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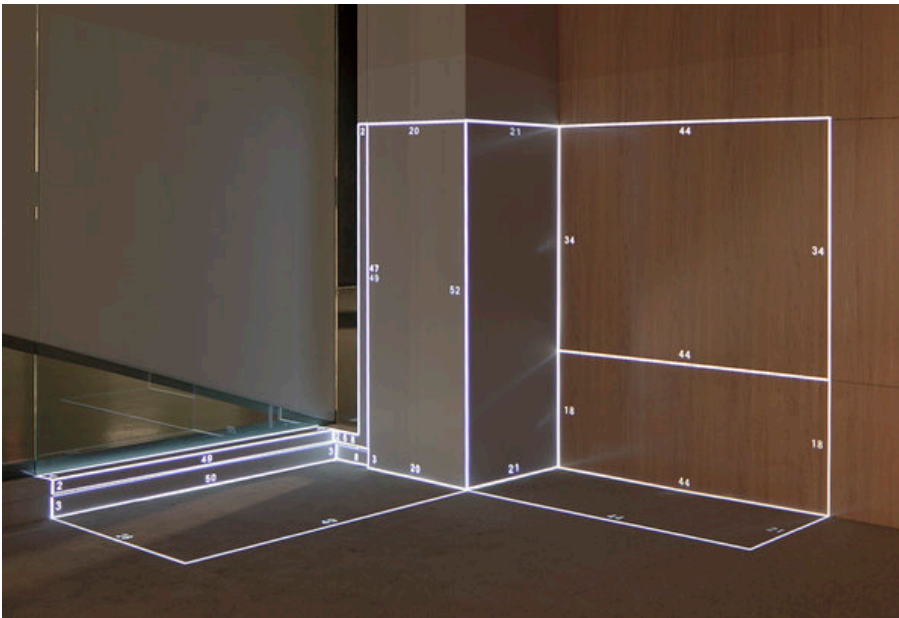
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CRITIC'S CHOICE

Review: YoungProjects' 'Presentism' induces a state of wonder in light

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"Dimensions (After Bochner)" by Pablo Valbuena at YoungProjects. (Young Projects)

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By Leah Ollman
April 11, 2014 | 11:00 a.m.

"Presentism: Light as Material" at YoungProjects is first and foremost a visual experience. The work by a dozen artists has plenty of conceptual heft and emotional resonance, but stakes its primary claim on our attention through optical means.

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This used to be a given in art, but for many decades now it's been just another option on the strategic menu. "Presentism" awakens a wistful gratitude for the direct sensual hit.

The show, intended to complement the James Turrell retrospective recently closed at LACMA, induces a state of wonder that often feels primal, inversely related to the sophistication of the technology used to achieve it. Most of the pieces, whether videos, projections, or light-driven sculptural installations, reverberate in the body with a distilled, low-tech purity.

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John Carpenter's "Trailers_Anemone" (2013) does this most explicitly, requiring the viewer's movement for the work to fully actualize. On a large screen, bright lights streaming luminous tails hover in a pulsing cluster. When a viewer standing in front of the screen takes a step or waves an arm, the swirling galaxy bursts into motion. The dots dive like comets, fanning out then regrouping, in response to the type and degree of human activity. Part celestial echo, part whimsical dance partner, the interactive projection is gently and thoroughly mesmerizing.

Jim Campbell's "Motion & Rest #2" (2002), the oldest work in the show and one of the simplest, telegraphs a fundamental and familiar aspect of the human condition -- the drive to persist.

Campbell has programmed the 768 LED lights on a roughly 2-foot square panel to present a continuous image of a figure walking, sometimes haltingly, as if over rough terrain. The generic, vaguely male form occasionally bends over from exhaustion, but pushes on with Sisyphean endurance. His forward momentum holds the eye. Recognition is immediate, and empathy reflexively follows.

In the seductive 2007 "Homage," by Stanley Casselman, a large acrylic panel incorporating programmed LEDs, Mark Rothko's ephemeral bands of color continually paint and repaint themselves in light. In "Monolithics/Peruvian Landscape" (2014), Refik Anadol brings to stirring life the angular planes and peaks of a relief-map sculpture through an hour-long looping projection that mimics, intensifies and schematizes the light effects of time's passage.

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Robin Fox's 2005 "Volta" translates sound via cathode ray oscilloscope into viscerally compelling, mutating patterns of greenish light. In another act of homage, Pablo Valbuena restages a Mel Bochner "Measurement" piece from the late '60s (done originally with black tape and press-on letters) in the ephemeral medium of light. A slim beam traces segments of the wall, corner and molding, rendering the architectural fragment as a transitory diagram and radically, magically redefining our physical relationship to the space.

Using the most up-to-date means, the artists in "Presentism" engage one of the oldest themes of human inquiry -- the power of light. Their high-tech efforts manage, often brilliantly, to bring us into intimate contact with the sensual



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YoungProjects, Pacific Design Center #230, 8687 Melrose Ave., (323) 377-1102, through April 29 (Closed temporarily through April 14). Closed Sunday and Monday. By appointment Saturday.
www.youngprojectsgallery.com

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