

and mechanization, the solitary and the social are held in suspension in such a way as to almost be reconciled; the work was made off-site and transported to the gallery, but it functions in a way that presupposes a spectator, an individual, with agency—the perceiving subject Henri Bergson defined when he wrote that “my perception displays, in the midst of the image world, as would their outward reflection or shadow, the eventual or possible actions of my body”—and so seems to escape the ossifying effects Buren identified. The paintings bear the mark of the skilled and practiced hand at work alone in the studio, but the complex of painting and electric light reminds us that the hand that prepared the flawless grounds, the hand that mixed colour (the colour black) and made marks with such virtuosity, belongs to the same body as legs that walked about town, carrying their owner from the studio down the street to Jomar Electric on St. Clarens Avenue to pick up made-to-order fixtures by Visioneering Electric, or to Lee Filters in the east end for sample packs of lighting gels with names like Waterfront Green and Follies Pink. (The body responsible for Flavin’s light pieces

was never allowed to be synonymous with the hand that produced his exquisite little seaside sketches.)

For Buren the studio “is the first frame, the first limit, upon which all subsequent frames/limits will depend,” the gallery the near-identical frame for which the work is destined. But as Paul Virilio has pointed out, “Everything is always perceived through a frame, and it’s certain this frame existed from the moment the first eye opened upon the visible field.” We therefore need to find an equivalence with the frame, which at any rate preceded the studio and museum. Daniel Hutchinson has found one way, one opening: in transfiguring the dreariness of the portable art object through the medium of coloured electric light he has allowed the autonomous work of art to coalesce with the world outside of it, revealed the influence of the individual on the work and the spaces in which it resides, and found, with a protagonist of Fitzgerald’s, that “the arc-light shining into his window seemed for this hour like the moon, only brighter and more beautiful than the moon.”

CRAIG RODMORE is an artist who lives and works in Toronto.

DANIEL HUTCHINSON is a visual artist based in Toronto, Ontario. He received his BFA from the Emily Carr Institute, Vancouver in 2004 and his MFA from NSCAD University, Halifax in 2008. He has exhibited across Canada and in the U.S., Australia and Sweden. In 2009 he received Honourable Mention for the Halifax Mayor’s Award for Contemporary Visual Art and was twice named a semi-finalist in the RBC Canadian Painting Competition. In 2013, Hutchinson’s work will appear in The Painting Project, a survey of contemporary Canadian painting curated by Louise Déry and Julie Bélisle and organized by L’Université du Québec à Montréal as well as the group show Imaging Disaster, at Museum London. Hutchinson is represented by Angell Gallery, Toronto.

The artist gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Arts Council.

Technical assistance provided by Gallery 44, Toronto.

A FIELD WITHOUT ORIGIN / NOTES ON PAINTINGS FOR ELECTRIC LIGHT

BY CRAIG RODMORE

Gold paint exists, but when Rembrandt painted a golden helmet he didn't use gold paint.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Donald Judd said that Dan Flavin's work was made up of three things: the "use of fluorescent tubes as a source of light, the diffusion of light throughout the surrounding space and upon nearby surfaces, and the arrangement or placement of the fixtures themselves." This inventory, or what is missing from it, reveals the distance between Flavin's fluorescent light pieces, which come so quickly to mind, and Daniel Hutchinson's new paintings, which both incorporate and are made "for" fluorescent lights; it suggests that they are closer to the performance works of Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer—since as Carrie Lambert wrote of minimalism (speaking of what Forti's *Huddle* [1969], a mass of "six or seven people" climbing over each other in place, might mean for it), "art at this watershed moment was defined not so much by sculpture becoming like performance but by a curious convergence of actions and things." It is the convergence of actions and things that characterizes—one wants to say produces—the works in this exhibition.

It is important to say of these paintings that each begins with the specification of the light fixture. The light fixtures—custom units with asymmetrical reflectors and bright, thin T5-type bulbs in standard lengths of two, four, and eight feet, assembled from a catalogue of available options—will be set on blocks below the paintings and/or suspended above them. With the size and characteristics of the fixture determined and a combination of coloured gels selected, each panel and stretcher is fabricated and the support prepared. The development of each piece is a complex negotiation of the combinations of gels, the placement of lights, the composition of the painting, and so on; but its appearance, in the end, is subject to the vicissitudes of the size and shifting position of the viewer.

These paintings, which are *for* coloured electric light, are not paintings of anything,

and with the abandonment of the subject (architectural, natural) that had persisted in Hutchinson's work until now, perspectival space within the painting is displaced by compositions based on an isometric grid whose size is determined by that of the brush that will be used. Axonometric projection obliterates the fixed vanishing point of perspectival drawing and, as Yve-Alain Bois showed in "Metamorphosis of Axonometry," in doing so it "abolishes the fixed position of the spectator and creates several possible readings of one and the same image." Bois's is an argument, with Lissitzky, against the fallacy—the "circular reasoning"—of the conventional wisdom regarding perspective, according to which perspectival drawing "assigns to the spectator of the universal theater the place of the sovereign from which to assess the sphere of his dominion, the dimensions of his knowledge, and the extent of his power." In fact, as "borderline cases" such as anamorphic images make clear, this sovereignty is an illusion, and "if the spectator leaves the standpoint demanded by the perspective construction, the space of representation collapses like a house of cards. The perspective demands, at least theoretically, the petrification of the spectator." Moreover, while the lines of perspective converge soon enough at the vanishing point, the axonometric image begins at infinity and moves limitlessly backwards and forwards—this is the revolutionary space of Malevich's architectonics: "There is no negotiation of depth; instead, it is geometrically rendered 'infinite': the eye is no longer fixed in a specific place, and the view is no longer trained or 'petrified.'" The truly free spectator's movements transform the image it beholds.

This free spectator is synonymous with the reader whose birth, as Roland Barthes famously announced, comes "at the cost of the death of the Author": "The reader is the space on which all quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." Likewise, the painter of these pictures corresponds to Barthes's "modern scriptor," who "no longer bears within him passions, humours,

feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt," whose vocation is not storytelling or depiction but the playing out of a performative—a "form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the act by which it is uttered"—and whose "hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin."

Like the textual scriptor, who uses words and phrases that anyone can find in the dictionary and inscribes these through a system of mark-making, Hutchinson as painter-scriptor has assembled what could be called a catalogue of gestures in the construction of each composition (and like the repertoire of actions that make up certain of Rainer's works, these simple gestures are transformed by their repetition and combination in a baffling flux). There is a correspondence between this store of gestures and the predetermined techniques, materials, and tools—such as prepared brushes—used to inscribe them and, in turn, between these and the innumerable but finite parts and combinations of parts produced by manufacturers of electric light fixtures and exhaustively inventoried in the catalogues, posters, and sample boards on display in the suppliers' showrooms. But just as the Barthes of "The Death of the Author" is the same one who loved writing instruments and was fascinated by the typewriter, whose quarter-sheet system for taking and filing notes suffered a blow in 1967 when France converted from Imperial paper sizes to the ISO standard, and who claimed to write fragments so that he could "multiply . . . many times over" the pleasure of beginning and completing the work, we see that these strategies by no means preclude the pleasure of making—both can be part of the same productive system, and this brings us to something significant that is resolved in Hutchinson's *Paintings for Electric Light*.

These notes began with Flavin and Judd. It would have been possible to begin with

Stella or even Reinhardt—the lineage is clear enough—but for the striking presence of the fluorescent light fixtures that connect this work to the post-studio modes of artistic production that emerged in the 1960s in the wake of Stella's innovations, in which the romantic conception of the solitary artist at work in the studio was displaced by the techno-industrial romance of the artist whose works are produced through telephone calls (the one that initiated production on Tony Smith's *Die* [1962] is the most famous) and visits to shops and factories—Robert Smithson's Arco Steel and Milgo Industrial, Judd's Bernstein Brothers, Tinsmiths and Allied Plastics, and their catalogues of ready-to-order materials and "trademarked surfaces" like Lavax Wrinkle Finish and Galvanox (finishes that Smithson listed, as Caroline Jones observed, "as if intoxicated by the alien poetry of these proprietary terms"), and Flavin's standard fluorescent light fixtures, Union Made by the Mercury Lighting Products Company, Inc., of Passaic, New Jersey.

For Daniel Buren, the difference between these studio and post-studio practices was insufficient, and in his famous indictment "The Function of the Studio" (1971), the evacuation of the studio is brilliantly articulated in the language of institutional critique. Mirror image of the gallery and museum, in Buren's analysis the studio is a vacuum in which fundamentally identical, interchangeable (exchangeable) objects are produced before circulating in the corresponding vacuum of the museum or gallery. (He notes, incidentally, apropos of the use of artificial light in North American-type studios, that there is "an equivalence between the products of these lofts and their placement on the walls and floors of modern museums, which are also illuminated day and night by electricity.")

Buren's is the critique with which works such as Hutchinson's still have to contend. In this case, a situation is staged in which the shared space inhabited by the work and the beholder is acknowledged, revealing, instead of concealing, both the contrivance of the situation and precariousness of perception. Studio and post-studio, craft