

Robert Irwin + Mary Corse: Parallax

10 October – 11 November, 2023

Pace Gallery

5 Hanover Square

Opening Reception: Monday 9 October, 6-8pm



From left: Robert Irwin, *SWEETNESS*, 2023, Shadow + Reflection + Color, 182.9 cm × 404.5 cm × 10.8 cm © Robert Irwin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Mary Corse, *Untitled (White Multiband with White Sides, Beveled)*, 2023, acrylic and glass microspheres on canvas, 243.8 cm × 198.1 cm × 11.4 cm © Mary Corse, courtesy of Pace Gallery

“What I want is the quality of light, its energy, its existence as matter.”

— Robert Irwin

“The act of painting has the ability to transcend your moment. We need meaning which is consciousness. And I find it there in painting. I find the infinite conversation instead of finite thinking.”

— Mary Corse

London—Pace Gallery is honoured to present *Robert Irwin + Mary Corse: Parallax*, an exhibition that brings together the work of two pioneering American artists. Marking the first time their work has been brought into direct dialogue, this exhibition explores the intersections and convergences between these two artists’ radical experiments with light, perception, and the role of the viewer. Opening on 9 October, coinciding with Frieze London, the ground floor galleries will place Corse’s iconic White Inner Band paintings in conversation with the largest examples to date from Irwin’s Unlight series. The lower ground floor gallery will hold an immersive, site-specific light installation by Irwin.

This exhibition comes at a significant moment for both artists, each of whom has been recognised by the Dia Art Foundation this year for their significant contributions to American art. Irwin—whose work *Full Room Skylight – Scrim V – Dia Beacon* (1972/2022) is currently the subject of an exhibition at Dia Beacon—was honoured as part of the Foundation’s Spring Benefit in May, while Corse, who was the subject of an exhibition at Dia Beacon that was on view from 2018 to 2022, will receive her honour in October.

On 26 October, the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) will present the European premiere of *Robert Irwin: A Desert of Pure Feeling*, a feature documentary about legendary California light and space artist Robert Irwin, whose decade-spanning career has profoundly influenced generations of artists. The screening is presented in partnership with Pace and will be followed by a Q&A with Lawrence Weschler. Additional screenings at the ICA will be held from 27 October.

While both artists developed work that is intimately connected to the distinctive conditions of Southern California in the 20th century, they worked independently and never had a direct relationship. Irwin was more closely associated with the Light and Space movement, which eschewed the practice of object-making; while Corse developed her own independent path, developing a phenomenological mode of painting. At stake for both Corse and Irwin, however, is the abstract nature of human perception. Since the 1950s and 60s, they have each explored modes of artmaking that transcend and subvert convention to create multi-sensorial experiences of viewing.

Widely considered the originator of the California Light and Space movement, Irwin's longstanding relationship with Pace spans seven decades. Arne Glimcher, the gallery's founder, first exhibited Irwin's work in New York in 1966, introducing his radical innovations to an East Coast audience for the first time. Since the Sixties, Irwin has influenced numerous subsequent generations of artists and charted new frontiers in contemporary theory and praxis. It was in the context of this innovative time in the 1960s that Corse, seventeen years Irwin's junior, began her own artistic practice that pursued entirely different terrain. Unlike Irwin, who abandoned his early work as a painter in favour of a sculptural practice involving pure light, Corse remained committed to the possibilities of painting. She began working with shaped, bevelled-edge canvases, plexiglass lightboxes powered by tesla coils, and, most significantly, glass microspheres, which she developed a technique of layering onto the surface of her paintings. Despite their divergent practices, both artists embraced the presence of the viewer as the primary component of the work, harnessing light and shadow as both subject and material.

Irwin's ongoing Unlight series is the latest development in the artist and theoretician's career-long investigation into human perception and the phenomenological conditions of light and space. Playfully titled after blues and rock albums, the Unlight works are comprised of arrays of six-foot long fluorescent tubes installed vertically on the wall, each unlit bulb shrouded in translucent gels and electrical tape. Rhythmically interspersed between the glass bulbs are empty aluminium fixtures and panels of grey and blue paint applied directly onto the gallery wall. Stretching over four meters in width, Irwin's large-scale installations—made from humble, industrial materials—produce opulent results, oscillating as the viewer moves through space, to expand beyond their peripheral vision and draw their gaze into the works' dynamic and complex depths.

Irwin identifies the materials for the Unlights not by their physical components, but by their intangible qualities: "Shadow + Reflection + Color". By responding only to the available light in a given space and removing any emitted artificial light from this body of work, Irwin not only subverts expectation but also invites viewers to consider the conditions of the space that surrounds them. The unlit bulbs—some cloud grey, others jewel-toned—absorb and amplify the atmospherics in the room, capturing and casting shadows, glinting in the changing light as visitors' bodies move across and through the room, attempting to decipher what is two- or three-dimensional, 'real' or illusion.

Corse's large-scale White Inner Band paintings hinge on a similarly dynamic relationship between the viewer and the phenomenological conditions created between the space and the work. Corresponding to the viewer's position across the exhibition space, these bands seem to appear and disappear from one's field of perception. Corse achieves this effect through her use of glass microspheres, a material she began experimenting with in 1968. Over the last 55 years, this industrial material has become central to Corse's painting practice, which she transmutes into a dynamic illumination within her gestural brushstrokes. The resulting works are highly sensitive to the lighting conditions of the space around them, bending and refracting light which radically alters one's perception of the painting.

As viewers navigate the space surrounding Corse's Inner Band paintings, the miniscule glass prisms glow, darken, and glimmer in turn, revealing the full spectrum of hues contained within their white light while generating a state of perpetual flux in the hard-edge geometries of the work. The bevelled edges of the works push their surfaces out and

away from the wall, lending the picture plane an ethereal quality that appears as though hovering indeterminately in space. Corse's work depends entirely on the physical presence of the viewer to be fully realised, creating an active dialogue between painting, viewer, and environment. "The art is not on the wall," Corse has explained, "it's in the viewer's perception."

Where Irwin's Unlight works draw ambient light into their depths, Corse's paintings refract light outwards. Placed in conversation with one another for the first time, this exhibition explores the interaction between the two artists' ideas of phenomenology (a term that denotes philosophical inquiry into sensory experience) in which visitors are invited to examine their own process of perception.

Irwin's site-specific installation in the lower ground floor gallery addresses a different set of concerns, and can be understood as a continuation of his recent major project at Kraftwerk Berlin, organised by LAS Art Foundation. In London, Irwin will divide the gallery in two, each side painted in imperceptibly different hues. On the walls, Irwin will construct a rhythmic interplay of lit fluorescent tubes and painted sections to enliven the space. Orchestrating light, space, and colour to create an immersive experience, this work epitomises the central tenets of Irwin's approach to creating a "conditional art" that depends entirely on the specificity of a given space.

A profound engagement with the subtleties of the viewer's experience animate both artists' work. In their own distinct ways, both Corse and Irwin each demand prolonged and close mode of looking in order to grasp the full scope of their visual and conceptual depths. Irwin and Corse return the viewer's attention back to their own perceptual process as well as their bodily presence in the space. "What we are really dealing with is the state of our consciousness," Irwin has remarked, "and the shape of our perception."

Robert Irwin (b. 1928, Long Beach, California) is a pioneering figure of the Los Angeles-based Light and Space movement of the 1960s. Irwin employs a wide range of media—including fluorescent lights, fabric scrims, colored and tinted gels, paint, wire, acrylic, and glass—in the creation of site-conditioned works that respond to the context of their specific environments. Beginning his career as a painter, Irwin later began exploring perception and light with his acrylic columns and discs. In 1969, he gave up his studio and began what he termed a conditional practice, working with the effects of light through subtle interventions in space and architecture. Working in existing sites, he composes with materials that are ephemeral, but which substantially transform the viewers' visual and phenomenological experience. Irwin's interventions blur the distinctions between space and artwork, exploring the nature of light, volume, and perceptual psychology. Over the past decade, Irwin has returned to his studio, using it as an experimental space to develop sculptural works with florescent lights and acrylic, while continuing to develop his site-conditioned installations.

Mary Corse (b. 1945, Berkeley, California) investigates materiality, abstraction, and perception through the subtly gestural and precisely geometric paintings that she has made over her nearly sixty-year career. Earning a BFA in 1968 from Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, Corse developed her initial work during the emergence of the Light and Space movement in Southern California. Throughout the 1960s, she experimented with unconventional media and supports, producing shaped canvases, works with plexiglass, and illuminated boxes. In 1968, Corse discovered glass microspheres, an industrial material used in street signs and dividing lines on highways. Combining these tiny refractive beads with acrylic paint, she creates paintings that appear to radiate light from within and produce shifts in appearance contingent on their surroundings and the viewer's position. First developing her White Light paintings, by the 1970s she began making her Black Light series with black acrylic and microspheres. The Black Earth works followed—large ceramic slabs that she fired in a custom-built kiln and glazed black. After thirty years of working monochromatically, she reintroduced primary colors into her paintings based on her understanding of color as constitutive of white light. Corse's art emphasizes the abstract nature of human perception, expanding beyond the visual to include subtleties of feeling and awareness.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth,

Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program—comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon.

Today, Pace has eight locations worldwide, including a European foothold in London and Geneva as well as Berlin, where the gallery established an office in 2023. Pace maintains two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace’s long and pioneering history in California includes a gallery in Palo Alto, which was open from 2016 to 2022. Pace’s engagement with Silicon Valley’s technology industry has had a lasting impact on the gallery at a global level, accelerating its initiatives connecting art and technology as well as its work with experiential artists. Pace consolidated its West Coast activity through its flagship in Los Angeles, which opened in 2022. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, along with an office and viewing room in Beijing. In spring 2024, Pace will open its first gallery space in Japan in Tokyo’s new Azabudai Hills development.

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