

Dan Flavin

FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

ACTIVITY

For a classroom arts-integration activity, design an artwork inspired by Dan Flavin.

- Using graph paper and colored pencils, diagram a design for a Flavin-inspired work in your classroom.
- Measure the space before beginning, and use the same-sized light forms as Flavin.
- Calculate the area of each shape created.

Further extension

Create a scale model of the design with neon glow necklaces.

Dan Flavin was born in New York in 1933. In 1953 he enlisted in the United States Air Force and was trained as a meteorological technician. While working in Washington, DC for the Air Force, he began going to museums and sketching. Flavin then studied art history at the New School for Social Research and at Columbia University in New York. He also worked at the Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the American Museum of Natural History. It was at this point that he began creating art with found materials.

In a poem* written by Flavin in 1961, we see his first interest in fluorescent light:

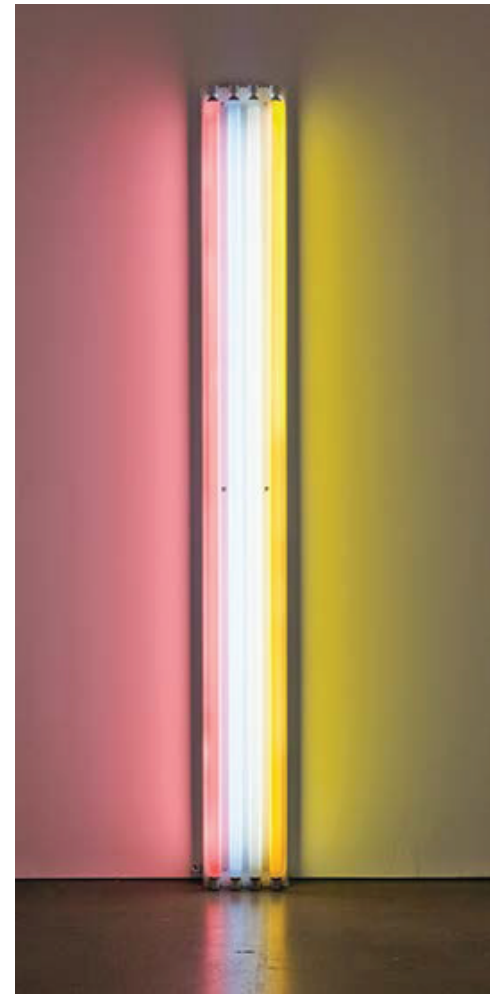
fluorescent
poles
shimmer
shiver
flick
out

dim

monuments

of
on
and
off

art.



His early works with light were part of the icons series, and featured a box-like structure with light(s) on the perimeter. These works play on Flavin's religious upbringing, and the devotional icons found in religious art.

Flavin moved from the icons to using commercially available fluorescent lights as his medium. He confined himself to a limited palette in color and form. The colors were red, blue, green, pink, yellow, ultraviolet, and four different whites; and the forms were straight tubes in two-, four-, six-, and eight-foot lengths. Colored light reacts differently than pigments when mixed, and Flavin experimented with specific geometry to create new perceptions of color and space with his works.

Untitled (to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Inch) is on view in Crystal Bridges' 1940s to Now gallery. The work is exhibited on its own in a small gallery space, and the four colors of the fluorescent tubes (pink, daylight, cool white, and yellow) activate the room. The colors interact with one another, creating additional hues and transforming the gallery walls into a canvas. This work is dedicated to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Inch, who were Los Angeles-based collectors and early supporters of Flavin.



Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

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Dan Flavin, *Untitled (to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Inch)*, 1964, pink, daylight, cool white, and yellow fluorescent light. © Estate of Dan Flavin/ Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

* Govan, Michael, and Dan Flavin. *Dan Flavin: A Retrospective*. New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2004, 112.