

Release Date: August 25, 2004

## NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART PREMIERES FIRST COMPREHENSIVE RETROSPECTIVE OF RENOWNED 20TH-CENTURY LIGHT ARTIST DAN FLAVIN



Dan Flavin  
*untitled (in honor of Harold Joachim) 3, 1977*  
pink, yellow, blue, and green fluorescent light, square across a corner: 244 cm (96 1/16)  
Collection Stephen Flavin

Washington, DC— **Dan Flavin: A Retrospective**, the first comprehensive exhibition of Flavin's full career, will present 46 objects and installations, most of which use the medium of fluorescent light along with 110 drawings, sketches, and collage-constructions by one of the most innovative artists of the second half of the 20th century. The exhibition will premiere at the National Gallery of Art, East Building, October 3, 2004, and remain on view through January 9, 2005. It will travel to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, as well as

venues in Europe, to be announced.

In early September, one of Flavin's signature "barrier" works, *untitled (to you, Heiner, with admiration and affection)* (1973), a 120 foot-long installation in green fluorescent light, will be on public view on the mezzanine level of the East Building. It will also be visible from Pennsylvania Avenue, NW.

"We are proud to honor the work of this American master in an unprecedented retrospective exhibition, which will provide a unique opportunity to view the range and complexity of his achievement. This is an important step in the Gallery's continuing representation of work by the generation of minimal and post-minimal artists," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is organized by Dia Art Foundation, New York, in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

## **EXHIBITION SUPPORT**

The national tour is sponsored by Altria Group. The exhibition at the National Gallery of Art is made possible through the generous support of Lehman-Smith + McLeish. The exhibition in Washington and its accompanying catalogue are made possible in part by a grant from Lannan Foundation.

## **THE EXHIBITION**

**Dan Flavin: A Retrospective** will showcase the chronological development of Flavin's work over the course of 35 years, demonstrating the various means through which he experimented with light, color, and interior space. It will include the full range of his work, from the early "icons" to installations that occupy an entire room. Many of these are specifically dedicated by Flavin to modernist predecessors and contemporary artists who he admired, such as Constantin Brancusi, Piet Mondrian, Henri Matisse, Alexander Calder, and Barnett Newman. Other dedications reveal Flavin's commitment to the politics of his time and his attempt to reinvent the genre of the commemorative monument.

The exhibition will begin with a group of "icons," produced between 1961 and 1963, a

series of box-like constructions with attached incandescent and fluorescent lights. Works such as **icon V (Coran's Broadway flesh)** (1962) signify Flavin's invention of an object that is neither painting nor sculpture yet incorporates elements of both.

The next section of the exhibition will represent Flavin's move from the "icon" construction into works composed solely of fluorescent light. Flavin's use of standardized tubes that were available from hardware stores in prefabricated lengths and colors and utilized by the artist in an unaltered state, begins with the work **the diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Constantin Brancusi)** (1963).

A group of Flavin's well-known "**monuments**" to **V. Tatlin** (1964–1981), which comprise the chief example of the principle of seriality and permutation in his work, will be shown together in a single room. The range of Flavin's content is represented by pieces that include political subjects, such as **monument 4 those who have been killed in ambush (to P.K. who reminded me about death)** (1966), an installation in red light that references the Vietnam War. In other works, Flavin shows respectful, slightly humorous homage to fellow artists such as Robert Ryman, in an installation using warm and daylight white lamps, and Ad Reinhardt, in a work consisting only of ultraviolet (or "black") light.

The exhibition will also include a large selection of works on paper (portraits, landscapes, and collages, as well as plans and diagrams) which reveal both practical and conceptual aspects of Flavin's working process. Three of Flavin's lights belonging to the National Gallery of Art will be included in this exhibition: two "monuments" to Tatlin and a large "corner" work dedicated to Barnett Newman, a recent gift to the museum from the Barnett Newman Foundation.

**Dan Flavin: A Retrospective**, is curated by Dia Art Foundation director and president, Michael Govan, and Tiffany Bell, director of the Dan Flavin catalogue raisonné project.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

Two important books on Flavin's work will be published to coincide with the exhibition.

**Dan Flavin: A Retrospective**, the exhibition catalogue, comprises three essays, a list

of works in the exhibition, a comprehensive bibliography, and a chronology of the artist's life. The essays will include a history of the development of Flavin's work; an account of Flavin's first retrospective, in 1969, at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, with emphasis on Flavin's own role in planning the show; and a description of the artist's working process, with the first full technical explanation of Flavin's studio practice and the issues pertaining to the certification and dating of works. The 208-page paperback edition, featuring 150 four-color and 40 black-and-white illustrations, will be available for \$45.00.

**Dan Flavin: The Complete Lights, 1961–1996**, is the first comprehensive book about Flavin's work. This separate publication incorporates the exhibition catalogue and will additionally include a catalogue raisonné of Flavin's light works. The only publication to present all of Flavin's lights together and to document the artist's entire career, **The Complete Lights** features hundreds of color images, many reproduced from new photography. Each light work is represented by a photograph and/or a graphic diagram as well as comprehensive information about its construction, exhibition history, and appearance in publications. The 432-page cloth-bound, boxed edition, including 520 four-color and 60 black-and-white illustrations, boxed with the exhibition catalogue, will be available for \$150.00.

Both volumes are published by Dia Art Foundation in association with Yale University Press and represent over five years of scholarly research and previously unavailable information about Flavin's work. They will contain archival and new color-correct photography in addition to technical specifications attributed to each artwork. The publications will be available in mid-September in the Gallery Shops, from the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov), or by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350.

Research for the exhibition and publication was supported by The Henry Luce Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

### **DAN FLAVIN (1933–1996)**

Dan Flavin was born on April 1, 1933, in New York City. In the mid 1950s he served in

the U.S. Air Force as a meteorological technician in Korea, after which he returned to New York and attended the Hans Hoffman School of Fine Arts, art history classes at the New School for Social Research, and drawing and painting classes at Columbia University. In 1959, while at Columbia, he began to make assemblages and collages.

In 1961 Flavin had his first solo exhibition at the Judson Gallery in New York, and, later that year, he began experimenting with the "icons." He became known as an originator of minimal art through inclusion in key group exhibitions such as **Black, White, and Gray** at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1964, and **Primary Structures** at the Jewish Museum in New York City in 1966. He was featured in the **Minimal Art** exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, in 1968, and continued to exhibit nationally and internationally until his death in 1996 of complications from diabetes.

Flavin's use of unadorned fluorescent light placed him at the forefront of a generation of artists, including Donald Judd, Carl Andre, and Robert Morris. These artists placed unaltered industrial materials in the service of abstract principles such as serial repetition and the "literal" relationship of the art object to the viewer and ambient space, defining characteristics of minimal art.

Among Flavin's most important late large-scale installations was his project to light the entire rotunda of the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City to commemorate its restoration and reopening in 1992 (based on a smaller installation he had made there for the "Sixth Guggenheim International" in 1971).

Three of Flavin's most ambitious permanent installations were completed after his death: the lighting of Santa Maria Annunciata in Chiesa Rossa, a 1920s designed Catholic church in Milan, in 1997; a project for Richmond Hall at the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, in 1998; and an installation commissioned for six former army barracks at Donald Judd's Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, in 2000.

## **RELATED ACTIVITIES**

Jeffrey Weiss, curator and head of modern and contemporary art at the National Gallery, will moderate a two-day symposium. On Saturday, October 23, from 11:00 a.m.

to 5:00 p.m. in the East Building large auditorium, illustrated lectures will be given by leading scholars and critics in the field of post-war and minimal art followed by a panel discussion. The lecturers include Briony Fer (University College, London), Hal Foster (Princeton University), Michael Govan (Dia Art Foundation), Ann Wagner (UC Berkeley), Alex Potts (University of Michigan), and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe (Art Center College of Design). On Sunday, October 24, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., a public interview will be conducted with various members of the art community who knew and worked with Flavin. All interviews and lectures are free and open to the public; seating is on a first come, first seated basis.

For more detailed information on the programs, call (202) 842-6826 or visit [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Other events include a family workshop, "Color, Light, Space," where children ages 6 to 12 will learn about Flavin's innovative use of materials and make their own Flavin-inspired artworks. The workshop will take place on Sundays: October 17, November 21, and December 5, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

## **DIA ART FOUNDATION**

Dia Art Foundation was founded in 1974. A nonprofit institution, Dia Art Foundation plays a vital role among visual arts organizations nationally and internationally by initiating, supporting, presenting, and preserving art projects, and by serving as a locus for interdisciplinary art and criticism. Dia Art Foundation presents its permanent collection at Dia:Beacon Riggio Galleries, in Beacon, New York; exhibitions and public programming at Dia:Chelsea, in New York City (currently closed for renovations); and long-term, site-specific projects in the western United States, in New York City, and on Long Island. Additionally, Dia Art Foundation has the largest institutional holding of Dan Flavin's work and has collaborated with the artist's son, Stephen Flavin, and Steve Morse, the Dan Flavin Studio manager, to research and produce a catalogue raisonné and archive. Dia Art Foundation director Michael Govan worked closely with Dan Flavin on four major exhibitions, and Tiffany Bell, who is compiling the catalogue raisonné, was Flavin's curator and archivist for several years during the 1980s.

**###**

## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

[ds-ziska@nga.gov](mailto:ds-ziska@nga.gov)