steel bunnies by Jeff Koons and tanked sharks by Damien Hirst, I find Bell's slickness generously candid—and the pseudo-Shaker austerity of Judd, for all his greatness, correspondingly coy. There's no crime in art's looking like a luxury. It is a luxury. Meanwhile, the intellectual integrity of the cubes, merging Euclid and reverie, proves rock solid.

The inveterately Southwestern critic Dave Hickey writes in an upcoming catalogue for the show that, unlike the starkly structural East Coast minimalism, West Coast minimalism, "like the California culture that nurtured it," is "intrinsically concerned with chemistry, with the slippery, unstable vernacular of oxygen, neon, argon, resin, lacquer, acrylic, fibreglass, glass, graphite, chrome, sand, water and active human hormones. This is a world that floats, flashes, coats, and teases." (In passing, Hickey nails a sense you get, between desert and ocean, "of the earth as the bottom of the sky.") This befits Bell



LADDIE JOHN DILL

Untitled, 1969/2010

Glass, sand, wood, and argon with mercury

Dimensions variable (architecturally specific)

Fact Sheet: Laddie John Dill

by *Margaret Knowles* 02/09/10

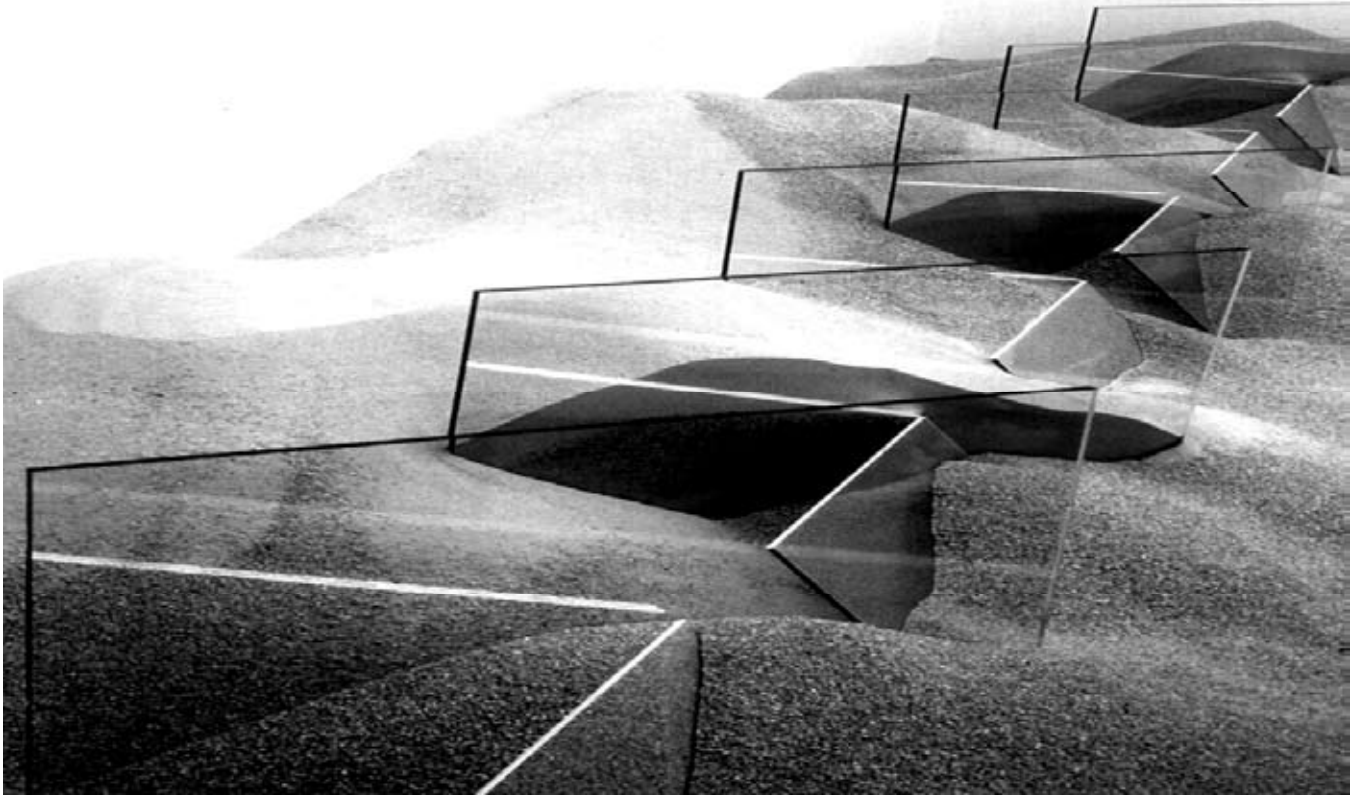
The recent Tim Nye-curated "Primary Atmospheres" show at David Zwirner was something of a welcome resurrection for a group of California Minimalists known as "Light and Space" artists. So welcome, in fact, that many of the artists—James Turrell, Robert Irwin, John McCracken—are already beloved, institutionally remembered figures, their myths only amplified by the generally negligent care of New York exhibition spaces. One artist curiously devoid of a personal mythology is Laddie John Dill (b. Long Beach, CA, 1943), whose work in the show, a series of glass panels arranged in sand and lit from below by fluorescents, was consistently called the exhibition's Smithsonian. Dill's work, which he calls "light sentences," combines a mysterious treatment of light with natural and sometimes esoteric materials. Nye has given Dill a solo show, "Contained Radiance," at his own gallery.



Here're the facts about Dill:

1. Dill's father was a lens designer, which the artist cites as a major influence of his scientific and analytical approach to materials.
2. Dill graduated from Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, in 1968 with a BFA degree. After graduating, Dill worked as a printing apprentice with Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenberg, Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns. He stayed with Johns when he came to New York in the 1970s, then moved in with Rauschenberg in his studio apartment on Lafayette Street.
3. When the Sonnabends were in Los Angeles for a Warhol show, Rauschenberg stop by and see Dill's work. It was a long shot, and Dill almost disassembled the large sand piece to move it to San Francisco, but decided to take the risk, and got his first one-man exhibition in 1971 at the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery in New York.
4. His studio in Venice, California (near those of his friends Ed Ruscha and Joe Goode) is divided into two parts, one in which he makes pieces, and the other that he uses just to experiment. He once filled a room in his studio with 10,000 pounds of silica sand to use in his three dimensional work.
5. The cement and glass construction above Frasier's (of the TV show Frasier) fireplace is by Laddie John Dill.

CONTAINED RADIANCE IS ON VIEW THROUGH FEBURARY 20. NYEHAUS IS LOCATED AT 358 WEST 20TH STREET, NEW YORK. IMAGE: UNTITLED, 1969/2010. PHOTO BY CATHY CARVER, COURTESY DAVID ZWIRNER NEW YORK.



Intriguing works in light and space

By Christopher Knight
Herald Examiner art critic

“Light and space,” it is said, are to Southern California art of the 1960’s and 70’s what gestural abstraction and the all-over image are to the New York School of the 50’s. Painting, sculpture, hybridized works, and, most importantly, installations of the period responded with the particular – and peculiar – qualities of atmosphere in the region. Robert Irwin stretched translucent nylon scrims across empty rooms, DeWain Valentine suspended acrylic rods that brought shifting daylight indoors, James Turrell, cut picture windows in the wall that looked into empty rooms filled with a nearly tactile atmosphere of ambient light. The ephemeral history of such temporal installation work is as vague and, by now, mythological as the most ancient art that has not survived the erosion of time. By their very nature, most light and space installations are as short lived and chimerical as a passing cloud.

“California I: Light and Space,” an exhibition of sculpture, paintings, photographs, drawings, and one small environment, is on view at the Lonny Gans Gallery, 21 Market Street, through March 31. It does not, as the gallery’s press release claim’s, “define the California movement and place it within the context of international contemporary art.” As an object-oriented exhibition (this is, after all, a commercial gallery with limited space and a need to have objects to sell), “California I” must omit the environmental installations that have become the hallmark of the movement it seeks to define. If anything, the show points out the need for a larger, full-dress exhibition to explore the light and space phenomenon. But that is the kind of show only an institution can orchestrate.

What the exhibition does offer is a number of intriguing works that provide clues to the larger concern of area artists involved with light and space as materials. In general, the movement has been claimed as the first wholly unique contribution to contemporary art made by Los Angeles artists. When the need to give the movement historical validity arises, French Impressionism is dredged up as the logical witness, with its tireless explorations of reflection, color, transparency, and the transient perceptual phenomena of light. But such a linkage rests on superficial similarities. Ignoring not only vast stylistic differences, but what I think is a fundamental attitude as well.

Consider, for instance, Laddie John Dill's untitled work from 1975. It consists of a long shelf of sand, mounded and scooped into a terrarium landscape. Standing peaks and valleys are sheets of glass, set in an ordered arrangement of six L-shaped pairs along the length of the piece. Argon light from a hidden source illuminates the top edge of the planes of glass that are parallel to the viewer, causing linear reflections of light on the abutted glass. This reflected light appears to cut through the mounds of sand piled against the glass, or to float like laser beams over the miniature landscape. While an Impressionist landscape, built from a brushy, tactile haze of paint, dissolves its subject into an ecstatic blur of color. Dill's piece employs a hard, precisely ordered, classically arranged, and measured configuration with all the clarity of a mathematical diagram. To this nearly mechanical arrangement, Dill fuses almost mystical overtones. Light, of course, has an ancient history of mystical associations, and here it links the transparency of glass with the opacity of sand (from which glass itself is made.) The reflected beams of light illusionistically piece both solid and void.

The differences between Dill's tabletop landscape and, say, a Monet poppy field are greater, and more profound, than any similarities. Dill's piece is a contained and a sharply delineated vessel for metaphysical meaning and, as such, is well within the realm of an American tradition of art embodied in Luminist landscape painting of the 19th century. In the canons of modern art, all roads lead back to France, and it has only been in recent years that other sources, including our own long-ignored painting of the last century, have been considered. Although Impressionist paintings focused on light, in substance it tended to dissolve the haystacks, cathedral facades, and urban streets it depicted into the flicker of a moment. Luminism, on the other hand, maintained an indissoluble attraction to physical things, fusing objects and a metaphysical light into a transcendentalist vision; time froze in a concentrated eternity. This Emersonian blend of reason and faith has been succinctly described as the blending of the real and the ideal. Art historian Barbara Novak, without question the most articulate spokeswoman for the 19th-century American art, has put it this way; "If we say that impressionism is the *objective* response to the *visual* sensation of light, then perhaps we can say that Luminism is the *poetic* response to the *felt* sensation... The conceptual nature of the American vision is one of the most distinguishing qualities of American art. It is accompanied by a strong feeling for the linear, for the wholeness of objects that must not rationally be allowed to lose their tactile identity—to be lost or obscured by the flickering lights and shadows of the European tradition."



Laddie John Dill, Untitled, 1983. Mixed media on canvas, 48 x 120".
Courtesy Charles Cowles Gallery.

ARTS MAGAZINE, vol. 58
no. 5, Jan. 1984
p. 24.

LADDIE JOHN DILL

In Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* Gustave Aschenbach, the central figure, proclaimed, "For not to be able to want sobriety is licentious folly." Aschenbach, after all, was a somber literary artist, having emerged from obscurity by writing a 'lucid and vigorous prose epic' on the life of Frederick the Great.

Laddie John Dill, in contrast, paints with light. Although he no longer uses glass tubes and neon to paint dots and dashes or bars of brightly articulated color, prismatic light shines from his work nonetheless. In his latest show, Dill's canvases are studies for stage sets for the theatrical version of *Death in Venice*. These cogent scenographic abstractions employ large triangles and forced perspective trapezoids to lead the viewer into an illusion of stage volume. The projected orthographics of the artist's imagery is enhanced by high contrast at the form boundaries. The overall effects refer to Turner's sky, fire and water seascapes, particularly the ones set, appropriately, in Venice. The theatergoer or gallery viewer could easily imagine a silent gondola carrying Aschenbach through narrow canals.

Deep royals flowing into lazy aquamarines, supplanted by vibrant alizarins and cadmiums, elicit a mood of expectation. Would the protagonist

survive? Gustave's resistance was wearing down, "... and art was war—a grilling, exhausting struggle that nowadays wore one out before one could grow old. It had been a life of self-conquest, a life against odds, dour, steadfast, abstinent; he had made it symbolical of the kind of overstrained heroism the time admired." Aschenbach's time in Germany produced the Expressionist art heroes. Dill's colors attribute to the German artists of that period, especially Kokoschka, Heckel, and Marc, although his compositions are much more rectilinear. It is Abstract Expressionism turned end over end, that is, Expressionist Abstraction. Converging forces, equal and opposite, are obtained by the artist's use of sections, painted separately and applied as marquetry to the canvas. Reticulated sand and foam images recall Dill's lyrical cement and polymer work of the mid to late 70s.

Although he still employs some polymer and cement pigment mix applied to canvas, Dill uses abstract color and form to project dimensionality, whereas some years back, he built his highly textural landscapes by casting a solid area and carving back to reveal topography through a reductive process. In his minimalist days, Dill explored light and volume in a way re-

lated to Larry Bell and Robert Irwin. Although his sand and neon and his sand and glass pieces were theoretically three-dimensional environments, the issues revealed were more aligned with painting than with sculpture. Those environments emanated from the floor plane and evolved to emerge from the wall. Now, in another end over end, Dill's two-dimensional paintings serve as flat maquettes for three-dimensional theater in the round. Stage right and stage left are counterbalanced in many of these works. Although the 'flats' themselves are the focus of attention, interstitial triangles help the sense of interior space and mood.

Inside the geometric shapes, curvilinear movement takes place. Fire leaps toward an edge, channeled water circulates, while blue sky and thin wisps of clouds float. Color as form is carefully directed—urged but not forced or pressed. Shadows appear in places, adding to the contrast. In other places brightly hued spotlights play down and in, bouncing and reflecting. The marks seem to be laid down easily, but also with intensity. There is nothing lazy about this work.

Although most of Dill's work in the show exhibits adroit use of bold primary colors, there are some pieces

that contain more subdued grays or copper red-browns. The play, after all, is not just a bright and shining presence. Some scenes are contemplative and a few even melancholy. But they should convey a rhythm and balance not unlike the gondola boatman, gliding his ship home. The paintings also contain curtains from which the players can emerge or retreat to. These curtains serve as veils, separating the world of the visible from that of the mental or subtle.

Mann's description from *Death in Venice* is apt: "At the world's edge began a strewing of roses, a shining and a blooming ineffably pure; baby cloudlets hung illumined, like attendant amorette, in the blue and bluish haze; purple effulgence fell upon the sea, that seemed to heave it forward on its welling waves; from horizon to zenith went great quivering thrusts like golden lances, the gleam became a glare; without a sound, with godlike violence, glow and glare and rolling flames streamed upwards, and with flying hoof-beats the steeds of the sun-god mounted the sky."

The stage is strongly set. The backdrops will get the curtain calls. What can the players do now? (Charles Cowles, *November 5-26*)

Jon Meyer

Art: View from the Coast

The "Los Angeles look" has been visible in American art for years now. It is both unmistakable and hard to define. Developed by a generation of Southern Californian artists who became nationally known in the early and middle '60s, it is cool, elaborately finished and somewhat hermetic: craftsmanship pursued as a form of meditation.

At one end of the spectrum, the Los Angeles look can be seen in Billy Al Bengston's "dentos"—crumpled aluminum sheets with depths of shimmering, candied and gaseous sprayed color trapped under layers of glossy acrylic. At the other, it is apparent in the prismatic bloom of Larry Bell's immaculate glass boxes, and in Robert Irwin's pale disks floating into immateriality above their own cast shadows. The "look" is always playing games with media (where but in L.A. would an artist do drawings in caviar and gunpowder, as Ed Ruscha did?) and it stops just this side of fetishism and overrefinement.

The L.A. look may refer to the West Coast folk culture of hot-rod and chopper, or to aerospace technology; it has little to do with the "mainstream" of art as defined in New York, and some critics find this hard to forgive. "It is apparently as easy," snorted one writer in Art forum recently, "to rack up in Los Angeles as an artist as it is to be a stringer of beads. In California, the idea of luxe, calme et volupté is simplified into prettiness and expensive-lookingness."

This is Eastern chauvinist rhetoric. But such attacks do, at least, indicate one crucial difference between the art scenes on the West and East coasts. New York has an efficient phalanx of museums and publications to sustain the discourse between new art and its audience. Southern California has not. Its museums, declares Los Angeles Critic John Coplans, "are basically social clubs with a strong materialistic background of acquisitions for local trustees. You can't walk into any museum in L.A. for most of the year and see a permanent installation of vital work that's being done here." Adds one artist realistically: "We are not maintained here."

Changing Stereotype

The fact remains that no American city outside New York has produced such a remarkable number of vital talents as Los Angeles. The minimal cool and delicacy of much Los Angeles work can be seen as partly a retreat from the incredibly blatant environment in which it is made. But the stereotype of L.A. style (shiny plastic and jewel finish) is by no means as rigid as it looks from New York. The scene is very diverse. Among its more gifted members:

LADDIE JOHN DILL, 27, graduated from the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles in 1968, and shares a beachside studio in Venice with his sculptor brother Guy. He began as a painter, but found that «paint wasn't doing anything for me —spatially or any other way. I wanted to three-dimensionalize it.» The method he found involves making «sites» of beach sand, combined with sheet glass and neon tubing. Like bamboo, the thin tubes are divided into segments, each of which is coated with a differently glowing color. Sometimes they are buried in sand and release their light mysteriously along the edges of the glass panes; in other pieces, they lie on the surface of the sand, spilling their unnatural polychrome radiance across its furrows and ridges so that the image hovers between landscape and abstraction.