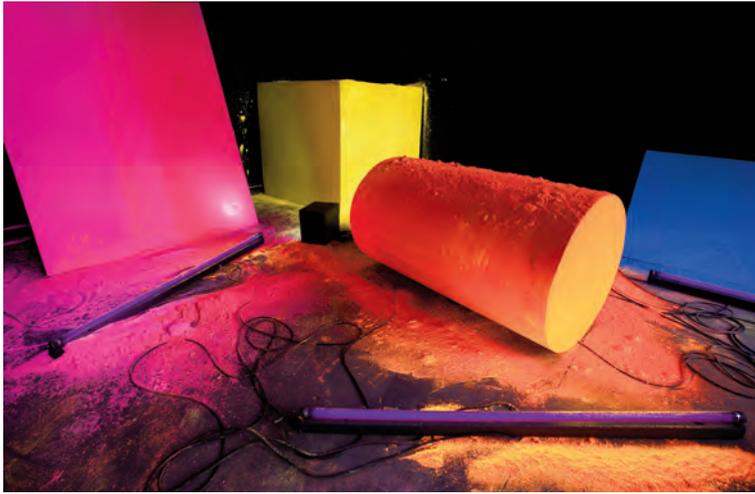


KEITH SONNIER - LIGHT WORKS

JUNE 12 - NOVEMBER 29 2015



Dis-Play II, 1970
Detail ("*Dis-Play Series*")
Foam rubber, fluorescent powder, strobe light,
black light, neon, glass.
Variable
© Adagp, Paris 2015 / Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Mitterrand, Paris
Photograph courtesy of Galerie Mitterrand, Paris

The Museum of Modern Art and Contemporary Art (MAMAC) in Nice continues its exploration of American art by presenting a major exhibition on the work of the American artist, Keith Sonnier from June 12 until November 29, 2015, entitled 'Light Works'. Born in 1941 in Louisiana, Keith Sonnier began his career in the mid 1960s. He currently lives and work in New York City and Bridgehampton, NY.

Sonnier's exploration of materials that include fabric, metal, glass, found objects and neon were to some degree inspired by his native Louisiana but later his research into early cultures integrated anthropomorphic aspects directly into his work and subsequently moved his work away from the singular language of minimalism. His light works reveal themselves as more narrative and more expressive than those of his certain of his contemporaries such as Richard Serra, Dan Flavin or even Sol LeWitt. His

work, including his video work from the 70's also explored and championed new technology, such as satellite technology and the use of computers as valid materials for making art.

Encompassing approximately 1,500 square meters, this exhibition brings together a little over thirty light works of the artist from the 1960s to his current work and brings together multiple bodies of work from private European and American collections as well as from the artist's studio.

1 Minimal aesthetics and metaphorical references

Sonnier began work on the *Ba-O-Ba* series in the late 1960s, but its continuation spans the length of the artist's career. It is based on the Greek mathematical theory of the Golden Ratio, prioritising its conceptual essence while incorporating modern technology and light in its construction. Sonnier combines circles and squares, often interrupting them with geometrical components such as aluminium bars and neon tubing. "Ba-O-Ba" comes from the Haitian French term meaning 'bath of colour' or "light bath" and refers to the effects of the rays of light against skin.

Expanded Sel V (1978-2006) is composed of different ribbons of neon twisted and rolled to form a three-dimensional line evocative of calligraphy and producing a multi-coloured glow. This *Sel* calligraphy is one of the oldest forms of Chinese script. Sonnier combines Chinese ideograms with the initials of friends. The act of imprinting space with a flowing, luminous calligraphy is a logical continuation of abstract expressionism in a new medium.

2 Totemic metamorphosis

The use of discarded objects and the expression of the almost totemic shapes of the sculptures from the 1990s and 2000s mirror the works in the MAMAC's collections. *Opelousas* (1996) takes its name from the town in St. Landry Parish, near the artist's hometown of Grand Mamou, in Louisiana. The Acadian culture he grew up in made a profound impression on Sonnier. The objects he incorporates into his art are evocative of his family home: the metal grids of fences and trellises and bamboo. A full bottle of famous brand liquid detergent is perhaps a nod to consumerism as well as a play on its translucence and opacity. This combination of objects and neon becomes a coherent and poetic sculptural whole. The organic appeal of neon and the sensual curved shapes of its electrical cables is undeniable. Sonnier turns soulless, lifeless objects into living, voluptuous beings, lending his sculptures an anthropomorphic nature: their convex volumes created by plastic containers. The exaggerated curve of a steel grid and the conical tower of bamboo fencing mimic the characteristics of a living, breathing body.



Tisket-a-Tasket, 1994
 ("Tidewater Series")
 Mixed media, neon, found objects
 42 x 26 x 18 inches
 © Adagp, Paris 2015 / Courtesy of the Artist and
 Pace Gallery, New York / Photograph Steve Tucker

3 Convolutions

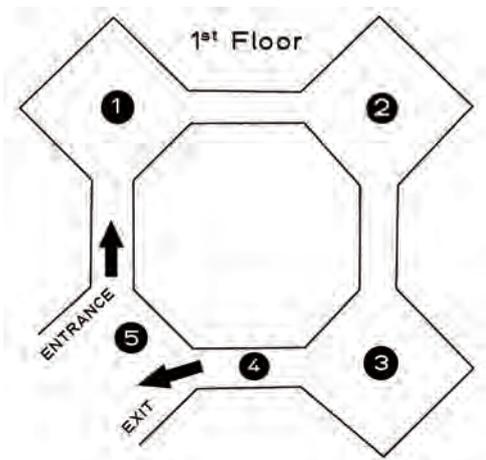
Sonnier uses flat or slanted panels and rigid steel frames. The latter offers a spatial complexity in the form of a deformed helix and is paired with floating, freestanding luminous neon tubes. In *Prairie* (2012) and *Gran Twister* (2012), Sonnier seems to want to erase the wall and create a three-dimensional volume floating in a multi-coloured space; a sculpture with neither stand nor support, boasting a palette of colours that create an atmospheric essence similar to that of a rainbow. In *Elliptically Lobbed* (2013) or *Lobbed Shape* (2013), the linear circuit of these constructions involves the sculpture's repeated weaving in front, and behind, its support. The quality of the light changes subtly from front to back. Each and every surface alters the essence of the light depending on its colour and reflective properties. Reflections and mirror effects are key to Sonnier's work, concepts that allow a certain symmetry and dialogue between the various elements of the sculpture. In *Mirrored Slant* (2013), observers watch as their reflections are incorporated into the piece as they move closer, whilst simultaneously observing their corporeal immersion in fluorescent color.

4 Passage Azur

The exhibition 'Light Works' imbues a sense of place and provides a phenomenological experience that the spectator can take away. The walkway, entitled *Passage Azur*, is a reference to the topography of Nice's coastline, its origins as a Palaeolithic site, its Roman past, the advent of Christianity as well as the affluent British tourists who gave their name to the *Promenade des Anglais*. The passage in question is literal as well as metaphorical. This in situ piece combines all of these elements under an ethereal dome that seems to be suggestive of an astral voyage as well as modern modes of transport in an urban context. The installation focus upon the scale and the proportions of the human body while reflecting upon the ease of its mobility, particularly in a place of transition or 'passage', as is the case with a walkway.

5 Dis-Play II

Dis-Play II is a combination of solid, geometric shapes with projected black light infusing the fluorescent pigments on the foam rubber with a phosphorescent glow designed to plunge the visitor into an unfamiliar "lunar" landscape. Often shown in a darkened space in close proximity with Sonnier's ten year body of film and video work, *Dis-Play II* refers to the popular practices the artist came across through his travels, notably in India, where he witnessed locals throwing handfuls of dry pigment in the air, creating landscapes of colourful bodies in dazzling procession during the annual Holi Color Festival. Color and its effect on the surrounding environment are particularly important to Sonnier, to the point where neon colour becomes architectural volume. The installation envelops visitors who become living light sensors, gaining awareness of the parameters of pictorial space and their integration within the artwork.



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