

...Inside Lights, Outside...  
Seth Weiner's Entoptic Installations

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The first thing that gets you when you view a piece by Paris installation artist Seth Weiner is how the work itself positions you to view it best. Another thing that may then occur to you is "what am I viewing?" Engagements with what we do when we 'view' are raised by the works of Weiner I have seen, and continued viewings of these works offer few logical conclusions to these concerns. Though these works are cast in a minimum of media, and marshal the shape, depth, and light of the environment to the aide of perceivable structure, any suggestion of sparsity is dispelled within moments of the visual experience.

The appropriation of light, and diverse light sources, is a suggestive place of inquiry, since many of Weiner's works mediate the passage of light into the eye by sculpting viewing-conditions which stretch the passage of time required for the eye to adapt to, and perceive, extremely subtle light stimuli. In those works of Weiner's which I have seen, "luminescence" is a more appropriate word than "light". Already this is a lot to say about work which indeed is best "seen", so I ask the gentle reader's indulgence as I find my own way to engage what I have seen when viewing pieces by Seth Weiner.

**When I view Weiner's recent works, I am in a dark room, my vision-field cast in darkness...so much so that, the first time, knowing these were light-installations which slowly reveal a colored glow, I assumed the light source had not been turned on. (!) I remain, however, and notice swirling lines and shapes in my vision. I slowly begin to discern a sound, a "drone" of sound, which is startling since the room seemed not only dark but silent when I entered. My eyes are still adjusting, and there is no light which I can detect. Yet, swirling artifacts are still there. After a stretch of time, I uncover, in my field of vision, a dim glimmer...maybe it's orange, perhaps white. I move closer to the glimmer, I look away from it, I look from the side, and gradually discern a four-sided shape...perhaps a square, maybe a rectangle. I stay until the glimmer dominates the small room to the extent I wonder how I missed it at all, and by now the sonic drone is loud enough I wonder the same about the sound...**

Discussing my experience with Weiner is illuminating: the swirling lines and

shapes I see in the darkness are phosphenes. According to the 19<sup>th</sup> century physicist Hermann von Helmholtz, "Under suitable conditions light falling on the eye may render visible certain objects within the eye itself. These perceptions are called entoptical." Phosphenes are instances of entoptic light which we may see when we close our eyes. A phosphene is the perception of light without light actually entering the eye...you can see phosphenes right now by closing your eyes and looking.

Phosphenes figure prominently in much of Weiner's work during the last five years, though in different ways within each piece. An early concern was to re-create, or concretely reify, the phenomenon of phosphenes for the viewer in three-dimensional space, with eyes wide open. These works yield their swirling lines and shapes by reflecting natural light on suspended sheets of plastic transparency.



Transparency Study  
plastic transparency, 120 cm x 90 cm



Transparency Study  
(view more images of the Transparency Studies below)

By capturing natural light on the surface of a transparency the viewer confronts an image which animates based upon the viewer's changing orientation to the plastic. Images which appear on the plastic retreat and advance, changing shape and color

according to the viewer's movement. One gulf between this experience and that of entoptic light is, when we close our eyes, phosphenes are not only directly in front of our vision, but in our peripheral vision too.

To address the panoptic nature of entoptic light, Weiner initiated actual motion into the works by blowing the transparency with air from an electric fan. Click on the image below to view the result in "Plastic Streams". (The link requires the Quicktime player be installed on your computer. To download the free Quicktime player, visit <http://www.apple.com/quicktime/mac.html>).



Plastic Streams, plastic transparency with wind

Created from the same sheets of transparency at the Transparency Studies, "Plastic Streams" retained the reflections of natural light, but now the reflections are "actively" animated. Yet, the re-created phosphenes are fixed in the frontal-view of our visual field. The challenge is the creation of a spatial canvas which may be entered into by the viewer; a space in which depth, distance, and image may be folded together. A near follow-up to "Plastic Streams" are the "Optical Chimes", composed of rolled transparencies, suspended vertically in darkness, and "activated" with small blue LEDs fixed in place. The rolled transparencies reflect the light of the LED in luminescent dots on their surfaces and, as the "chimes" are freely suspended, animate the light source, refracting the light throughout three-dimensional space.

Click below to view two videos of the "Optic Chimes" using your Quicktime player.

[Optical Chimes video 1](#)

[Optical Chimes video 2](#)

The most recent installments of Weiner's endeavor further the goal of reproducing the experience of visual phosphenes by inducing the "actual" phosphenes in our vision. The third paragraph, above, is a first hand account of this experience. Regrettably, the verbal portrayal of the visual experience hits way beneath the mark; these works use large spaces to create the viewing space, and simply must be seen, or viewed, in person. A public presentation in Paris is in preparation. In the meantime, opportunities to view these works may be arranged individually with Seth Weiner. To do so, please contact Jon Forshee at the address below, and certainly keep posted to Paris-Link for announcements of upcoming shows.

I am grateful to Seth Weiner for kind permission to use the above images and video.

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