

KEITH SONNIER

PRESS RELEASE

Light Sculptures 1981-2007

Exhibition from October 11th to November 8th 2008

Keith Sonnier, the most narrative of the American post-minimalist sculptors?

For the past two years, the American sculptor Keith Sonnier has been back in the news with shows at Pace Wildenstein New York, Mary Boone Gallery, and Sadie Coles HQ. Keith Sonnier had not been shown in Paris for 20 years, until now, with a show of 15 works at JGM. Galerie. With this show, we can trace the progress of one of the most European of American sculptors of the Post-Minimalist era from the 1980's to today.

Keith Sonnier started his career in the mid-1960's, showing at Leo Castelli in New York, alongside contemporaries Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, and Sol LeWitt. Like them, he created abstract art. Keith Sonnier used a hodge-podge of materials found in that grand bazaar of the streets of New York. With his unique eye, he composed works from numerous fabrics and ribbons, imbuing them with a quasi-erotic quality. Keith Sonnier's first works, gathered and assembled using a restrictive amount of materials, were confined and highly structured.

Contrary to his contemporaries, his works are more narrative and literary through his use of materials that prove to be less aggressive, more sensual. Other sculptors working against the prevailing coldness of the Minimalist movement of the time were Eva Hesse and Robert Morris, creating openly emotional works.

In 1968, Sonnier discovered neon. Although not the first American to employ it- Dan Flavin used light sources as early as 1961 and industrial neons from 1963, while Bruce Nauman harnessed neon in the late '60's. Like Flavin, Sonnier's works have mystical connotations, reminding us that his inspiration came one night, when, returning from an evening in his hometown in Louisiana, he noticed lights dancing through a thick fog. His works have always reflected that instability - shifting, joyous and airy. They escape from the frame, uniting walls and floor as one.

Eastern influences from Keith Sonnier's travels permeate his work. His interest in far-away places started at an early age. He was raised in America, but with a French grandmother, spent the year 1963-1964 in Paris. This explains, perhaps, why critics see references to the cylinders of Cezanne in his geometric forms from the 70's. Later, there were trips to India, China, Bali, and Mexico where he discovered calligraphy, ornamentation, the power of colour, and a sense of the absolute, inventing his own linguistic symbols.

Unlike his contemporaries creating Minimalist works, he leaves messages throughout his pieces. His works transcend the everyday, while still using commonplace materials. On the surface, his neons remind us of Times Square or Vegas. But the modern technology he uses in no way changes his search for a timeless ideal, the Absolute.

With his large outdoor installations, Sonnier dallies with the new European influences, such as Mondrian and Van der Rohe, using the three primary colours, blue, yellow, and red set forth by the grand masters of Neo-Plasticism. But, Sonnier mingles in far-flung references from his travels, such as various divinities, or African masks. Twentieth century techniques combine with ageless idols.

Keith Sonnier creates an entire atmosphere through his sculpture, enabling the spectator to become totally submersed in his vision.

In France, this quasi-holistic approach can be experienced at the Lycee Dorian, the metro Joffre-Mutualite de Rouen, and, of course, at the JGM Gallery until November 8th.

Marie Maertens