

MIT List Center

Dan Flavin

Installed in Ashdown House, Dan Flavin's 1990 work, *Untitled (for Conor Cruise O'Brien) 5c*, is set at a 45-degree angle on the wall and composed of green, red, blue, and yellow fluorescent lights. Since the early 1960s, Flavin had been making sculpture with fluorescent tubes, a medium more associated with cubicles and cafeterias than art. It was part and parcel of his adherence to that formerly restrictive tenants and commercially fabricated materials of minimalism. MIT professor, Caroline Jones.

For Flavin, it was terribly important to be able to go to the hardware store and buy this stuff and put it on the wall. In playing with light as if it were a stick that he could compose with, he's provoking a notion that the light is not there for us to work by or read by with it humming overhead, but rather the light is there for us to contemplate as light.

Flavin died in the mid 1990s. At the time, he could not have anticipated that fluorescent bulbs would become a rare commodity, abandoned in favor of environmentally friendly CFL bulbs.

It was not his intention to think of these fluorescent tubes as precious and rare, and now conservators have to stock up on these things before they stop being manufactured and hold them in cold storage and treat them very tenderly because the only way we can keep this piece in our present is to conserve that past.