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NEWS RELEASE

MIT List Visual Arts Center

presents

Otto Piene: Lichtballett
October 21–December 31, 2011

Opening Reception: Thursday, October 20, 6-8PM
Pre-reception Artist Talk, 5:30PM, Bartos Theatre

Cambridge, MA-August, 2011. The MIT List Visual Arts Center is pleased to announce an exhibition of the light-based sculptural work of renowned media and environmental artist Otto Piene, (b. 1928, Bad Laasphe, Germany), highlighting the artist's pioneering exploration of art and technology. *Otto Piene: Lichtballett* will bring together several of the artist's light sculptures from the 1960s and 70s with two new works created especially for the exhibition.

Known for kinetic light environments and multimedia "sky art," Otto Piene was a founder, with Heinz Mack, of the influential Düsseldorf-based Group Zero in 1957. Pioneers of performance, kinetic, and environmental art, the group included artists such as Piero Manzoni, Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely, and Lucio Fontana. Piene was the first fellow of the MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) in 1968, and succeeded founder György Kepes as its director in 1974 until retiring in 1994.

First produced through the use of hand-operated lamps directed through perforated stencils, Piene's *Lichtballett* (light ballet) environments of kinetic light sculpture became mechanized in the 1960s. The first light machines consisted of revolving lamps, grids, globes, and discs operated by electric switchboards, causing "the steady flow of unfurling and dimming, reappearing, and vanishing light," as the artist explained. These machines evolved into kinetic sculptural environments of mechanized effects by the late 1960s. *Electric Rose* (1965), a major work from the MIT List Visual Arts Center collection, was included in Piene's first stateside exhibition, *Light Ballet*, at the Howard Wise Gallery in 1965. Restored for the present exhibition in close collaboration with the artist, the piece consists of a polished aluminum globe covered with 170 neon bulbs that pulsate light in four sequenced phases.

Along with *Electric Rose*, the exhibition will showcase several other significant early works. *Light Ballet on Wheels* (1965) consists of interior lamps that continuously project light through a revolving disk onto the ceiling and walls in varying forms. The sculpture *Electric Anaconda* (1965) is composed of seven black globes of decreasing diameter stacked in a column, light climbing up the column until completely lit. *Lichtballett* (2011), a site-specific wall-sculpture, and *One Cubic Meter of Light Black* (2010-11), two new works produced for the exhibition, continue the artist's decades-long investigation of light phenomena.

Synchronized into a choreographed installation, the exhibition highlights Piene's pioneering exploration of light as an artistic and communicative medium. An original score composed by the artist for his first light performances in the 1960s will accompany several special presentations of the light ballets throughout the duration of the exhibition. *Otto Piene: Lichtballett* will also be accompanied by a series of film screenings that document Piene's work and the history and performance of the light ballets through several decades.

About the Artist

A leading figure in kinetic and technology-based art, Otto Piene was born in Bad Laasphe, Germany in 1928. After studying painting and art education at the Academy of Art in Munich and the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, and philosophy at the University of Cologne, Piene founded the influential Group Zero in Düsseldorf with Heinz Mack in 1957. Pioneers of performance, kinetic, and environmental art, Zero included artists such as Piero Manzoni, Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely, and Lucio Fontana. Piene was the first fellow of the MIT Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) in 1968, succeeding founder György Kepes in 1974 as its director until retiring in 1994. Piene had his first solo exhibition in 1959 at Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf and has had numerous exhibitions and retrospectives, including at the Kunstmuseum im Ehrenhof, Düsseldorf, in 1996, and at the Prague City Gallery, Prague, in 2002. His works are included in nearly two hundred museums and public collections around the world including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Nationalgalerie Berlin; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and the MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Piene represented Germany at the Venice Biennale in 1967 and 1971, and exhibited at documenta in Kassel, Germany, in 1959, 1964, and 1977. Piene's *Centerbeam* (1977), a pioneering multimedia work created with a team of artists for *documenta 6*, was later exhibited on the National Mall in Washington, DC. For the closing ceremony of the 1972 Munich Olympics, Piene created *Olympic Rainbow*, a "sky art" piece comprised of five helium-filled tubes that flew over the stadium. Piene received the Sculpture Prize of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1996. He lives and works in Groton, Massachusetts, and Düsseldorf, Germany.

Otto Piene: Lichtballett is organized by João Ribas, Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

Funding for *Otto Piene: Lichtballett* has been generously provided by the David Bermant Foundation, the Barbara and Howard Wise Endowment for the Arts, the Goethe-Institut Boston, the Council for the Arts at MIT, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.



Directions: The MIT List Visual Arts Center is located in the Wiesner Building, 20 Ames Street, at the eastern edge of the MIT campus. It is in close proximity to Kendall Square, Memorial Drive, and the Longfellow Bridge.

By T, take the Red Line to the Kendall/MIT stop, follow Main Street west to Ames Street, turn left, and walk one block to the crosswalk. The MIT List Visual Arts Center housed, in a building identifiable by its white gridded exterior, will be on your left. Signage is on the building.

By car, coming across the Longfellow Bridge or from Memorial Drive, follow signs for Kendall Square. Limited metered parking is available on Ames Street. A parking garage is located at the Cambridge Center complex (entrance on Ames between Main and Broadway). Paid public parking is also available at the Marriott Hotel on Broadway.

Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Wednesday: 12-6PM; Friday-Sunday: 12-6PM; Thursday: 12-8PM; closed Mondays and major holidays. Additional Information: 617.253.4680 or <http://listart.mit.edu>

All exhibitions at the MIT List Visual Arts Center are free and open to the public.