

Dia:



Dan Flavin
nine sculptures in fluorescent light, 1963–81

Dia Bridgehampton
The Dan Flavin Art Institute
23 Corwith Avenue
Bridgehampton, New York

Dan Flavin

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Dia Bridgehampton was designed by artist Dan Flavin to permanently house an installation of his work alongside a program of temporary exhibitions. With the support of Dia Art Foundation, Flavin renovated this turn-of-the-century Shingle-style firehouse, then church, converting its vestibule and second floor into a display of his signature works in fluorescent light. A resident of nearby Wainscott, Flavin envisioned the first floor as both a venue for changing exhibitions and a printshop for himself and other artists working on Long Island.

Unadorned and clearly structured, Dia Bridgehampton's vernacular architecture has been carefully altered over time to serve successive purposes. Between 1908 and 1923, the property was occupied by the Hook and Ladder Company, the town's volunteer fire department. The First Baptist Church of Bridgehampton bought the property in 1923, and the Prince Hall Freemasons laid a new cornerstone on the church's behalf in 1947, when renovations began on the building.¹ The facade was extended and the main entrance moved from the front to the side. An annex was built to house a garage on the first floor and an apartment on the second. When the congregation grew too large for the premises in 1979, a new church was erected nearby and Dia purchased the property to present Flavin's art.

Working closely with architect Richard Gluckman and Dia's director of operations James Schaeufele, Flavin oversaw the building's renovation between 1981 and 1983, making key decisions to best accommodate his work and preserve the property's multiple legacies. Protruding facade elements such as gutters and electrical cables were removed to streamline the exterior. Doors, paneling, and shingles were restored and an ethereal blue light was installed under the front cornice. To modulate the light indoors, the artist ordered ultraviolet-filtered glass windows and gray Mylar shades. To memorialize the building's initial function, the barn-style double doors from the firehouse entrance were refurbished and the newel post in the vestibule was painted fire-engine red. The church doors and frosted-glass windows were moved to the back room of the second floor, which hosts a display of memorabilia from the First Baptist Church, including a neon cross. The building opened to the public as the Dan Flavin Art Institute on June 18, 1983. In keeping with his practice of acknowledging friends, relatives, curators, and historical personages in the titles of his works, Flavin dedicated the building to Schaeufele.

The vernacular frame protects an intimately sized yet sensorially rich interior, where natural light blends with Flavin's buzzing fluorescent works. Selected and arranged by the artist, *nine sculptures in fluorescent light* (1963–81) offers an inventory of the possibilities for readymade colored light in relation to architecture. Composed of

circular fluorescent fixtures in three temperatures of white (cool, daylight, and warm), *untitled (to Jim Schaeufele) 1, 2, and 3* (all 1972) punctuate the ascent up the vestibule's staircase. A preparatory drawing from Flavin's *icons* series, *untitled [drawing for icon IV (the pure land) (to David John Flavin 1933–1962)]* (1962), is the first piece the visitor encounters on the second-floor landing. In the main gallery, Flavin devised a structure composed of walls set at 90-degree angles to display a selection of his lights. At each end of this structure are four works that explore the possibilities of colored light in relation to corners with increasing degrees of complexity. In *red out of a corner (to Annina)* (1963), a single red fixture doubles the corner that hosts it, while in *untitled* (1976), a bundle of three variously colored fixtures leans into a corner. In *untitled (to Katharina and Christoph)* (1966–71) and *untitled (in honor of Harold Joachim) 3* (1977), vertical and horizontal fixtures create a square and grid, respectively, illuminating both the corners and the visitor.

The central portion of the wall construction supports two corridors barred at their center. Flavin wanted the fluorescent fixtures to face both directions so that they would illuminate the visitor and the inaccessible half of the corridor beyond the barriers. In *untitled (to Robert, Joe and Michael)* (1975–81), horizontal bulbs—gold on one side, pink on the other—span the width of a corridor, blocking physical passage but not visual access. The pink is intensified toward purple when viewed from the gold side, while the gold gains a greenish tint when viewed against the pink. Similarly, *untitled (to Jan and Ron Greenberg)* (1972–73) takes the form of a barrier, although here the lights are installed vertically—green bulbs on one side and yellow on the other. In this work, the blockage is incomplete; one fixture is absent, allowing a glowing edge of yellow to penetrate the green side of the corridor.

The inaugural exhibition in the ground-floor gallery featured Flavin's first work using fluorescent light fixtures, *the diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Constantin Brancusi)* (1963), and a set of preparatory drawings. In addition to overseeing the building's renovation, the artist took an active role in curating several early programs featuring his and other local artists' work, pieces from his collection of 19th-century Long Island arts and crafts, Japanese drawings and prints, and Hudson River School drawings. Starting in 1987, independent curator Henry Geldzahler advised Dia on a series of monographic exhibitions of artists with ties to the East End of Long Island such as Louise Bourgeois, Alice Neel, Cy Twombly, and Andy Warhol. Today, Dia continues to present exhibitions of artists primarily residing or working on Long Island in the space, including Maren Hassinger, Mary Heilmann, Jill Magid, and Leslie Hewitt.

Part of the cultural history of the East End, Dia Bridgehampton is a lasting example of Dia and Flavin's collaborative vision and shared preoccupation with site-specificity. The location remains a testament to the compelling experience generated by a concentration of the artist's light works in a carefully calibrated setting. As fellow artist Dan Graham stated, in the simplicity of Flavin's fluorescent variable, "light is immediately present in all places."²

—Matilde Guidelli-Guidi

Notes

1. In February 1947 the growing congregation voted to build a new church, but the reverend at the time decided to renovate the building instead. A cornerstone—later detached and preserved on the second floor of Dia Bridgehampton—was laid by Tyre Lodge No. 91. F. & A. M., a chapter of the Prince Hall Freemasonry, also known as the African American Freemasonry. Considered one of the most influential Black leaders of the late 1700s, Prince Hall (ca. 1735–1807), the founder, was an abolitionist known for his leadership in the free Black community of Boston and was active in the Back to Africa movement. The chapter is still active today.
2. Dan Graham, "Flavin's Proposal," *Arts Magazine*, February 1970, p. 44; quoted in Michael Govan and Tiffany Bell, *Dan Flavin: The Complete Lights, 1961–1996* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with Dia Art Foundation, 2004), p. 72.

About the artist

Dan Flavin was born in New York in 1933. In the mid-1950s he served in the U.S. Air Force in Korea, after which he returned to New York, where he studied art history at the New School for Social Research and Columbia University. In 1961 he had his first solo exhibition at the Judson Gallery, New York. Later that year he began experimenting with electric light in a series of works called *icons*, which led to his first fluorescent light work, *the diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Constantin Brancusi)* (1963). Major exhibitions of Flavin's work have taken place at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (1967); the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (1969); and the Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden, Germany (1989). In 2004 Dia organized a traveling retrospective in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. In 1983 Dia opened the Dan Flavin Art Institute, a permanent exhibition designed by the artist in a former firehouse and Baptist church in Bridgehampton, New York. Flavin died in Riverhead, New York, in 1966.

Further reading

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- Thierolf, Corinna, and Johannes Vogt. *Dan Flavin: Icons*. New York: Prestel, 2009.
- Ragheb, Fiona, ed. *Dan Flavin: The Architecture of Light*. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1999.
- Rauh, Emily S., ed. *Corners, Barriers, and Corridors in Fluorescent Light from Dan Flavin*. 2 vols. Saint Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum, 1973.
- Smith, Brydon, ed. *Fluorescent light, etc. from Dan Flavin*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada for the Queen's Printer, 1969.

Checklist

1. red out of a corner (to Annina), 1963

Fluorescent light and metal fixtures
Edition 2/3
The Estate of Dan Flavin

2. untitled, 1976

Fluorescent light and metal fixtures
Edition 2/3
Dia Art Foundation

3. untitled (to Robert, Joe, and Michael),

1975–81
Fluorescent light and metal fixtures
Edition 2/3
Dia Art Foundation

4. untitled (to Jan and Ron Greenberg),
1972–73

Fluorescent light and metal fixtures
Edition 2/3
Dia Art Foundation

5. untitled (in honor of Harold Joachim) 3,
1977

Fluorescent light and metal fixtures
Edition 1/3
Dia Art Foundation

6. untitled (to Katharina and Christoph),
(from the European Couples series), 1966–71

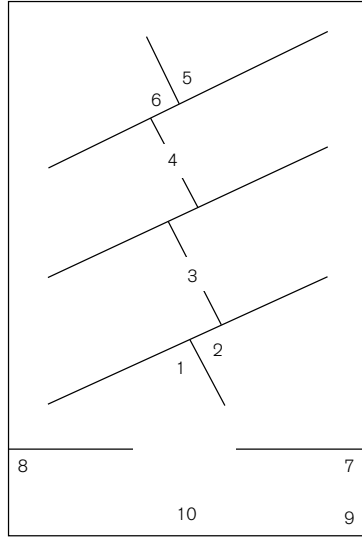
Fluorescent light and metal fixtures
Edition 1/5
Dia Art Foundation

7. untitled (to Jim Schaeufele) 1, 1972

Fluorescent light and metal fixtures
Edition 1/3
Dia Art Foundation

8. untitled (to Jim Schaeufele) 2, 1972

Fluorescent light and metal fixtures
Edition 1/3
Dia Art Foundation



9. untitled (to Jim Schaeufele) 3, 1972

Fluorescent light and metal fixtures
Edition 1/3
Dia Art Foundation

10. untitled [drawing for icon IV (the pure land) (to David John Flavin 1933–1962)], 1962

Pencil and chalk on paper
Collection of Stephen Flavin

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Cover: Dan Flavin, *nine sculptures in fluorescent light* (detail), 1963–81. Installation view, the Dan Flavin Art Institute, Dia Bridgehampton. © Stephen Flavin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York