

Robert Irwin: New Work

April 1 – 30, 2022
 540 West 25th Street
 New York



Robert Irwin, *Hells Bells*, 2021 © Robert Irwin, courtesy Pace Gallery

New York – Pace is pleased to present an exhibition of new works by the artist and theorist Robert Irwin, who is widely celebrated for his radical lifelong investigation into fundamental questions of perception and has collaborated with the gallery for 56 years. Running from April 1 to 30 at Pace Gallery’s 540 West 25th Street location in New York, *Robert Irwin: New Work* will span the first and seventh floors of the gallery and feature seven new works from the artist’s Unlight series—including the largest work of this kind to date—in addition to an installation of six new works from Irwin’s series of columnar sculptures, which explore new chromatic terrain for the artist.

All of the works on view in this exhibition will be shown publicly for the first time. Those from Irwin’s ongoing Unlight series, which will occupy the gallery’s first floor, have been created since the artist first debuted this body of work in 2020 at Pace in New York. Extending ever further his engagement with the conditions of human perception and the phenomenological effects of light, Irwin’s newest Unlight sculptures comprise constellations of unlit six-foot fluorescent fixtures and tubes, installed in vertical rows directly on the gallery walls. Covered in various applications of colored, translucent gels and thin strips of electrical tape, these works feature sumptuous and rhythmic compositions based on the subtle effects of the existing light in a given space, as registered in the reflective surfaces of the glass bulbs and anodized aluminum. The plays between Irwin’s abstract works and the surrounding room result in shifting patterns of shadow and tonality.

Energetic and expansive, Irwin’s latest Unlight works challenge viewers to see their environment in new and unexpected ways. Eschewing electrical power in favor of organic interactions, Irwin defies the viewer’s expectation of the banal objects—light fixtures and electrical tape—that comprise his sculptures. Neither is used for its ostensible purpose. Yet Irwin does not transform these everyday objects into the materials for his work. Instead, he uses them as instruments to conduct his actual materials: “Shadow + Reflection + Color.” Comprising not only the physical objects on the wall, but also these three ephemeral elements of perception, Irwin’s Unlight sculptures offer new possibilities for sensorial encounters between individuals and their surroundings.

Installed on the gallery’s seventh floor, Irwin’s new suite of columnar sculptures is constructed from sheets of acrylic pigmented in tones of grey and green, as well as red, which is a color that the artist has never previously explored in this body of work. Irwin has been experimenting with columnar forms made from transparent materials like acrylic since the 1960s, and Pace’s presentation offers a survey of the current state of this important valence of his larger practice. Illusionistic, layered, and multicolored, Irwin’s columns evoke the energetic potentiality of light itself,

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capturing the radiance of color almost as a physical entity and gesturing to the subjective nature of experience as well as the shared conditions of human perception.

Irwin, who has been exhibiting with Pace since 1966, has maintained his highly innovative and enormously influential practice for more than six decades. A father of the California Light and Space movement, the artist has charted new frontiers throughout his career, expanding the contours of the canon and continually challenging the limits of what art can be. Having developed an Abstract Expressionist approach to painting in the 1950s, Irwin would take up what he has termed a “conditional art” in the 1970s, growing his practice of making installation-based works into the broader field of architecture. For more than three decades, Irwin has used fluorescent lights in his work, and in the last decade he has presented the bulbs and fixtures as the substrate of his sculptural environments. The new works in Pace’s presentation reflect Irwin’s insatiable and ongoing inquiry into the relationships between light, space, and human perception.

Robert Irwin (b. 1928, Long Beach, California) is a pioneering figure of the Los Angeles-based Light and Space movement of the 1960s. 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. 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.

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 President and 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.

The gallery has also spearheaded explorations into the intersection of art and technology through its new business models, exhibition interpretation tools, and representation of artists cultivating advanced studio practices. Pace’s presence in Silicon Valley since 2016 has bolstered its longstanding support of experimental practices and digital artmaking. As part of its commitment to innovative, technologically engaged artists within and beyond its program, Pace launched its own dedicated NFT platform, Pace Verso, in November 2021. The gallery’s past NFT projects have spotlighted digital works by Glenn Kaino, DRIFT, Lucas Samaras, Simon Denny, Urs Fischer, John Gerrard, and other artists.

Today, Pace has nine locations worldwide including London, Geneva, a strong foothold in Palo Alto, and 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 was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, as well as an office and viewing room in Beijing. In 2020, Pace opened temporary exhibition spaces in East Hampton and Palm Beach, with continued programming on a seasonal basis.



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