

Kayne Griffin

1201 SOUTH LA BREA AVENUE LOS ANGELES, CA 90019
T (310) 586-6886 F (310) 586-6887 KAYNEGRIFFIN.COM @KAYNEGRIFFIN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Robert Irwin

Unlights

January 9 – February 27, 2021

Kayne Griffin is pleased to present *Unlights*, a solo exhibition of sculptural works by Southern California based artist Robert Irwin. This will be Irwin's inaugural exhibition with the gallery and the first time this body of work is being exhibited on the West Coast. This exhibition will be on view from January 9th through February 27th 2021.

Irwin's new works are composed from unlit six-foot fluorescent lights mounted to fixtures and installed in vertical rows directly on the wall. The glass tubes are covered in layers of opulently colored translucent gels and thin strips of electrical tape, allowing the reflective surfaces of unlit glass and anodized aluminum to interact with ambient illumination in the surrounding space and produce shifting patterns of shadow and chromatic tonality. Reflecting his recent turn toward the perceptual possibilities of unlit bulbs, Irwin's new body of work expands the range of possibilities for how we experience sensations of rhythm, pulsation, expansion and intensity, while continuing the artist's long-standing interest in registering the immediacy of our own presence in space.

Expanding from his breakthrough disc paintings of the late 1960s, Irwin's new works effectively dissolve the perceived border between object and environment, focusing the viewer's consciousness on the act of perception. Each light fixture in Irwin's sculptures contains one or two unlit bulbs—or no bulb at all—while alternating gaps of “empty” wall are painted in subtle shades of gray, producing a sense of uncertainty about what is tactile and what is merely optical. As the shadowed, painted and reflected intervals of space reverberate in the viewer's visual field, the wall itself enters the composition, destabilizing any sense of figure and ground. To encounter Irwin's sculptures is thus to allow oneself to be caught in a ceaseless oscillation between flatness and volume, transparency and opacity, solidity and atmosphere.

In Irwin's art, the object functions as a kind of score for orchestrating “the continual development and extension of humans' potential to perceive the world.” Although unlit, the bulbs in these new sculptures are therefore never “off.” Their optically rich surfaces serve as energetic loci for heightening the sensory possibilities of the human body. In their chromatic complexity, the works convey an almost painterly quality, recalling Irwin's origins as a second- generation Abstract Expressionist painter in the 1950s. Suggesting a rhythmic, minimal composition of repeated linear elements, the works also evoke his innovative line paintings of the early 1960s, which involve us physically and perceptually in an open-ended, immersive and transitory experience of seeing.

Widely recognized as a pivotal figure in contemporary art, Irwin is closely associated with the Light and Space movement that emerged in Los Angeles in the 1960s, and he has continued to live and work in

Kayne Griffin

1201 SOUTH LA BREA AVENUE LOS ANGELES, CA 90019
T (310) 586-6886 F (310) 586-6887 KAYNEGRIFFIN.COM @KAYNEGRIFFIN

Southern California for his entire career. He first used fluorescent lights as substrates for producing what he has called a “conditional art” in the 1970s, often in combination with architectural scrims and other spatial interventions. In the 1990s he introduced colored gels to the fluorescent tubes to alter the chromaticism of

the light, and, over the past decade, began isolating the bulbs and fixtures as sculptural objects in their own right. In returning to the use of solely ambient light, Irwin’s new sculptures embody the culmination of seven decades of rigorous experimentation.

Robert Irwin (b. 1928, Long Beach, California) grew up in Los Angeles and studied at Otis College of Art and Design (1948– 50), Jepson Art Institute (1951), and Chouinard Art Institute (1952–54). He later taught at Chouinard as well as the University of California, Los Angeles, and developed the graduate program at the University of California, Irvine, where he taught a generation of artists that includes Larry Bell, Chris Burden, and Vija Celmins. Irwin is the recipient of numerous awards and honors including a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship (1976), a five-year MacArthur Fellowship (1984–89) and a Thomas Jefferson Foundation Medal in Architecture (2009).

Irwin has had more than seventy-five solo exhibitions at institutions including The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1970– 71); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (1976, 2009–10); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1977, 2013); Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (1997, 2007); the Secession Vienna (2013); and Dia Center for the Arts, New York (1998–99, 2015–17). In 1993 the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, organized a retrospective of his work that traveled to Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne; Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. In 2016, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., exhibited *All the Rules Will Change*, an examination of the artist’s pioneering work between 1958 through 1970, and in 2018, University Art Museum, California State University Long Beach hosted *Site Determined*—exploring the artist’s outdoor environmental projects through architectural models and drawings—which then traveled to Pratt Institute School of Architecture.

He has conceived over fifty-five site-conditional projects, including the Central Gardens for the J. Paul Getty Center, Los Angeles (1992–1997) and the architectural and grounds design for Dia:Beacon, New York (1999–2003). His large-scale permanent installation at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas (2001–16) is the first free-standing structure devoted exclusively to his work.

Irwin lives and works in San Diego.

For press inquiries please email press@kaynegriffin.com