

CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL LIGHT ART NEON DELIGHT

March 14 – August 16, 2020

Press conference: March 13, 2020, 10:30am

Opening: March 13, 7pm

Artists:

Tracey Emin (GB), Jeppe Hein (DK), Brigitte Kowanz (AT), Mario Merz (IT), François Morellet (FR), Jan van Munster (NL), Maurizio Nannucci (IT), Bruce Nauman (US), Bruno Peinado (FR), Anselm, Reyle (DE), Bernardi Roig (ES), Keith Sonnier (US), Olivia Steele (US) und Giny Vos (NL).

With **NEON DELIGHT**, the Centre for International Light Art in Unna dedicates an exhibition to the material used most frequently in light art. From March 14 to August 16, the museum brings together the most well-known international artists working in neon-based light art in its unique, underground, raw spaces. Works from the 1960s to the present provide a representative overview of neon in light art.

Who's afraid of red, yellow and blue? asked **Maurizio Nannucci** (b. 1939, Florence) in colorful neon letters in 1970 as a tribute to Barnett Newman's iconic 1966 work of abstract expressionism. In the exhibition NEON DELIGHT, being presented now at the Centre for International Light Art in Unna, Nannucci will be represented with the unique work *Never Move Far From Color* (2017–18).



Maurizio Nannucci | NEVER MOVE FAR FROM COLOR, 2017/18,
©the artist and Galerie Nikolaus Ruzicska, Foto: Florian Reittner

Nannucci's work shows that neon art is often language-based art in the form of text, writing, or typography. **Tracey Emin** (b. 1963, Croydon) lets us know in yellow-neon writing: *You Never Should Have Loved Me The Way You Did* (2014). Neon art is poetry, it reveals something personal—it gets close. **Jeppe Hein's** (b. 1974, Copenhagen) work *Who Am I Why Am I Where Am I Going* (2017) also speaks directly to viewers: peering into a mirror, they read the questions that they can answer for themselves on behalf of the Berlin-based Danish artist. On the other hand, the work *It Is Both A Blessing And A Curse To Feel Everything So Very Deeply* (2016) by **Olivia Steele** (b. 1985, Nashville) does not pose any questions but relies solely on the power and opposition of just two words: "blessing" and "curse."

But neon art is also geometric abstraction entirely without words and is often highly fragile art. Dan Flavin in particular made this branch of art popular with fluorescent tubes. **François Morellet** (b. 1926, Cholet; d. 2016, same location), **Keith Sonnier** (b. 1941, Mamou), and **Anselm Reyle** (b. 1970, Tübingen) are artists in the exhibition who have created geometric-abstract, tangible neon art—in some cases in extremely complex, expansive ways.

Several works presented in the exhibition NEON DELIGHT—featuring immaterial light sources shimmering in various hues—are extremely subtle, such as those by **Brigitte Kowanz** (b. 1957, Vienna) or **Bruce Nauman** (b. 1941, Fort Wayne). Nauman's work *The True Artist Helps the World*



Bruce Nauman | Double Slap in the Face | Foto: Augustin, Esslingen

by Revealing Mystic Truths (1967) refers to the immaterial, mystical power of light, the energy that **Jan van Munster** (b. 1939, Gorinchem) often made the subject of his work. Other artists in the show include **Mario Merz** (b. 1925, Milan; d. 2003, Turin), **Bruno Peinado** (b. 1970, Montpellier), **Bernardi Roig** (b. 1965, Palma de Mallorca), and **Giny Vos** (b. 1959, Rotterdam).

Fluorescent tubes and neon lighting have fascinated both artists and the public for many years. The sensual, dazzling radiance and the intense signaling effect of neon art is what

makes it so appealing—in addition to its proximity to the realm of the technical, the artificial, the world of products, pop, and advertising. Physics and metaphysics are rarely merged so closely in art.

Initially, however, glass tubes filled with neon gas had a purely signaling character and were used in cities at night for advertising purposes beginning in the twentieth century; they illuminated Paris, New York, Berlin, or Las Vegas. The gas that creates the effect we know as neon light when electrically charged was discovered by the end of the nineteenth century. Since the 1960s in particular, neon has also been a theme of visual art. The production of such works of art has not changed since then: even today, each tube is individually blown by a glassblower and filled with gas.

NEON DELIGHT shows the surprising diversity of art created with neon light. **John Jaspers**, director of the Centre for International Light Art in Unna explains: "The neon tube, called the 'living flame' in the US, has a signifying and signaling character, plays with words and writing, is messaging and visual communication." At times these artworks have an industrial quality. Or they disintegrate, sensually, spiritually, spherically, from all solid forms and become fragments.

Architecture, however, always functions as a fixed frame of reference, as demonstrated by the **NEON DELIGHT** exhibition at the Centre for International Light Art in Unna, where an impressive permanent exhibition is also on display. Located in the eastern Ruhr region, the museum is housed deep underground in the basement of a former brewery. Spectacular light art can be experienced here in a 3,000-square-meter historical building complex.

The exhibition is organized in close partnership with: Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo | Sammlung Froehlich, Stuttgart | Picasso Museum, Málaga & Kunsthalle Bremen | Studio Bruce Nauman, Galisteo, New Mexico, USA | Galleria Fumagalli, Mailand | White Cube LTD, London | GalerieNikolaus Ruzicska, Salzburg | Studio Kowanz, Wien | MAM Mario Mauroner Contemporary Art, Wien | Studio Olivia Steele, Berlin | Studio Anselm Reyle, Berlin | Studio Jeppe Hein, Berlin | RHC Eindhoven, Sammlung Kunstlicht in de Kunst

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