

KEITH SONNIER – IN THE COSMOS OF COLOURS

A film by Marco Wilms

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in co-production with ARTE

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Verbindung RotGelbBlau, Münchner Rückversicherung Building, 2002

Ba-O-Ba, New National Gallery Berlin, 2002

Lichtweg, Munich International Airport, 1989 - 92

Double Monopole, Kansas City Airport, Kansas 2006/07

In the last 100 years electrical lighting has revolutionized our world to an extent matched by few other technologies. Since the early twentieth century artificial light has illuminated our streets, shop windows, advertising signs and houses. We inhabit cities and gardens of light, and a paradise of artificial light has evolved in the aftermath of our victory over darkness. As a medium for visual messages artificial light soon attracted the attention of artists, who have worked with light bulbs, fluorescent lamps, neon lighting and high-power searchlights since the 1920s.

The focus of art has shifted dramatically from the illusory representation of natural light towards the actual utilisation of artificial lighting. Light is a compelling and spectacular medium, and most viewers are unable to ignore the visual stimulus emanating from light art installations. Playing on the act of seeing, and the patterns and experience of human perception, light art provokes an immediate reaction in its viewers. Artists have illuminated landscapes and created autonomous, luminous objects and spaces. Light ambience, light kinetics, reflection, graphics, logo-culture,

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main office klopstockstraße 1 50968 köln germany

tel. +49. 221. 397 96 96

office berlin heinrich-roller-strasse 15 10405 berlin germany

tel. +49. 30. 695. 669. 10 fax +49. 30. 695. 669. 15 email info@gebrueder-beetz.de

and the play of art with natural phenomenon are themes around which gifted international light artists have created works of unbelievable intensity; interior installations on an occasionally grand scale, but in particular installations in exterior settings around a variety of artistic and architectural projects.

In the last twenty years Keith Sonnier has carried out numerous public interventions at the sites of historical and contemporary architecture in Europe and America. Some were temporary interventions, such as his work "Ba-O-Ba" at Berlin's New National Gallery in 2002, where he emphasised and extended the strict modernistic vocabulary of Mies van der Rohe's design, providing a new route toward an "understanding" of the architecture. Many other works by Keith Sonnier have been permanent installations, such as the 1 kilometre long "Lichtweg" (Light path) at Munich International Airport, the largest interior installation Sonnier has realised to date. The "Lichtweg" functions as a guide way through the airport, but is charged with atmosphere and constantly plays with the perceptual experiences of visitors and viewers. In 2002 he created a second permanent light installation in Munich; the "Verbindung RotBlauGelb" is a 143 metre long neon-lit corridor in red, blue and yellow tones. Both are interventions in existing architecture, created not as an attempt to simply revitalise architecture through art, but as a functional interaction between art and architecture - in this case the interventions guide our movement. Functionality is an important aspect of Sonnier's work, through which he defines a new role for art in relation to architecture. These two light paths will form the focal point of the episode. We will meet Keith Sonnier in his New York studio and meditate with him in the twilight hours before the backdrop of the Manhattan skyline. In Munich we will also talk to Sonnier about his "Lichtweg" at Munich Airport, and take a ride through the light tunnel on an airport buggy together with him.