

SPRÜTH MAGERS

Otto Piene

Light Ballet

Sprüth Magers, Berlin

April 29 - June 17, 2017

Otto Piene's use of light developed in the late 1950s with works utilising earlier experiments of printing onto canvas using punctured screens of many small holes, producing a grid of small, elevated pigment dots on the surface. These perforated 'raster sieves' were used in early works as hand-held tools through which to shine light from candles. This rudimentary apparatus soon developed into more complex means in 1960-61, employing metal screens, discs, motors, timers, and rotating electric lights, coming to a theatrical climax in room size installations. A selection of these elements will be presented in this exhibition, his first with Sprüth Magers and the start of the collaboration between the Otto Piene Estate and the gallery.

Piene was a choreographer of light, forcing it to 'dance' across the room, first by his own hand but later with these sophisticated mechanical arrangements. These perforated screens and stencils vary in size and complexity, some taking up whole false walls and others more modest spheres and cubes. A single light source is fractured into multiple dots that change size simply by how far the bulb is from the punctured screens. The light appears to come from all directions as it moves from one wall to the next, constantly changing its clarity and scale, with the use of timers to fade lights in and out creating a variety of environments that range from near darkness to full multi-source discotheque theatrics.

The experience for the spectator is one of total immersion as the light moves across the room and their body. This aspect of filling the space differs from the formal restrictions of theatre and film, in which light is projected and viewed from one point, bound to one end of the room with the spectator at the other.

Piene used the term 'painting with light', distancing himself from a recent history of gestural painting in the 1950s to a more technologically optimistic utilisation of light, in relation to recent experience. The light spectacles with which Piene was familiar were in the context of war and his experience as an anti-aircraft assistant aged sixteen, the blazes of fire and the searchlights that populated the night sky in the hunt for the Allies' bombers.

This recent history of technology, and specifically light, as a medium of war is a premise that Piene looks to investigate and rewrite on a clean slate with light presented as a source of life rather than destruction. This was a core ideology of Group ZERO, founded with Heinz Mack in 1957, as 'a zone of silence and of pure possibilities for a new beginning... The incommensurable zone in which the old state turns into the new', following the trauma of World War II.

Otto Piene (1928-2014) was born in Laasphe, Germany and died in Berlin, Germany. He lived and worked in Düsseldorf, Cambridge and Groton, Massachusetts. Retrospective exhibitions include the Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund (2008-2009), the Prague City Gallery (2002), and Kunstmuseum im Ehrenhof, Düsseldorf (1996). Recent solo exhibitions include LWL Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster (2015), Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2014), ZKM Museum Für Neue Kunst, Karlsruhe (2013), and MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge (2011). In 2014, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York held a comprehensive retrospective of Group ZERO.

The Berlin gallery is concurrently presenting solo exhibitions by Pamela Rosenkranz and Lucy Dodd.

For further information and press enquiries, please contact Silvia Baltschun (sb@spruethmagers.com).

Public reception: April 28, 2017, 6 – 9 pm

Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 11 am – 6 pm