

IKON

Exhibition Guide

13 April – 26 June 2016

Dan Flavin

It is what it is and it ain't nothing else
First and Second Floor Galleries
and Tower Room

One of the most important post-war American artists, Dan Flavin (1933–1996) was renowned for his pragmatism. His dictum “It is what it is and it ain't nothing else” was very straightforward in its rejection not only of illusionism but also of bad faith.

Flavin's resistance to symbolism and a denial of spirituality in art is telling given his Catholic upbringing in New York, and the fact that he studied for the priesthood before enrolling in fine arts at Columbia University in the late 1950s. Subsequently he became acquainted with other American artists emerging around that time in reaction to Abstract Expressionism, including Sol LeWitt, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, Barnett Newman and Donald Judd. He was especially close to the latter – both sharing an interest in artworks that refer to nothing but their factual presence, with an emphasis on industrial materials and intense colour – and this is signified by his dedication of a number of works to Judd.

One of the earliest works in this exhibition is *alternate diagonals of March 2, 1964 (to Don Judd)*, made shortly after Flavin centred his entire artistic practice on the use of fluorescent light. The bright red and yellow are Judd-like, and likewise such inspiration is brought to bear on *untitled (to Don Judd, colorist) 1–5 (1987)*, a series of fluorescent lamp combinations of white, pink, red, yellow, blue, green. These standard colours are as wonderful as they are products of

industrial ordinariness – unlike neon colours which suggest an unwanted theatricality – and together they bathe the exhibition space in pale radiant light.

Flavin dedicated many of his works to other friends, members of his family and colleagues. At the heart of this exhibition is *untitled (to Barnett Newman) one–four (1971)*, an installation that frames the corners of a square room in a kind of homage to the older artist's celebrated series of four paintings, *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue*. Its systematic nature at once conveys effectively Newman's disdain for the picturesque in art and Flavin's interest in architectural environments, the possibility of “infinite specific expression in relation to specific space.”

The emphasis on interior corners is very characteristic. *pink out of a corner (to Jasper Johns)*, at the beginning of our exhibition, is a strong statement of intent from 1963. An 8' lamp between two walls, it eradicates darkness from an extremity of a room to the point of obliterating any proper perception of it. He was very aware of the traditional placement of religious icons in corners, like the Russian constructivist Kazimir Malevich, but rather than conjuring up imagery of the divine or black squares, he made icons of light with what he referred to as “blank magic”.

Flavin was very interested in Russian Constructivism and, more than Malevich, it was Vladimir Tatlin – with his insistence on “real materials in real space” – who made a lasting impression. Flavin's “monuments” for Tatlin are remarkable in their combinations of 8', 6', 4' and 2' white fluorescent lamps, suggesting architectural structures through modernist abstraction and a dash of ironic humour. After all, as he explained, “These ‘monuments’ only survive as long as the light system is useful” and, simply, they can be turned on and off. Their temporariness is especially poignant given the impractical nature of Tatlin's utopianism.

The last room in Ikon's exhibition is devoted to Flavin's Tatlin monuments, reiterating the integration of Flavin's work with the

environment it occupies. *Untitled (to Dorothy and Roy Lichtenstein on not seeing anyone in the room)*, made in 1968, also involves white light but in this case the 8' fluorescent fixtures are installed vertically in a doorway to an empty room, facing inwards, like bars and thus reminiscent of a prison cell. Inspired by Lichtenstein's 1961 painting, *I can see the whole room! ... and there's nobody in it!*, it epitomises Flavin's preoccupation with the continuity of his work into architectural spaces, as is made clear, literally, by his illumination of them – to the point that the fluorescent fixtures are “somewhat betrayed by [their] physical presence into approximate invisibility.”

Dan Flavin is a natural fit for Ikon's programme. We have recently shown Donald Judd (*A Good Chair is A Good Chair*, 2010) as well other contemporaries such as Atsuko Tanaka, François Morellet and On Kawara, similarly influential, and, on the other hand, a number of younger artists – David Batchelor, Martin Creed, Ceal Floyer, Olafur Eliasson, Ann Veronica Janssens – whose work strongly corresponds to that of Flavin. This exhibition is not a didactic museum show, but rather an exercise of matching a judicious selection of Flavin's work with the variety of interiors that Ikon Gallery has to offer, in order to convey his refreshing approach to making and thinking about art.

Associated Event

Panel Discussion – Dan Flavin

Tuesday 17 May, 6–7.30pm

£4 per person, £2 concessions: students, unwaged, 60+

Jeffrey Weiss, Senior Curator, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; David Batchelor, artist and writer; and Jonathan Watkins, Ikon Director, discuss the work, life and legacy of Dan Flavin. Booking essential, visit www.ikon-gallery.org to book online or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

Dan Flavin's exhibition *It is what it is and it ain't nothing else* is supported by Crown Fine Art, Glenn Howells Architects, The Henry Moore Foundation and David Zwirner/The Estate of Dan Flavin.

Visit the Resource Room where you can find a selection of books, audio and film.

If you have any questions about the exhibition please ask the Information Assistants in the gallery.

Stay in touch

Subscribe to our e-bulletin at www.ikon-gallery.org and find us on

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Ikon Gallery

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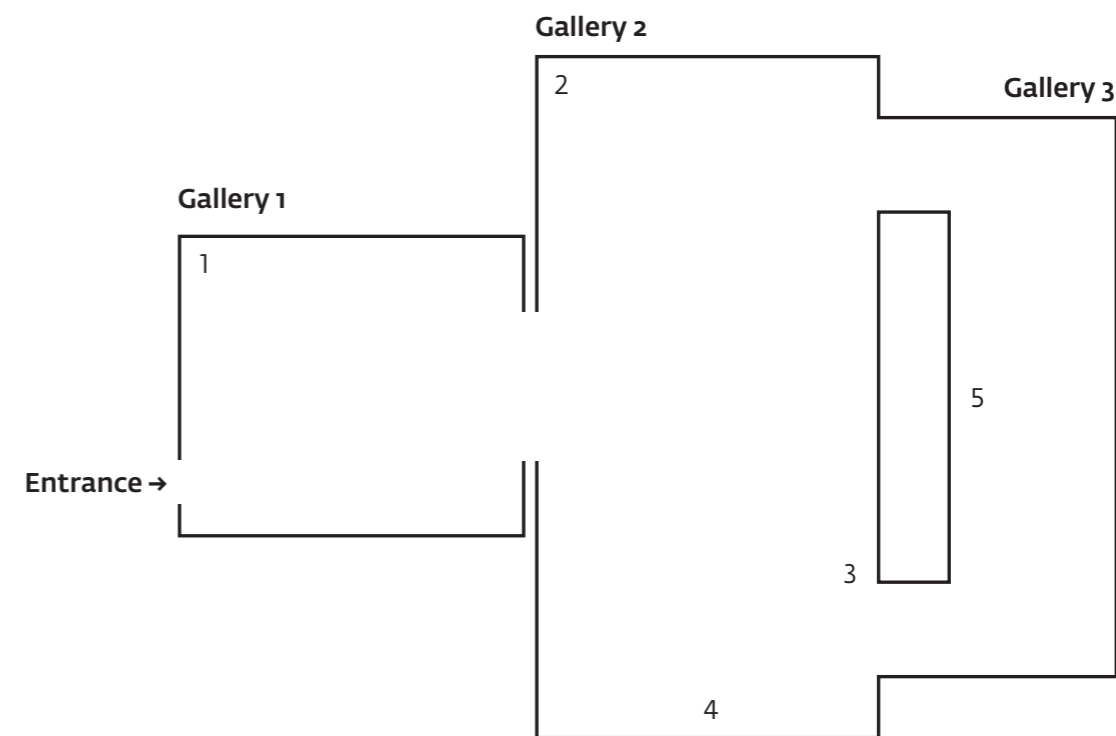
www.ikon-gallery.org

Open Tuesday – Sunday

and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am–5pm

Free entry, donations welcome

First Floor Galleries



Gallery 1

- 1 *pink out of a corner (to Jasper Johns)*, 1963
pink fluorescent light
8 ft (244 cm) high

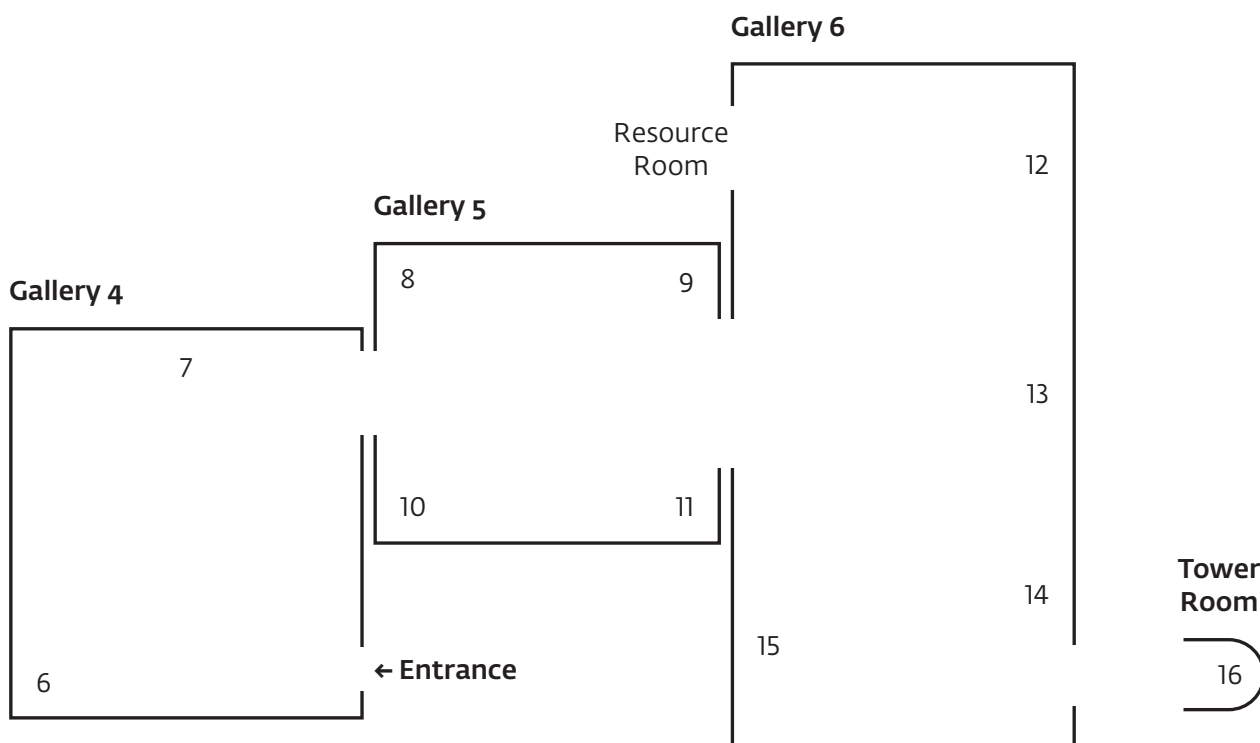
Gallery 2

- 2 *untitled (in honor of Harold Joachim) 3*, 1977
pink, yellow, blue, and green fluorescent light
8 ft (244 cm) square across a corner
- 3 *alternate diagonals of March 2, 1964 (to Don Judd)*, 1964
red and yellow fluorescent light
12 ft (366 cm) long on the diagonal
- 4 *untitled (in memory of "Sandy" Calder) V*, 1977
red, yellow, and blue fluorescent light
10 ft (305 cm) wide

Gallery 3

- 5 *untitled (to Don Judd, colorist) 1–5*, 1987
pink, red, yellow, blue and green fluorescent light
Five parts, each: 4 ft (122 cm) high, 4 ft (122 cm) wide

Second Floor Galleries



Gallery 4

- 6 *untitled (to Cy Twombly) 1*, 1972
cool white and daylight fluorescent light
8 ft (244 cm) wide across a corner
- 7 *untitled (to Dorothy and Roy Lichtenstein on not seeing anyone in the room)*, 1968
cool white fluorescent light
8 ft (244 cm) high; 7.6 ft (233.6 cm) wide, installed in a doorway

Gallery 5

- 8 *untitled (to Barnett Newman) one*, 1971
yellow, red, and blue fluorescent light
8 ft (244 cm) high, 4 ft (122 cm) wide across a corner
- 9 *untitled (to Barnett Newman) two*, 1971
yellow, red, and blue fluorescent light
8 ft (244 cm) high, 4 ft (122 cm) wide across a corner
- 10 *untitled (to Barnett Newman) three*, 1971
yellow, blue, and red fluorescent light
8 ft (244 cm) high, 4 ft (122 cm) wide across a corner
- 11 *untitled (to Barnett Newman) four*, 1971
yellow, blue, and red fluorescent light
8 ft (244 cm) high, 4 ft (122 cm) wide across a corner

Gallery 6

- 12 *"monument" for V. Tatlin*, 1967
cool white fluorescent light
8 ft (244 cm) high
- 13 *"monument" for V. Tatlin*, 1966
cool white fluorescent light
10 ft (305 cm) high
- 14 *"monument" for V. Tatlin*, 1968
cool white fluorescent light
8 ft (244 cm) high
- 15 *"monument" 7 for V. Tatlin*, 1964
cool white fluorescent light
10 ft (305 cm) high

Tower Room

- 16 *untitled*, 1968
red and green fluorescent light
10 ft (305 cm) high



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