Dan Flavin
Lights

In the early 1960s, US artist Dan Flavin (1933–1996) began using commercially available fluorescent tubes in standard sizes and colours to create an unmistakable oeuvre. Therein precision and careful calculation are bound together with a sensual aura. The Dan Flavin – Lights exhibition is the first representative overview of Flavin’s light works to be shown in Austria. The exhibition elucidates the early development of his work starting with selected icons and reaches from crucial individual works comprising fluorescent tubes to the later serial and large-scale installations. The mumok show comprises 30 works and makes visible Flavin’s artistic diversity and the developmental possibilities inherent in commercially available fluorescent tubes, which he knew how to exploit with such impressive consistency. These tubes include the first “golden” tube placed diagonally on the wall; the “monuments” for V. Tatlin; and room installations such as an artificial barrier of blue, red and blue fluorescent light (to Flavin Starbuck Judd), 1968.

By choosing the tubes as both motif and material for his works, Flavin signalled the increasing proximity of art with everyday life and the consumer world. The ways in which they are presented derive from principles of minimalist sobriety, though these are simultaneously and colourfully outshone. The transcendence of traditional art genres and materials is thereby created and can be found, in a preliminary stage, in the so-called icons (1961–1964). Here, the body of the image loses its defining borders through the use of commonplace light bulbs and/or fluorescent tubes.

The icons replace the sacred meaning of light with profane illumination reminiscent of neon signs and everyday room lighting. This liberation from conventional light mysticism also reflects the artist freeing himself from his own religious upbringing. The icons transform the image into a shining wall object prior to Flavin erasing the remains of then current notions of what a picture is by affixing fluorescent tubes directly to the wall in predetermined configurations.

The diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Constantin Brancusi), 1963
Courtesy: Dia Art Foundation, New York, and David Zwirner, New York

In the diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Constantin Brancusi), 1963, the tube appears for the first time as an uncompromising object of a luminary self-staging. Lacking anything extraneous, the work develops a luminous power that not only suspends the usual boundaries between work, room and viewer, but also the dividing line between rational form and poetic appearances.

Flavin’s light works do not only refer to current, everyday experience but they also indicate a modernism where the aspiration of the democratizing and functional aspect of art is part of bringing about social change. This becomes clear when the tubes are assembled into towers of geometric forms such as in the “monuments” for V. Tatlin (from 1964 on), which have been inscribed into art history. This series of works, which continued into the 1990s, relates to the design of an unrealized office building by the Russian artist-engineer Vladimir Tatlin for the Third International.
On the one hand, Flavin is referring to the Constructivists’ professed faith in industrialization. On the other hand, it shows their influence on Flavin’s own pictorial language as well as the material and formal language of Minimal Art in general. The dedications contained in the titles to close relatives and friends, as well as personalities from the art world, political representatives and historical events, reflect the intermingling of Flavin’s artistic and social concerns. This decisively differentiates him from fellow artists such as Donald Judd or Robert Morris and the Minimal Art programme proclaimed by them, which rejected everything personal, subjective and political.

In the exhibition, the European Couples, a group of rectangle works are a highlight of spatially referential light art. Their fluorescent tube squares dissolve the corners of the room and immerse viewers in an imaginary, intermingled, blurred colour space.

Drawings will be presented together with the light works. These document both Flavin's process of planning for the works and his artistic sensitivity.

Curated by Rainer Fuchs

The exhibition has been organized in collaboration with the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen and with the support of the Estate of Dan Flavin and Stephen Flavin. Dan Flavin’s inexhaustible, and simultaneously precise, way of dealing with various spatial and architectural concepts will be able to be experienced firsthand as a result of the changes in presentation resulting from the differences in the exhibition spaces in Vienna and St. Gallen.

Publication for the exhibition
A catalogue will be published for the exhibition by Hatje Cantz Verlag containing articles by Rainer Fuchs, Karola Kraus, Stefan Neuner, Juliane Rebentisch and Roland Wäspe.

Thanks are due to the main sponsor of the exhibition, Deloitte, the mumok sponsor, UNIQA, as well as Megaboard and the media partner Der Standard.
Fact sheet
Dan Flavin – Lights

Duration of exhibition 13 October 2012 to 3 February 2013

Opening 12 October 2012, 7 p.m.

Press conference 12 October 2012, 10 a.m.

Location mumok
Museumsplatz 1, 1070 Vienna
Levels 0, 2, 3, 4

Curator Rainer Fuchs

Exhibition production Ulrike Todoroff

Exhibition venues Kunstmuseum St. Gallen
16 March to 18 August 2013

Catalogue Dan Flavin – Lights

Opening hours Monday: 2–7 p.m.
Tuesday to Sunday: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Thursday: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Tickets Normal € 10,–
Reduced € 8,– or € 7,–

Press contact Barbara Hammerschmied
Phone +43 1 52500-1450
barbara.hammerschmied@mumok.at

press@mumok.at
www.mumok.at/presse