

DAN FLAVIN

(Jamaica, New York, 1933- Riverhead 1996)

I like art as thought better than art as work (...). It's a declaration: art is thought.

Dan Flavin is a self-taught artist and studied art history at Columbia University from 1957 to 1959. He began his career as an artist in the late 1950s under the influence of Abstract Expressionism and Jasper Johns. His first individual exhibition took place at the Judson Gallery in 1961.

His first creations were watercolors, collages and photography. That same year he introduced the light as a plastic material in some painted wooden boxes, to which he incorporated light bulbs. This is

how the *Icons Series* was created in 1963, consisting of a series of simple compositions consisting of vertical lights that manage to highlight the energy and color contained in these lights, creating a special atmosphere that, for some critics, invites mysticism and reflection.

In 1963 he created *Diagonal of May 25*, a work presented at the Green Gallery in New York and dedicated to Brancusi, where he used the fluorescent lighting tube for the first time, which from then on would be the only element in his work. The use of industrial materials and modular units associate him directly with the minimalist movement. In 1966 he takes part in the exhibition *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum in New York.

His art focuses on the use of light and color, with the support of new industrial technologies, transforming the atmosphere where it is installed through the optical effects that arise by combining white or colored fluorescent lighting tubes. The artist explored different variations and intensities of color, which were adjusted depending on the length, number and arrangement of tubes, placed vertically, horizontally and also diagonally.

In the mid-sixties he began to do more complex works, in which he also studied aspects of architecture and the given space. Possibly the most outstanding was the one he made for *Documenta 4* in Kassel in 1968, where a neon barrier closes the entrance to the room it illuminates. Later came others important works like the one he made for the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, in 1969.

From the 1970s, the scale of his work increased to monumental architectural scenarios. In 1975, he did work for the exterior of Kunstmuseum Basel, followed by, among others, the lighting of the train tracks in New York's Grand Central Station in 1977 and the permanent installation made for the Baptist Church in Bridgehampton, home to what would later become the Dan Flavin Institute of Art, created in 1983 to show his work permanently. In the occasion of



Dan Flavin, April, 1966. Photo by Fred W. McDarrah

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the reopening of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, in 1992, he produced his most important large-scale work: a light installation to light the building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Throughout his career, the ultimate intention of Flavin was to offer sensory experiences of space by transforming and enriching them through simple interactions of light. He died in 1996 in New York, leaving behind a legacy that he considered less "a doing" and much more "a thinking".



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