



NICOLA
VASSELL

LIGHT
FORCES

RITA LETENDRE
& FRED EVERSLEY

NOV. 10 —
DEC. 17

Opening NOV. 10
5-8pm

Gallery Hours

Tuesday - Saturday, 10 am - 6 pm 138 10th Ave. New York, NY 10011

For press inquiries

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Light Forces: Rita Letendre and Fred Eversley

"Light, from the first shock at birth to the last breath, is life. Anyway, it has been my life!"

— Rita Letendre

"The original and ultimate source of all energy on earth is the sun." -

— Fred Eversley

Light Forces traces the creative rapport and friendship shared between Rita Letendre and Fred Eversley that began in the 1960s and continued for decades. Initially meeting in Los Angeles, Letendre and Eversley maintained an abiding fascination with light, exploring its experiential and conceptual properties through their work. If luminosity and vision were touchstones for artists working in Southern California in the 1960s, now codified under the rubric *Light and Space*, a close examination of Letendre's and Eversley's work reveals their distinctive innovations and a probing, singular focus on embodied perception.

Letendre arrived in Los Angeles in 1965, already an accomplished abstract painter. Recognized as a precocious talent in the dynamic Montreal art scene of the 1950s, Letendre became an adept *automatiste*—Quebec's response to abstract expressionism that was inflected with political undertones. Her work of the early 1960s manifests a fixation with the theme of light; paintings like *Solstice* (1962) blaze with an intensity that calibrates seasonal extremes with internal flames.

At California State University, Long Beach, Letendre executed a large outdoor mural that translated her textured paint application to a flat, monumental dimension. Arresting in its forthright presentation of painterly forms coalescing, *Sunforce* (1965) dominates the architecture, bridging two campus buildings and fronting a long passageway. Rectilinear and curvaceous black forms abrade, causing color to cascade—the mural serving as a collider. *Sunforce* was a declaration of ambition. It established how, in California, Letendre would develop formal solutions at a rapid rate, utilizing prior knowledge to pioneer new pictorial solutions.

Amidst this fertile cultural moment, Fred Eversley first encountered Rita Letendre. Eversley—a highly trained electrical engineer who moved to Los Angeles in 1963 to work for Wyle Labs to build acoustic laboratories for NASA's Apollo and Gemini missions—partially credits Letendre for his decision to become an artist. Following a car accident in 1967 and a long convalescence, Eversley's rapport with Letendre and her sculptor husband Kosso Eloul and their circle of friends led to his existential shift—directing scientific acumen toward aesthetic ends.

Once Eversley changed paths, he brought his science and technology background into his artistic practice. He quickly invented his first polyester resin spinning technique, utilizing centrifugal forces in molds attached to lathes and turntables. Through this method, he established his first body of work: transparent, multicolored cylindrical sections. These sophisticated early works led to Eversley's first solo show at the Whitney Museum in 1970, including the cathedral form *Untitled* (1969).

There is a metaphysical dimension to Eversley's work. The sculptures operate like portals, visual conductors that tint and shape vision, directing it through space. Spanning a range of subtle and vibrant hues, Eversley's chromatic reach encompasses the visible spectrum, conjuring different densities of the same color within specific works.

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Letendre's work, as it developed throughout the 1960s, moved toward an ever more precise assertion of color. With hard-edged intensity, vectors of color cleave total darkness in an angular, vertiginous space. Her painting developed a more complex geometry following her final move to Toronto in 1970, when Letendre began using the airbrush to achieve atmospheric, at times celestial, effects.

By the early 1970s, each artist had attained a signature formal vocabulary. Eversley's was the iconic parabolic lens, which he perfected over decades and continues to explore. The parabola is the only shape that focuses all forms of energy, including light, to a single focal point. It captures within itself an image of the surrounding environment, seeming both to project imagery while also being possessed of an internal energy source.

From his studio in Venice, California, Eversley pushed the boundaries of experimentation—exploring color combinations and the opacity of pigments, at times revealing traces of particles in liquid resin. Examples such as the swirling metallic black and gold lens from 2018 offer a scale-less, swirling cosmic image that materializes light within the orb.

When Eversley relocated in 2019 to his native New York, he was challenged to work with new dyes with different properties than his original media from the 1960s due to disruptions caused by the pandemic. Experimenting with these color saturations and spectral intensities, he achieved new chromatic effects. His most recent work in this exhibition, dating from 2021, is defined by a brilliant and nuanced density.

In 2022, Eversley returned to his foundational study of optical effects in his early cylindrical cut sections. He researched new materials and techniques in an effort to augment scale, seeking a grander bodily framework to allow viewers to interact with sunlight outside. The first monumental example of this larger-scale work is on view in his current career-spanning exhibition at the Orange County Museum of Art, where a transparent, vertical polyurethane sculpture assumes a corporeal dimension.

Letendre also elaborated her spectral vision through her paintings of the 1970s and 80s, creating public commissions on a grand scale that animated the urban environment, often on the exteriors of skyscrapers. In later years, her painting returned to re-engage the gestural, more tactile approach of her early work, infusing her directional, abstracted landscape motif with a gusty, elemental energy. Letendre remained highly productive throughout the past decades, until her passing in 2021.

Over the years, since their first meeting in Los Angeles in the mid-1960s, Letendre and Eversley remained in contact while living a continent apart, visiting when their paths crossed. By juxtaposing the works of these two distinct artists, one is afforded an opportunity to contrast their approaches to color and luminosity. Utilizing distinct media, Letendre and Eversley plumbed the depths of a life-spanning passion—the essence of light.

Through adjacency, it is possible to experience the unique formal achievements of these artists, each of whose contributions have been absent from conventional, mainstream art histories. This dual presentation of their work seeks to open a space for further interpretive possibilities, allowing the fertile early years of their development to be experienced and traced forward.

— David Moos

Light Forces was organized in collaboration with David Moos

November 10 — December 17 2022

Rita Letendre

Rita Letendre was born in Drummondville, Québec in 1928 to a Québécois father and Abenaki mother. She passed away in 2021 at 93 years old. Her work evolved in relation to various artistic movements in Montreal, including that of Paul-Émile Borduas' Automatistes. Her many exhibitions in Canada and abroad—she spent time in France, Italy, Israel and the United States before finally settling in Toronto in 1970—have made her a key artist of the country's postwar period. In 1954, her work was included in the major Automatiste exhibition *La matière chante*. Her first solo show took place at the Montreal gallery L'Échourie in 1955; later, in 1961, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts presented a selection of her large-sized works. Her artistic career has been characterized by a consistency of approach that has taken her from the structured, gestural abstraction of the 1950s and early 1960s to the hard-edge and geometric abstraction of the late 1960s and the 1970s, when she developed her preferred motif—the arrow. Since that time, her work has moved toward a new form of gesture through the oblique, in which the electrifying power of color and dynamic composition are constants. An artist of exemplary energy, she has worked with a wide variety of media and techniques, including oil, acrylic, casein, pastel, airbrushing and screen-printing. A number of large-scale outdoor murals that she executed in various locations in Canada and the United States between 1965 and 1980 further cemented her renown. She is the recipient of a 2010 Governor General's Award, the highest honor granted to Canadian visual artists.

Rita Letendre has been the subject of retrospectives at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (2002-03), the Art Gallery of Ontario (2017), and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection (2019). Throughout her career, she presented several solo exhibitions and participated in numerous group exhibitions in Canada, the U.S., Europe, Japan and Israel including at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec (2009) and Albright Knox Gallery (2010). She was a recipient of the Order of Canada (2005), the Governor-General's Award (2010), the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal (2012) and the Paul-Émile Borduas Award (2016).

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Fred Eversley

Fred Eversley (b. 1941, Brooklyn, New York) is a key figure in the development of contemporary art from Los Angeles during the post war period. Based in Venice Beach for many years, he synthesizes elements from several art historical movements associated with Southern California, including Light and Space, though his work is the product of a pioneering vision all his own, informed by lifelong studies on the timeless principles of light, space, time, and gravity. Prior to his becoming an artist he was an engineer who collaborated with NASA and major aerospace companies, designing high-intensity acoustical laboratories, which helped develop his interest in the parabola: the only shape that concentrates all forms of energy to a single focal point. His pioneering use of plastic, polyester resin, and industrial dyes and pigments reflects the technological advances that define the postwar period even as his work reveals the timeless inner workings of the human eye and mind. Eversley's abstract, three-dimensional meditations on color—including the luminous lens-like objects for which he is perhaps best known—entice the viewer to approach, prompting questions about how the biological and optical mechanics of sight determine how we see and understand each other, and communicate a kinetic, palpable sense of the mysterious presence of energy throughout the universe.

Eversley is the subject of a survey exhibition, *Fred Eversley: Reflecting Back (the World)*, at the Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, California, on view through January 15, 2023, and will be the subject of a forthcoming solo exhibitions at the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College, Claremont, California, in 2024. He has also been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts (2017); Art + Practice, Los Angeles (2016); National Academy of Science, Washington, D.C. (1981); Palm Springs Art Museum, California (1977); Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California (1976); and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1970). Recent group exhibitions include *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (2017 – 2020, traveled to five venues); *Space Shifters*, Hayward Gallery, London (2018); and *Water & Power*, curated by the late Noah Davis, Underground Museum (2018). His work is in the permanent collections of more than three dozen museums throughout the world, including Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas; Museum of Modern Art, New York; K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong; and Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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David Moos

David Moos is the president and founder of David Moos Art Advisory. Prior to founding DMAA in 2011, Moos was the Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2004-2011) and the Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama (1998-2004). He also served as the Chair of the Art Committee for Public Places at Toronto City Hall (2004-2010). He received a BA from McGill University, Montreal, and a PhD in Art History from Columbia University, New York. He has organized numerous traveling exhibitions and retrospectives, including *IAIN BAXTER&: Works 1958-2011* (2011-2012), *Julian Schnabel: Art and Film* (2010), *Wangechi Mutu: This You Call Civilization?* (2010), *The Shape of Colour: Excursions in Colour Field Art, 1950-2005* (2005), *Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio: Community Architecture* (2003), *Radcliffe Bailey: The Magic City* (2001), and *Jonathan Lasker: Selective Identity* (2000), among others, and published extensively. In 2020 he co-founded Museum Exchange, the first digital platform for art donations, allowing museums to access works of art being offered by collectors outside their established donor base.