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Dan Flavin

Rainer Fuchs, Karola Kraus, Stefan Neuner

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The years 1955-1965 saw artists wreaking havoc with the parameters of painting. If Abstract Expressionists had proposed art as the manipulation of paint on a flat plane, the American artist Dan Flavin further refined art as the manipulation of light itself. Starting out as a convert to Abstract Expressionism in the late 1950s, Flavin quickly disposed of painting's "frame," as sculptural light object. He first used fluorescent light in a 1961 series of square boxes with lights attached to the sides, titled *Icons*. The spiritual connotations of the title were soon eschewed for a radical materiality: "It is what it is, and it ain't nothin' else," he famously once said of his work: "everything is clearly, openly, plainly delivered." By using such an everyday material (neon tubing) and arranging it in simple compositions (in rows, or as diagonals, grids, right angles, arcs), Flavin attained a powerful combination of ordinariness and grandeur, and a purity on a par with the modernist artists to whom he dedicated works--Brancusi, Mondrian, Tatlin. This catalogue offers the broadest appraisal of Flavin's achievement to date. With 200 color plates, it traces his development, from the early painted objects to the first neon tubes, beginning with the "Diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Constantin Brancusi)," and beyond. Also included here are his much admired drawings and prints.
Dan Flavin (1933-1996) was born in New York to Irish-Catholic parents. During military service in 1954-55, he was trained as a meteorological technician; returning to New York in 1956, he studied art at the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts and at Columbia University. Following his development of neon sculpture, Flavin's first museum exhibition was held at the St Louis Art Museum in 1973. Just two days before his death in November 1996, Flavin completed the design for his famous installation at the Menil Collection in Houston.

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