

ARTNEWS

LADDIE JOHN DILL AT ACE GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

BY *Peter Frank* POSTED 04/04/16 5:35 PM

Through May 2016



Laddie John Dill, "Contained Radiance: Miracle Mile," 2015, installation view.
COURTESY ACE GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

Laddie John Dill is best known today for his weighty abstract slabs that seem to have been painted *with*—not just *on*—stone. But Dill emerged some 45 years ago, on both coasts, with a series of works fabricated out of light and sand. It turns out these were merely the tip of a neon iceberg.

In the late 1960s Dill produced and exhibited a hefty number of delicate and eccentric “lines of light” made out of forged glass and agitated gas. He did not show them again until 2011, when the Getty’s “Pacific Standard Time” initiative came along and valorized Southern California art of the postwar years. Indeed, these precocious early works of Dill’s proved to be one of the major “finds” of the Getty initiative. Dill has since updated a few of them and fabricated more, but those that remain from 1969 dominate the gathering.

Copyright 2016, ARTnews Ltd, 40 W 25th Street, 6th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10010.

All rights reserved.

ARTNEWS

This is not to imply that the 1969 works are more effective—more beguiling, that is, in their luminescence, more playful in their sequencing of elements, more mysterious in the way they hug the shadows—than are those realized or completed in the last year. Several of the later pieces are among the most moving of the works in the exhibition, including one handsome multipartite piece apparently fabricated to “activate” work within the site of certain gallery windows.

Dill calls his reed-thin, ramrod-straight objects “Light Sentences.” They are composed of discrete colored segments arranged in sequences, as if they were words comprising distinct phrases. They play with our tendency to “read” such alignments, whether or not we take them in as whole entities. We scan them left to right when horizontal, top to bottom when vertical. When hung on walls near one another, they assume the configuration of paragraphs.

Ultimately, the “Light Sentences” reach a level of poetic self-containment when isolated in dark, recessed spaces, hovering like disembodied hands, or when paired with other multicolored glow-sticks that somehow match or “answer” them symmetrically. In such cases, Dill’s lines of luminescence take over our optical perception and reveal themselves not merely as neon art in the wake of Lucio Fontana, Dan Flavin, and Stephen Antonakos, but as Light and Space art in the spirit of Robert Irwin and James Turrell.



Laddie John Dill, ‘Contained Radiance: Miracle Mile,’
2015, installation view.
COURTESY ACE GALLERY, LOS ANGELES