

For immediate release

DOUG WHEELER

Encasements

January 23 – March 5, 2016



Untitled, 1968
Installation view, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1969
Photo courtesy Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
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David Zwirner is pleased to present *Doug Wheeler: Encasements*, the artist's third solo exhibition with the gallery, on view at 537 West 20th Street in New York. This exhibition represents the most comprehensive presentation to date of this important body of work, and will comprise five "encasements," including a rarely seen "center light" work. Presented here in an open configuration, viewers will have the unprecedented opportunity to consider these singular works in relation to one another and to compare the distinct luminous atmospheric effects and subtle tonal variations that characterize each of them. Previously, no more than two encasements have been shown together, as in exhibitions at Fort Worth Art Center Museum, Texas (1969), Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1969), and Tate Gallery, London (1970), and accordingly this exhibition aims to underscore their ongoing significance.

A pioneering figure in what is often referred to as the Light and Space movement in Los Angeles during the 1960s and 1970s, Wheeler is noted for his innovative constructions and installations that manipulate the perception and experience of space, volume, and light. First conceived between 1967 and 1969, the artist's "light encasements" evolved out of his longstanding experimentations with fabricated acrylic and neon, and consist of large panels of vacuum-formed plastic with neon lighting embedded along their inside edges. Installed in a white room with all architectural detail and ambient light

eliminated, the light paintings appear to dematerialize, immersing viewers in a luminous space where light seems to have almost particulate mass.

Wheeler created only twenty encasements of this type in addition to two variant center light encasements, one of which can be found in the collection of the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California, and the other of which will be presented publicly for the first time in this exhibition. In the latter works, the neon light emanates from the center of the panel, rather than its edges, creating a more condensed luminosity. Unbounded by any kind of frame, the light appears to dematerialize from its source and hover within the space, thus generating a distinctive physiological experience. By shifting the work's construction in this way, Wheeler provides an effective counterpoint to his own practice and deepens our perceptual experience.

When they were first realized, these works marked a significant transitional moment in the artist's practice, completing his move from creating discrete objects to conceptualizing the immersive environments for which he has become known. As in his overall body of work, Wheeler's encasements challenge the idea of the work of art as a tangible aesthetic object by providing the viewer with a total sensorial experience. Of Wheeler's works, John Coplans, curator of the artist's 1968 solo exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum, noted, "they clearly reveal a highly mature esthetic and demonstrate that he is a satellite of no other artist...[Wheeler's] primary aim as [an artist] is to reshape or change the spectator's perception of the seen world. In short, [his] medium is not light or new materials or technology, but *perception*."¹

¹ John Coplans, *Doug Wheeler*. Exh. bro. (Pasadena: Pasadena Art Museum, 1968), n.p.

Doug Wheeler's (b.1939) first solo exhibitions were held at the Pasadena Art Museum (1968); Ace Gallery, Venice, California and Vancouver (1969); Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf (1970); and Galleria Salvatore Ala, Milan (1975). His work has been included in a number of important exhibitions, including *Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, Doug Wheeler* (Tate Gallery, London, 1970); *Rooms* (The Institute for Art and Urban Resources at P.S.1, Long Island City, New York, 1976); *Ambiente/Arte* (37th Venice Biennale, 1976); *The First Show: Paintings and Sculpture from Eight Collections 1940-1980* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1983); *Sunshine and Noir: Art in LA 1960-1997* (Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk, Denmark, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, and Armand Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 1997-1998); and *Percepciones en transformación: La Colección Panza del Museo Guggenheim Bilbao (Changing Perceptions: The Panza Collection at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2000-2001)*, among others. More recently, Wheeler's work was the subject of a solo exhibition at 49 Nord 6 Est – FRAC Lorraine, Metz, France (2012) and has been presented in numerous group exhibitions including *Singular Forms (Sometimes Repeated): Art from 1951 to the Present* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2004); *Time & Place: Los Angeles 1957-1968* (Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2008-2009); *Primary Atmospheres: Works from California 1960-1970* (David Zwirner, New York, 2010); *Phenomenal: Light, Space, Surface*, a part of the Getty Research Institute's *Pacific Standard Time* initiative (Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 2012); *Light Show* (Hayward Gallery, London, 2013); *Seeing Through Light: Selections from the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Collection* (Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, 2014-2015); *The Avant-Garde Collection* (Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California, 2014-2015); and *Looking at Tomorrow: Light and Language from the Panza Collection, 1967-1990* (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, 2015-2016). In 2014, Wheeler presented a new environment at Palazzo Grassi in Venice in conjunction with the group exhibition *The Illusion of Light*.

David Zwirner has represented the work of Doug Wheeler since 2011. His previous solo exhibitions with the gallery took place in 2012 and 2014. Work by the artist is held in major museum collections, including the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; and the Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf. Wheeler lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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