

LIGHT³

Stephen Dean
Ethan Ryman
Jan Tichy

Curated by Lilly Wei

June 12 - July 11, 2014

Opening Reception: Thursday, June 12, 6-8pm

More Light

While light has long been associated with the spiritual and metaphysical, Stephen Dean, Ethan Ryman and Jan Tichy emphasize its more phenomenal and psychological qualities. In their work, it is treated analytically—although not without a sense of the poetic—as a means to comprehend and engage with the world.

Stephen Dean (b. 1968, Paris; based in New York) works in a range of media, including video and installations and has long explored color as both pure phenomena and cultural signifier. His works in this exhibition are gorgeously physical manifestations of color in interaction with light, but there are always historical and populist narratives to be gleaned from the often utilitarian structures he so cannily re-purposes. Converting them into abstractions, into updated interpretations of Minimalist objects, his ladders suggest Judd with a nod to Flavin and maybe LeWitt, his postcard racks recall Duchamp's bottle racks and his appealing, brilliantly reflective sculptural constructs, his *Mnemotechnics*, conjure up Tatlin's corner counter-reliefs), colorized. Dean has been using modern dichroic glass in his work for quite some time, fascinated by the constant shifts in hue that it produces under different light conditions, its response mercurial and dazzling. A low-tech means of production, it returns enormously rich visual dividends. Determined by the position of the spectator in relationship to the object, by the angle of the light and the angle of viewing, the works are in flux, kinetic, performative, experienced as unpredictable patterns of colors that are temporarily glimpsed, painted on the walls and floors by transient light.

Ethan Ryman (b. 1964, New York; based in New York) is also deeply interested in modes of perception, in how and what we see, constantly testing the ratio between perceptual reality and illusion. Finely calibrated, precisely executed, he calls the works for this exhibition sculptural and photo-sculptural objects, focusing on perspectival shifts that subtly change the configuration of what we are seeing. From flat to the three-dimensional and back, the work mutates as our point of view changes. Ryman is also intrigued by what he describes as the idealization of reality in which the imperfect geometric structures that exist in daily life become idealized when we choose to regard them as such—a trick of the eye and mind—ignoring their flawed, irregular actuality, as in the photograph on view, a picture of a wall with brightly colored bands of different materials that alternates between the abstract and the representational. A testament to the psychology of perception and its filters, what we see is what we see, but that is endlessly subjective, endlessly complicated. In his series of installations titled *Shift*, the light is corralled and held within sequences of white frames arranged in grid formations, the placement of great importance to the work, the architecture serving as the ground/support. Each rectangular frame functions like a miniature stage in which the performance is enacted by delicately modulated bands of fluctuating reflections that suggest non-objective paintings. In constant transition, in motion, they constitute a cinema of shadows. Like Dean, Ryman recruits light as an active collaborator.

Jan Tichy (b. 1974; Prague; based in Chicago) is an artist who works with video, photography, sculpture and architecture. Light is also an essential aspect of his quietly powerful, tersely poetic production with its disquieting undertones, its images of spare, elegant dissent. His light, however, differs from that of Dean and Ryman in that it is mechanically sourced and more narrative. Light, as Tichy deploys it, is double-edged, reverberant, its readings multiple. Existing within a heart of darkness, its revelations are overtly political but also ambiguous, complex. Represented by two projects in this exhibition, the first was conceived for the gallery—his works are often site-specific, the architecture vital to its realization—installed inside a long, narrow corridor concealed behind a wall, the kind of precarious refuge where those fleeing persecution or justice might hide themselves. More generally, it comments on visibility and invisibility, what is present but overlooked or refused acknowledgment. The other piece consists of a set of flares, with its hot red light that demands attention, often signaling disaster. A beacon that guides, an aid in searches, a marker used to designate trouble spots, the nature of its illumination can be both humane and malevolent as its interrogative glare shines a fierce, relentless beam into the enveloping space.

Lilly Wei