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LEADERS IN LIGHT

With reference to the work of Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin during the development of Light Art in the sixties

by

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INTRODUCTION

Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin were among the first to incorporate light sources into their work as an essential part of the piece, and to continue using artificial light in this way. They emerged as forerunners in the use of light in art during the sixties, and their work to the present still acknowledges the importance of light in art. Certainly before the sixties there were artists who used light sources in their work and questioned the use of actual light in art, but these were mainly minor endeavours. Chryssa Vardea was the first to use light as a major element in her work and would continue using it, followed almost immediately by Dan Flavin with his fluorescents. After these two artists followed a whole group of artists working with light during the sixties, which broke down the traditional barriers of craftsmanly skill and the hallmarks of Fine Art so that light art is still a strong presence today, and not just a phase. The probability of light art being conceived and existing without Chryssa Vardea or Dan Flavin is quite possible and it was in fact inevitable. These two artists, contributed more than any others to the use of light in art during the sixties and were undoubtedly of certain influence during this time and on into the seventies.

This Thesis aims to prove these above points that Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin gave rise to light art during the sixties, and that they were influenced and of influence

at this time. The Thesis will also investigate the work of both artists and explore the connections between the two, both using the same medium but in such different ways. To explain these points the thesis will be divided into four chapters, the first discussing the art culture of 1960's New York, the second and third discussing the life and work of Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin respectively, and the final chapter exploring the contrasts and comparisons between the two artists.

In discussing the work of the sixties, in particular in New York, where both Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin worked, it will also be crucial to investigate certain movements and events which predate the sixties, these having an effect on the development of the work of Chryssa Vardea, Dan Flavin or other light artists. It is also necessary to look at other art works containing light whether before or during the sixties, and to discuss some of the other artists who worked with light in that decade. Pop art and minimalist art will also be discussed here to be related to Chryssa Vardea's and Dan Flavin's work, and the effect that both movements had on the development of light art.

After investigating the sixties, it's art and movements, a description of the life and work of both artists shall follow. Their lives, their work and their relationship with a movement or group during the sixties, is talked of here and one is aware of the major contribution that each artist made to the evolvement of

actual light as an important factor in art, and a medium which can actually become essential rather than peripheral.

Subsequent to the life and work of each artist being discussed, contrasts and comparisons between the two are made. This evaluation of the two includes their life, work and the movements that they were closely connected with in the sixties. Both artists being the same age, working during the sixties in the same place, New York, not to mention the common connection of the use of the same medium, light makes it not out of context to talk of these two artists, so different in their ways, in the same essay.

CHAPTER 1 - THE SIXTIES

The work of both Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin blossomed at the beginning of the sixties, but before each actually reached this stage there was a lot of movement within the art culture of New York, where the two worked. Therefore it would be sensible to look at the earlier influences first before the sixties are discussed in any great detail.

Starting with light, as this is the greatest connection between Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin, one must go back to the early twentieth century. Between the years of 1923-30 the constructivist Läslö Moholy-Nagy, completed his *Light-space Modulator*, this was the first electrically powered sculpture that emitted light. With this structure Läslö Moholy-Nagy was to stir the minds of later artists and spur on the development of light and kinetic art in the sixties. Läslö Moholy-Nagy did not, however, realize the potential in the artificial light source known as neon, which was at the time of the *Light-space Modulator* experiencing a boom, especially in New York. A recent discovery by Georges Claude in Paris in 1910, after decades of experiments, neon first appeared in use in 1912 in a Parisian barbers. In 1923 two signs bought in Paris and installed in a Packard showroom in Los Angeles, caused major attraction, and it is said that large numbers turned out to see it, some travelling the breath of the United States.[1] By 1930 neon was in full swing and its amazing that it took almost fifty years before artists recognised

its potential, another irony here is that by then neon was despised and classed cheap and most shops during the fifties and sixties threw out their neon signage onto the junkpile. It is interesting to note at this point that Dadaists employed mundane objects for shock value, neon at this stage would have also had shock value in art. Other areas where it is surprising that neon wasn't used are with the constructivists, who sought to integrate art with the machine and had a great interest in science and technology, in the Bauhouse where they explored what Gyory Kepes termed "the fluid power of light in action", and where Oskar Schlemmer attempted his theatre workshop, to dematerialize space by changing colours and lights and then there was Thomas Wilfred who worked with projected light from the thirties on. Apart from minor once-off endeavours however, Lucio Fontana, at the time questioning space in his work[2], used neon in a type of three-dimensional drawing fashion, the neon had that fluidity that other light sources did not have, although for Lucio Fontana this was just a phase. It was partly because of this "fluidity" that other light sources didn't have that urged Chryssa Vardea to try the medium, with fluidity she was able to recreate neon signage with her own expressive qualities. Chryssa Vardea wasn't the only artist at this time to use neon, many of the Pop artists[3] rescued neon from the "junkpile", just as they had rescued almost anything with a cheap, lowly public view, Chryssa Vardea however, was the first to use it regularly and as a serious part of the works development. Dan Flavin the other major figure in the use of light during the

sixties, had an interest in the work of Oskar Schlemmer, whom I have already mentioned as an experimenter of the dematerialization of space using changing colours and lights. Dan Flavin stayed away from the "fluid" neon and instead used the static and prefabricated fluorescent light for reasons that will be discussed in more detail in chapter three, but basically Dan Flavin was a minimalist and preferred fluorescent because of its impersonal and non-humane image, fluorescents even came in standard sizes in every city internationally, this reinforced his minimalist ideal of non-contact on behalf of the artist.[4]

Other artists to begin to experiment and work with light at this time include Stephen Antonakos, Nicholas Schöffer, Kieth Sonnier and Julio le Parc. Stephen Antonakos was the working opposite of Chryssa Vardea. Both worked in neon but whereas Chryssa Vardea worked in the figurative, Stephen Antonakos worked in the abstract, and while Chryssa Vardea's lights were static his were using transformers to program his lights to go on and off in various patterns. Chryssa Vardea then began to use this method of programming her tubes, and Stephen Antonakos then changed his way and ceased programming his works and left the viewer immersed in brilliant hues of neon (Fig 1). Like Chryssa Vardea though, he also experienced a revelation while observing the neon flamboyance of Times Square. What makes the work of Stephen Antonakos different from that of Chryssa Vardea's is that he used neon to create an aesthetically structured environment rather than taking the commercial images and text into his work.

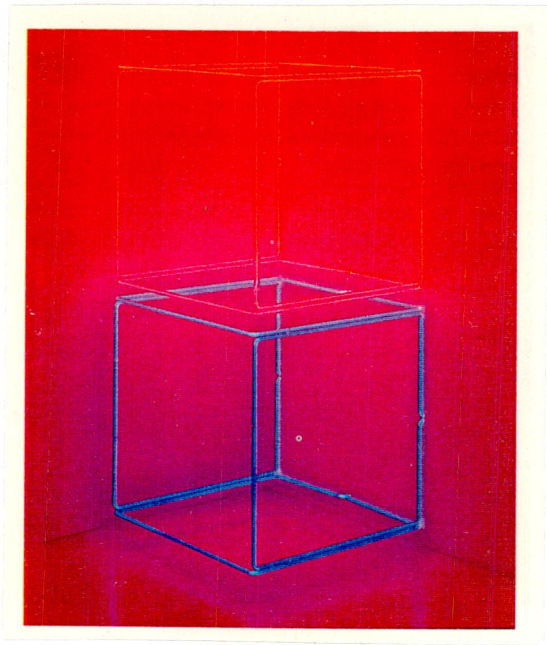

Fig. 1. Stephen Antonakos, Red Box over Blue Box, 1973.

Another artist to work with light at the time was the Hungarian-born, Nicholas Schöffer, who worked in the constructivist mode. His pieces consist of a central core from which branches a variety of perpendicular elements whose lines and planes sculpt a virtual or apparent volume. The sculpture is controlled by an electronic brain, which turns the piece making it reflect light in a totally random manner, acknowledging all kinds of luminary or sonic influences from without (Fig 2). This work of Nicholas Schöffer's is not unlike that of Läszlö Moholy-Nagy. As Jack Burnham has argued in *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (1968), art works that exist by virtue of modern cybernetics - as Nicholas Schöffer's do - imitate life, as traditional sculpture always did. However it is not appearance that they mime but, rather the human organisms sentient capacity to respond to external stimuli, Kieth Sonnier was fascinated by the abstracted, and keeping his information in a real twentieth century machine-age context. In using neon, he would exploit its fluidity as a drawing medium, like other neon artists such as Lucio Fontana and Chryssa Vardea. Kieth Sonnier used neon and bulbs together then, in the machine-age context, would leave the cables and transformers, which make the piece run, in view of the spectator (Fig. 3). Julio le Parc, also at work during the sixties, didn't so much include artificial light sources such as fluorescent, neon or bulb light directly as objects in his works, but instead used metal, perspex and glass to reflect light or cast shadows, nevertheless his experiments with light are important to the growing use of actual light

Fig. 2. Nicolas Schöffer, Chronos 8, 1967-68.

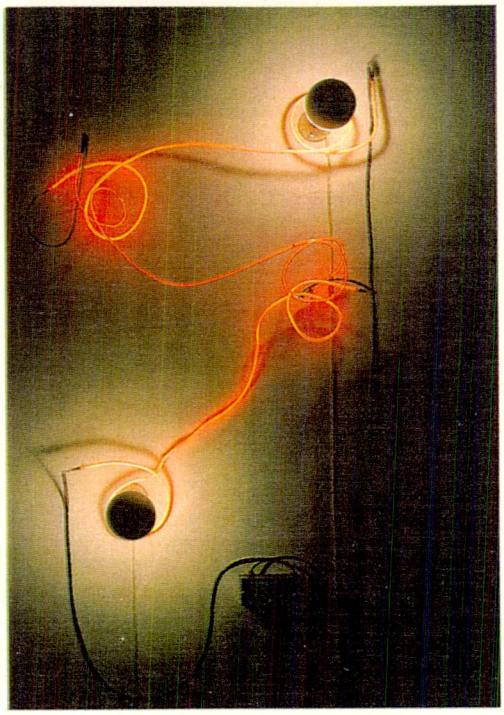

Fig. 3. Keith Sonnier, Neon Wrapping Incandescent Light: Triple Loop, 1969.

as a medium in works at that time. He energetically passed from one experiment to another in every aspect of light, movement and illusion, progressing constantly in his thirst of knowledge on light. Julio le Parc would create, sometimes, murals of reflected light and shadows using such materials as perspex cubes and metal mobiles, some of this work has been an influence later in the work of Christian Boltanski. Lights with their movement and some with controlling transformers were sometimes connected with performance art, Julio le Parc seems to have done more to strengthen this link than other artists concerned with light at the time. His viewers were an important part of the piece, in fact in some of his works viewers were finding themselves crawling through labyrinths, rolling balls, wearing distorting glasses, sitting in collapsible chairs or wearing spring loaded shoes. This string of artists all worked with light and formed part of the art culture of the sixties, all of which may have influenced or been influenced or merely developed at the same time as Chryssa Vardea or Dan Flavin.

The development of Chryssa Vardea's and Dan Flavin's work was influenced greatest by two of the major movements of the sixties, Pop Art and Minimalism, and the trend after Abstract Expressionism to produce sculptural pieces rather than painterly ones, was also a general factor in their development. Op, Kinetic, Performance and Assemblage art were all movements also active at the time, and each penetrated, to some extent, almost every other movement, even in the work of Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin

connections to these can be made. Optical and kinetic art had a strong connection to those using light. Dan Flavin and Chryssa Vardea being no exceptions. Chryssa Vardea portraying the Times Square sky with its neon signage blinking on and off, used transformers to control light patterns and thus creating a strong link to Kinetic art. Dan Flavin on the other hand was a more static artist, but can be connected to Op art with his disruption of the space in the exhibition rooms. Using light he enlarged walls, highlighted usually disregarded features of a room or eliminated a corner. Assemblage art can be related to the work of Chryssa Vardea as an influence, in that she would actually root through the scrapheaps outside the backs of signage shops looking for material that she might use. Chryssa Vardea's early work of the late fifties contains many pieces made with found objects, even her later work which may not have contained found material had an assembled look off of it. When looking at the chaos of Times Square she developed a confusing image by overlapping in the work, giving it a very thrown-together look which resembles some of the work of assemblage artists. The assemblage artists were collectors and their favourite objects to collect were cheap and non-art. Dan Flavin, just before his discovery of fluorescent lights, was a fanatical collector and scavenger, a hobby he still keeps up, but what most links him to assemblage art is his use of cheap, non-art objects such as his fluorescent lights. His connection to assemblage differs from that of Chryssa Vardea, as his work wasn't resembling that of an assemblage

artist but its his use of the common household object that links him.

One aspect of the visual arts that linked all the major movements of the sixties together was the decline in painting and resurgence of sculpture. Frank Stella gradually moved from painting to his black, aluminium and copper pictures and these reacted against their own painterly painting. Clement Greenberg can here be held partially responsible, although things were heading in the general direction of sculpture anyhow. Clement Greenberg called for a totally autonomous art - an art purged of everything foreign to its own inherent physical nature - and by declaring that only in sculpture would it be feasible to realize an aesthetic object free of all "dishonest" allusiveness and extraneous metaphor. Abstract and near-abstract sculpture had gathered some momentum between the late thirties and early forties and then slowed down in the later forties and in the fifties due to Abstract Expressionism. It was the fear that if it, sculpture, became markedly clean-drawn and geometrical, it would look too much like machinery, and Abstract Expressionism painting with its aversion to sharp definitions inspired this fear, painting at this time was becoming much more self-confident so the look of accident and viod took the lead over the geometrical. In the work of Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg and Ad Reinhardt the question of the boundary of art and non-art was raised. So in the sixties, given that the initial look of non-art was no longer available to painting, since even an

unpainted canvas now presented itself as a picture, the borderline between art and non-art had to be sought elsewhere as painting had exhausted this avenue. Artists now looked toward the three dimensionals as this is where sculpture and everything material that was not art was. Sculpture took preference to artists at this point as painting in the sixties was so electably art. This debate went on through the sixties with one writer declaring that since painting could never match the visual intensity radiating from abstract works made, like much of Pop Art and all of Minimalism, of "actual materials, actual colour and actual space", it was doomed to die.

Proto-pop (Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg) and Pop did a lot of flirting with the three-dimensional. Assemblage did more than that, but seldom escaped a stubbornly pictorial context. It was perhaps minimalism that broke down the boundaries of the pictorial aspect in sculpture, more than any other sixties movement and at the same time rejecting the sixties predecessor which was so painterly. Barbara Rose, one of the movements apologists, stated this fact in an article in 1965 when she spoke of minimal sculpture, "whose blank, neutral, mechanical impersonality contrasts so violently with the romantic, biographical Abstract Expressionist style which preceded it". The minimalists, as with mondrian, believed that the work should be completely preconceived in the mind before its execution, to them art was a force to impose upon things its rational order and was not about self expression. The term "Minimal" seems to imply that what is

minimal about Minimal art is the art itself, but in fact there is nothing minimal about the art, if anything it is "maximal". What is minimal about Minimal art, especially when compared with Abstract Expressionism or Pop Art, is the means and not the art. Minimal Art was not a sudden jump into the opposites of Abstract Expressionism as the above writing might suggest, but rather an expansion of a narrow bridge that exited Abstract Expressionism and its era. So these signposts since the late forties that suggested the arrival of minimal art were the link between Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism, and between painting and sculpture. Even when Abstract Expressionism was in its prime Barnett Newman produced the painting *Abraham* in 1949 after his father's death, it consisted of just a single black stripe on a black background. The sixteen Americans show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1959 contained works by Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Frank Stella, the last exhibiting a haunting quartet of paintings consisting of nothing but symmetrical pinstripes. Also just prior to the sixties were Ad Reinhardt's symmetrical one colour paintings, then in 1960 he produced the series of cruciform black squares. Yves Klein's all-blue monochromes and Robert Rauschenberg's bare white canvases of 1952, two more examples. These all seemed to test the limits of art but were all essentially painting at the limit. It was time for the three-dimensional. With sculpture the minimalists dealt with the actual space and real materials. Self expression was void in their works, the minimalists using prefabricated materials without human touch. Composition

was now a less important factor than scale, light, colour, surface or shape, or relations to the environment. In a minimalist work the environment frequently becomes as it were the pictorial field.

> "Successful work in this direction differs from both previous sculpture (and from objects) in that it's focus is not singularly inward and exclusive of the context of its spatial setting. It is less introverted in respect to its surroundings. Sometimes this is achieved by literally opening up the form in order that the surroundings must of necessity be seen with the piece".[5]

This use of the surrounding environment is crucial to the work of Dan Flavin, whose work is the space of the room in which it is shown. Also in the work of Carl Andre whose bricks do not exist as art objects without the gallery institution, and which rely also on the gallery space for positioning of the brick, rather like Dan Flavin's positioning of fluorescents. Donald Judd and Robert Morris were the main forerunners in Minimalism with Dan Flavin and Carl Andre. Donald Judd, in his influential articles *Local History* (1964) and *Specific Objects* (1965), makes clear the inspiration he had found in Frank Stella's Aluminium and Copper paintings, but argued that Frank Stella's qualities would work better in a more three-dimensional context. Donald Judd's characteristic form (which he found in 1964), was a relief-like arrangement of open modular boxes, fastened to the wall in vertically or horizontally lines, with regular intervals between each unit (Fig. 4). Like the work of Dan Flavin's they required no base and had a

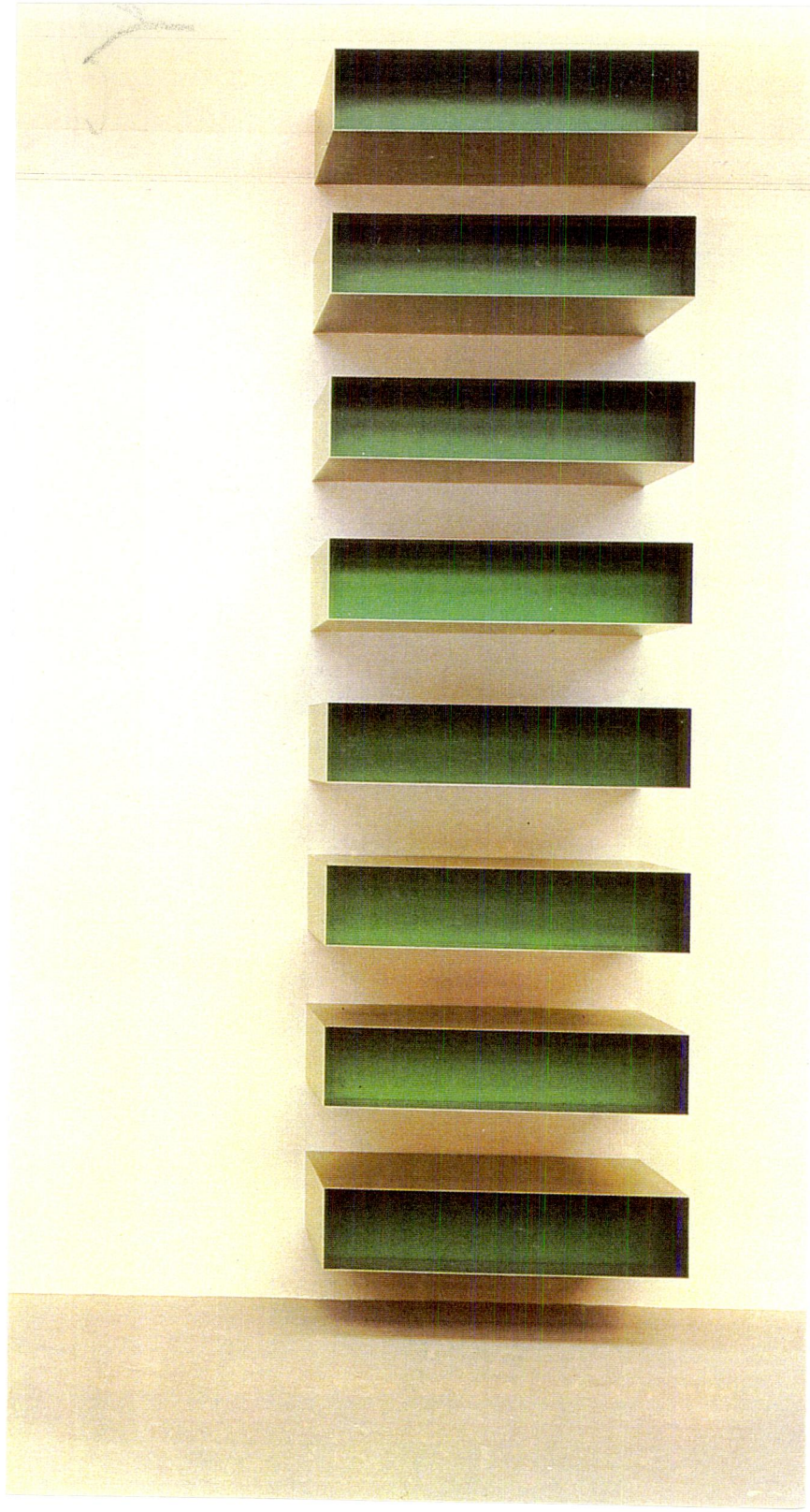

Fig. 4. Donald Judd, Untitled, 1978.

gravity-defying lightness, they were completely unrepresentational of the human figure and were made of a prefabricated material. In Donald Judd's case galvanised iron, bearing none of the humanist associations attached to wood, marble, bronze or even the hand-welded metals of David Smith. Those boxes look like they're shell-like and empty, because that's what they are, empty, this philosophy of "what you see is what you get"[6], seems to run through all minimalist work, especially Dan Flavin's work who this quote was taken from. The difference between Donald Judd and Dan Flavin, and Robert Morris and Carl Andre, is that the latter two produce a more gravity bound sculpture. Robert Morris also was a disbeliever in colour contrary to Dan Flavin who used colour from the beginning in the *Diagonal*, although he did produce works of just white light. Donald Judd began without colour but soon began to introduce it, Carl Andre's bricks were brown but had they been colourless he would have used them just the same. *L-Beams*, were industrially smooth in finish, looking like mass-produced standardised elements used in heavy construction, but not all of Robert Morris's work was so static. Robert Morris's biggest interest was in non-art materials, such as felt, thread, earth, rubber, zinc and so on. One work consisted of just filling up the gallery floor of scattered non-art materials, such as those just listed, these had to be redeployed each time the work was moved to a different place. This attacked the high-art ideals as it shattered the idea of a static, inclusive, introverted piece of work, Morris even went on to produce a

piece called *Steam Cloud* which was, as the name suggests, a cloud of steam. Like Dan Flavin and the other minimalists Robert Morris used anti-high art materials and these same materials also didn't exhibit the artist's hand in the way other materials may have.

Chryssa Vardea, although using light like Dan Flavin, had a totally different purpose, but it is more difficult to actually place her in a movement or group. She was however, influenced by some of the different happenings of the sixties and probably most of all the Pop Art movement with which she is sometimes associated with, but as Leo Castelli explained, "She wasn't really involved in Pop Art"[7], but then goes on to say, "what's very important in her work, as in that of Jasper Johns is words and letters (Fig 5).[8] Chryssa Vardea early on was drawn to printed images, works taken from the media, newspapers and signs, as she put it the "Bombardment of senses". It is this fascination with media and the mass produced imagery that strongly connects her to Pop artists as opposed to other movements or as an uncatagorised artist. The words and letters in her work of the sixties is constantly repeated and varied all the time as in the work *Americanoom* of 1963. This seems to be influenced, distantly, by Andy Warhol's *Campbells tins* or his *Marlyn Monroe's* but she uses text instead of imagery. It has to be noted that at the time of Chryssa Vardea's development to her characteristic style, the movement of Pop was in its prime and Leo Castelli also states that Chryssa Vardea "has always been attuned, as artists must be to the time that she is working in".[9]

Fig. 5. Jasper Johns, Painted Bronze, 1960.

Although Chryssa Vardea produces her own lexicon of neon language from signage and does not directly portray any particular company, the work still retains that mass produced, mass identifiable look that relates to Pop art. American artists have taken a leading role in mass produced imagery and also in the development of using light at this time. Sometimes the frontier between Pop Art and Kinetic Art in their work becomes uncertain and this is the case with artists such as Indiana, Billy Apple and of course Chryssa Vardea.

The movements of the sixties contributed much to the development of the work of both Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin. As part of these movements both artists are responsible for the influence that these movements had on the seventies art culture. Dan Flavin and his minimalist brethren with their use of actual material, actual light and actual space, were already on their way towards sculpture liberated into a total, out of doors environment, this was to be a major step towards earthworks, a post-modern development more fully identified with the seventies. Chryssa Vardea's work on the other hand offered an inspiring model and suggested the three ways in which neon art was to go, firstly that of words and images, secondly that of light and colour and thirdly that of kinetic and performance art.

CHAPTER 2 - CHRYSSA VARDEA

Chryssa Vardea was born in Athens in 1933. She experienced the ordeals of World War II, further complicated by the turmoil of civil war and the suppression of communism. She first pursued studies in the field of social problems, and at nineteen she was sent as a representative of the Greek Ministry of Social Welfare to the Dodecanese Islands. After this she worked on the island of Zante, which had been devastated by an earthquake. The children here remained without shelter, but the state found the money to restore the monasteries. The accompanying frustration and disillusionment with government bureaucracy led her to abandon social work in disgust. She returned to Athens and began to devote herself entirely to painting in which she had already made earlier attempts under the guidance of her teacher, Angbelos Prokopion, these ventures being of abstract painting. Apart from these attempts Chryssa Vardea also recalls some small pieces that she constructed in plaster and iron wire.

At the age of twenty, Chryssa Vardea left Athens for Paris in 1953. She stayed there for not too long. She spent a brief spell at the Académie de la Grande Chaumiére and she also met André Breton and Max Ernst, members of the post-war Surrealist group. Moving to San Francisco she entered study again, this time at the California School of Fine Arts. Again however, she did not stay too long, for by the end of 1954 she was in New York.

In New York Chryssa Vardea was immediately struck by the visual dynamics of this great urban environment. For her technological and urban environment the world of mass communications and mass production, have become a culture of unlimited potential for self-expression. New York's Urban calligraphy affected her the most with its letters, symbols and lights, as she called the "bombardment of senses". Chryssa Vardea was very excited about her new found inspiration and had this to say;

> "I saw Times Square with its lights and its letters, and I realized it was as beautiful and as difficult to do as Japanese calligraphy .... In Times Square, the sky is like the gold of Byzantine mosaics or icons. It comes and goes in the foreground instead of remaining in the background".[1]

It is between this "calligraphy" and "icon" that Chryssa Vardea places her work. So in 1955 she began to work on an approach called *static light*. Her early work of this time includes the tablets of 1956, cast in bronze or aluminium. These show alignments of letters alternating with empty spaces, rather like epigraphic inscriptions. Throughout this time she was using letters and multiple imagery, repeated, it was because of this that Sam Hunter asked her to exhibit in *Le Nouveau Réalisme à Paris et à New York*, at Jean Larcade's Gallery Rive Droitein, Paris, where she was represented with, among others, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Yves Klein, that was in 1961. Also contemporary with the "Tablets" were *Bach* (1956) and *Requiem* (1959) which, as their titles suggest, derive their inspiration

from music. The plaster works are aligned in modulated relief, and in *Bach* the letters B,A,C and H each repeated four times side by side. Such a repetitive treatment of the letter in relief is highly characteristic of Chryssa Vardea's work, this procedure foreshadows the 1962-67 period of neon-metal works where she would repeat letters in fours. A work of 1956 entitled *Flight of the Birds* is composed of irregular square spots, representing closed formation migrating birds. Each spot is cast in aluminium and painted white, then set off against a white background panel. Its multiple repetitions evokes the swarm of electric lights that creates the luminous fields of advertising signs. She used this technique again and again up until 1960. The fragment was another of Chryssa Vardea's favourite techniques. It started in 1957 with her fragments of newspapers and similar material as in her *Classified Ads* (1959) and the *Magic Carpet* (1962).

> "Since 1957 I have worked in fragments. Entire areas of my Newspaper paintings were covered with fragments of painted material. I repeat these fragments and in their entity I reach reality. I cover the entire area with a fragment repeated precisely. This is the way my mind works, it has many intersections and impacts. Diagrams occur between the conscious and the unconscious, instinctive directions.[2]

Chryssa Vardea had embraced the neon signs, large advertisements, sculpted letters and flashing symbols on arrival to New York and she began to work along the lines of an artist inspired from such influences. The use of neon in her work was only a question of time. Two works

executed between 1961 and 1962 mark the beginning of the use of the neon in her sculpture, the neon frame in *Times Square Puzzle* defines the end of the newspaper paintings, and the luminous letters of the word *air* in *Times Square Sky* anticipate the metal and neon conjunction that led to *The Gates to Times Square*, Chryssa Vardea's masterpiece. From when she had begun the *fragment* paintings, she had explored the sculptural potential in the process by assembling word fragments, materials that she found discarded from the sign shops or that she sculpted herself out of scrap metal. This resulted in dense compositions of heavily reworked layers of lettering, a technique that she mastered and was to become so characteristically hers. It was with this knowledge of neon and the use of assembled layers in her work that Chryssa Vardea entered into the most productive period of her life, that of the years 1962-68, when she also created Magnum Opus, a monumental homage to Times Square entitled *The Gates to Times Square*. After *Times Square Puzzle* and *Times Square Sky* three pieces in the same spirit show the stages of evolution to the work of *The Gates*, these are *Americanoom* (1963), *Positive/Negative* (1965) and *Delicatessen* (1965).

Americanoom is based on the repetition of script in different adaptations. The work is divided into six panels, two panels vertically and three horizontally, on which the words, from fragments of advertising signs, (R)OOM, AIR, TRY and NEW are placed on four sections in cursive script, and on two of the lower panels (in the centre and to the left) is the capital text CAFETE(RIA) and

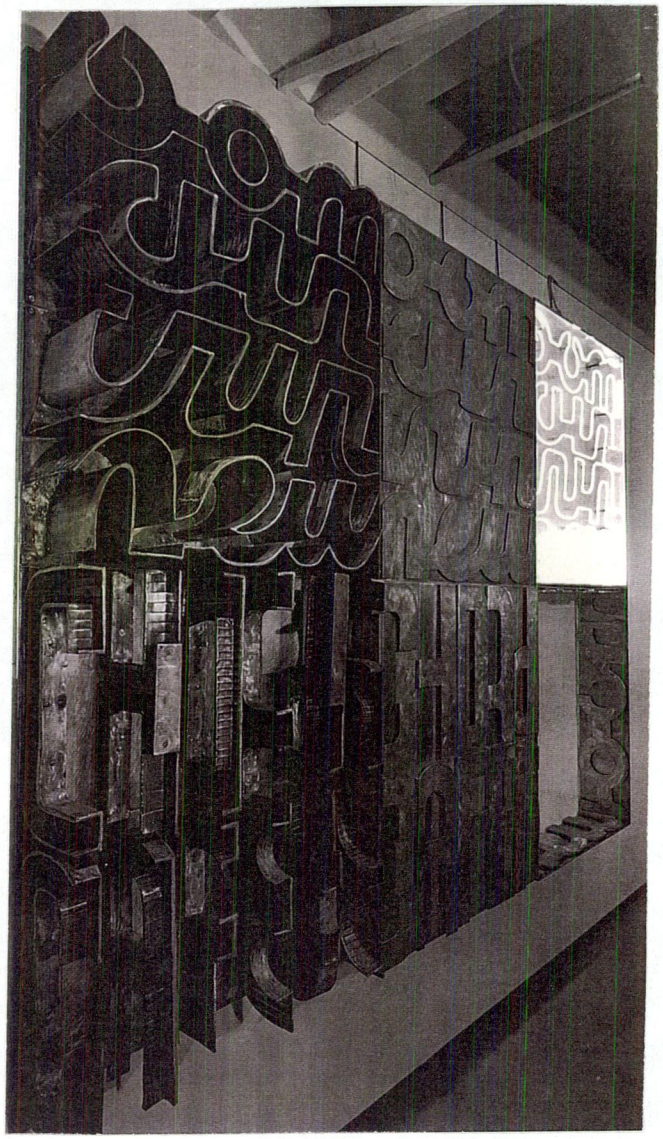

Fig. 6. Chryssa Vardea, Americanoom, 1963.

CHORDS (Fig. 6). Different modulations of the text are placed in the different panels, that of metal sign fragments in sunken relief, letters set perpendicular to the plane, two panels with flattened letters, neon script in four colours and the last panel with the words inscribed around the inner sides of a Plexiglas box, this is one of the purest results of Chryssa Vardea's imaginative vision, perhaps her most accomplished work of her metal and neon period of the years 1962-68. *Americanoom* goes back to 1963, that was one year before she began work on *The Gates*. *Positive/Negative* and *Delicatessen* date from 1965, by this stage work on *The Gates* was in full swing, and although the two pieces differ from the magnum opus textually, they nevertheless share fully its intertextuality. *Positive/Negative* is a stele[3] divided horizontally into two equal parts, the upper part consisting of sign fragments in stainless steel while the lower half is a hollow metal box serving as a support for the neon signs placed within. *Delicatessen* also takes the form of a stele whose upper part is made of delicatessen signs, the leftover pieces being accumulated in a Plexiglas box below. It was a favourite idea of hers that each element in the work had its place there and we see this clearly in *Delicatessen*, nothing is lost. Chryssa Vardea incorporates rolls of plans and preparatory drawings in the final structure of *The Gates to Times Square*.

At the same time Chryssa Vardea was extending her knowledge of neon and from this period she produced her first two Plexiglas neon boxes as in *Analysis of Letter B*.

These pieces foreshadow the series of five *Ampersands*, (1964) which were five different approaches in multicoloured neon for the symbol "&". Likewise the analysis of the letter A dates from 1964 and is significantly entitled *Prestudy for the Gates*. It was between 1961 and 1964 that Chryssa Vardea familiarised herself with the most modern neon techniques, in particular that of preshaping. With this experience and that of what she had learned previously with other materials she allowed herself to sharpen her original vision. She executed some fifteen pieces that she calls *Studies for the Gates*, and thus can be seen as the matrix for a whole expansion of a new lexicon which she used throughout the sixties. There are also numerous photographs depicting her making notes and sketches at Times Square. This was the beginning from which the systemic structure was built up little by little. Chryssa Vardea herself describes *The Gates* in her journal;

> "Welded stainless steel, neon and Plexiglas. Fragments of commercial signs also rolled plans for the forms. Also cast aluminium parts. 10 feet x 10 feet x 10 feet. The Gates took over two years to complete. I started by using original 'Commercial' signs, I then fitted these signs to the structure. Those 'fragmented' commercial signs are enclosed in the Plexiglas boxes in the last two sections of The Gates. The last two sections focus on structure. Each of these fragments of the commercial signs is remade by me and repeated four times, in two or three places three times. I made 132 unrelated fragments and each section of the structure contains four or three, depending on the positions of the letters"[4]

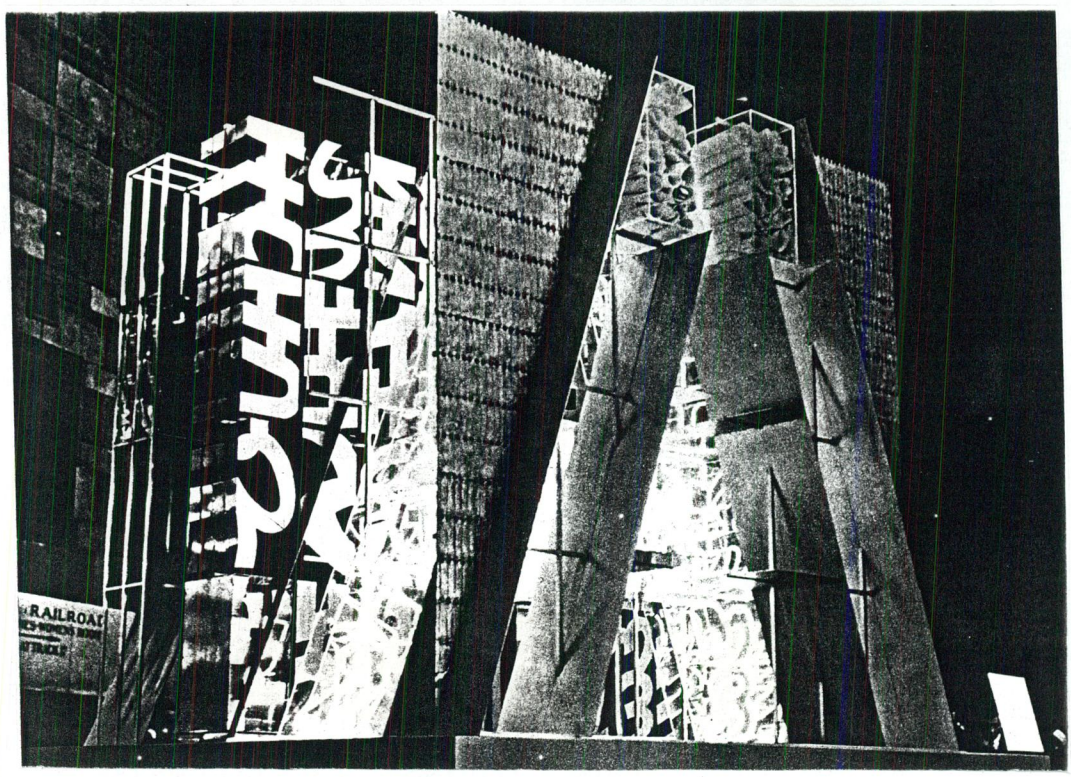

Fig. 7. Chryssa Vardea, The Gates to Times Square, 1966.

When Chryssa Vardea had completed *The Gates to Times Square*, it was a combination of her experiences in art since her arrival in New York in 1954 and would spawn future ideas for her also. *The Gates* revealed her entire lexicon which she had built up with metal and neon a sort of language mark by joining together letters and symbols, commonly found in signage to give them a familiar but semi-abstract quality (Fig. 7). It also bore other Chryssa Vardea characteristics such as her use of all elements in the work. It has already been mentioned of her inclusion of the preparatory drawings in the final piece but also *The Gates* contains compartments of which are half full of waste, the leftovers from cutting the steel plates for the other half (this waste is the negative surface of the plates), her habit of repetition is also evident in *The Gates*. Two frontal sections consist of flat aluminium strips positioned in diagonals representing the arms of the letter A in sunken relief. The letter A appears frequently throughout the structure, in all eight sections of *The Gates*. Within each structure there is also the repetitions of other letters, symbols and Chryssa lexicon. *The Gates* was shown at the Pace Gallery, it was also displayed to the New York public in Grand Central Terminal, as part of the City Sculpture Exhibit in 1968, here in the context of the large lobby of the railroad station, it took on its exact significance. Mr. and Mrs. Albert A. List bought *The Gates* and donated it to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo.

From this monumental cubic assemblage, structured in the form of an A, which constitutes a homage to the living

American Culture of advertising and mass communications, came more studies but this time from *The Gates* as opposed to for *The Gates*. In her studies subsequent to *The Gates* she abandons metal in general and only returns to it at the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies. Her studies are of separate sections of *The Gates* and involve more violent colours and more advanced technology. The studies usually just incorporate two letters in cursive script, in *Study No. 3* that of KW in *Study No. 6* that of AU in *Studies No. 7* and *No. 10* that of KU and so on. In *Study No. 4* she simplifies the basic form of an S in double alignment, which prefigures the sign in *Clytemnestra*. Chryssa Vardea is at this stage concentrating on the light/darkness discourse, which is superimposed on that of the rotation of day and night. She uses dark Plexiglas, black or smoky grey, in combination with neon. The neon shines through the Plexiglas but when the neon is turned off the viewer can't see everything except for a black Plexiglas box, this portrays neon in the night sky. It is achieved through programmes in the mechanism in the pedestal of the structures. These programmes turn on and off the neon light, so that maybe twelve seconds of light may give way to forty seconds of darkness. The discovery of black light gives Chryssa Vardea the option of losing the Plexiglas boxes. In *Study No. 14* she displays a double S form, vertically repeated eight times. The tubes irradiate a black light with a bluish hue, the effect of black light accentuates the sombre, nocturnal, dramatic effect. This work was also called *Clytemnestra* (Fig. 8),

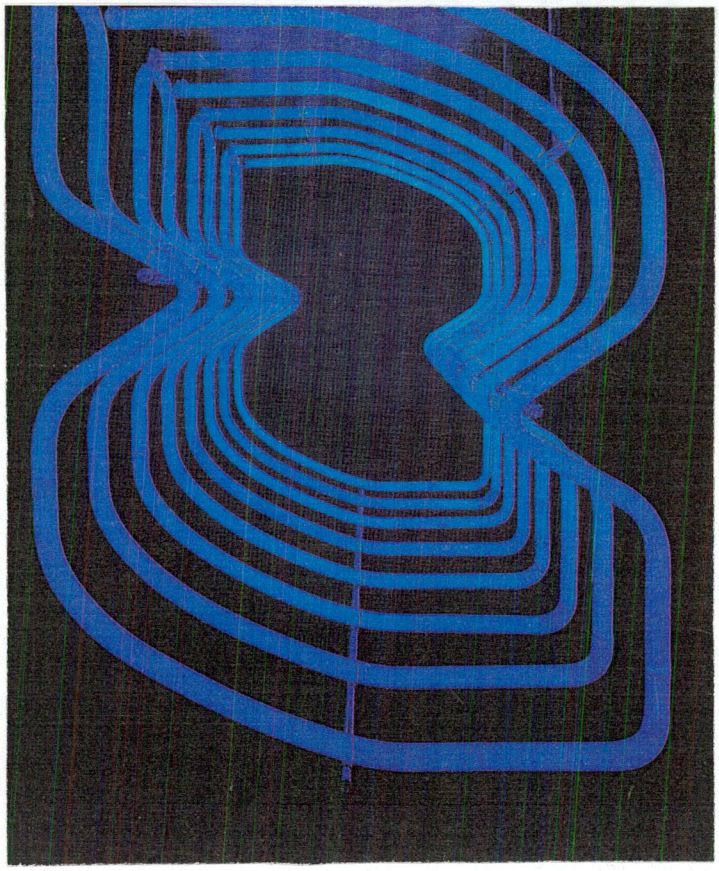

Fig. 8. Chryssa Vardea, Clytemnestra, 1966.

the disconsolate mother in Euripides tragedy Iphigenia in Aulis.[5] This was her first work in black light. The form of *Clytemnestra* was repeated on a monumental scale of fifteen feet high in 1968 and exhibited at *Documenta 4* in Kassel. The neon tubes are encased in cylindrical grey plastic and as the light passes through the sheath of moulded plastic it irradiates in a muffled way, this can be put into context when one considers the cry of anguish from Clytemnestra, the abstracted S form imitating an opening mouth or indeed her curled up body as her son Orestes kills her. *Clytemnestra* thus closes one chapter in Chryssa's work and opens another, it foreshadows the end of the *studies* but Chryssa Vardea still intrigued by Euripedes and Iphigenia, continues on using neon and this theme into the seventies. The exhibition at Kassel reopened her success in Europe and spurred on the Metternich project and put her back in contact with Jean Larcade.[6] This whole period of her work (1962 to 1968) was her most productive, from her first use of neon to the ending of the studies series, with *The Gates* in between, can be explained by Chryssa Vardea herself in a declaration she made in 1968.

> "America is very stimulating, intoxicating for me. Believe me when I say there is wisdom, indeed, in the flashing lights of Times Square. The vulgarity of America as seen in the lights of Times Square is poetic, extremely poetic. A foreigner can observe this, describe this. Americans feel it. Times Square I knew had this great wisdom, it was Homeric, even if the signmakers did not realize it".[7]

The movement that Chryssa Vardea is most closely associated with is Pop, although it is true to say that she wasn't really in any group and really not a Pop artist in it's full sense. She nevertheless was influenced by those around her, and as an artist of the sixties New York art culture, her work does have some connections with Pop. When Chryssa Vardea first arrived in New York in 1954 the movement of Pop or Proto-Pop at this stage was beginning to emerge from the culture after the dominance of Abstract Expressionism. Her first work in New York was *Cycladic Books* (Fig. 9), these are reliefs in plaster, the image simple, a rectangle with the shape of a T on it. This T shape was the mold of the inside of a cardboard packing box. Cardboard boxes, symbol of consumer society, a society of mass-advertising and mass-production, and from the beginning, Chryssa Vardea is linked with Pop. Pop artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Rosenquist were at the time using mass produced products as material for art, the discarded and common suddenly become wanted and beautiful to the artist even if society didn't think so. Chryssa Vardea used unwanted and discarded signage right through the sixties along with neon, which society at the time saw as cheap and connected it to gin joints. *Cycladic Books*, also resembles Pop at the time which was attempting to be anarchic to its predecessor, Abstract Expressionism. Pop was breaking away from painting and so was Chryssa Vardea with *Cycladic Books*. Although the work hung on the wall and was flat and rectangular, it was more of a light relief or an object than a painting, rather like the

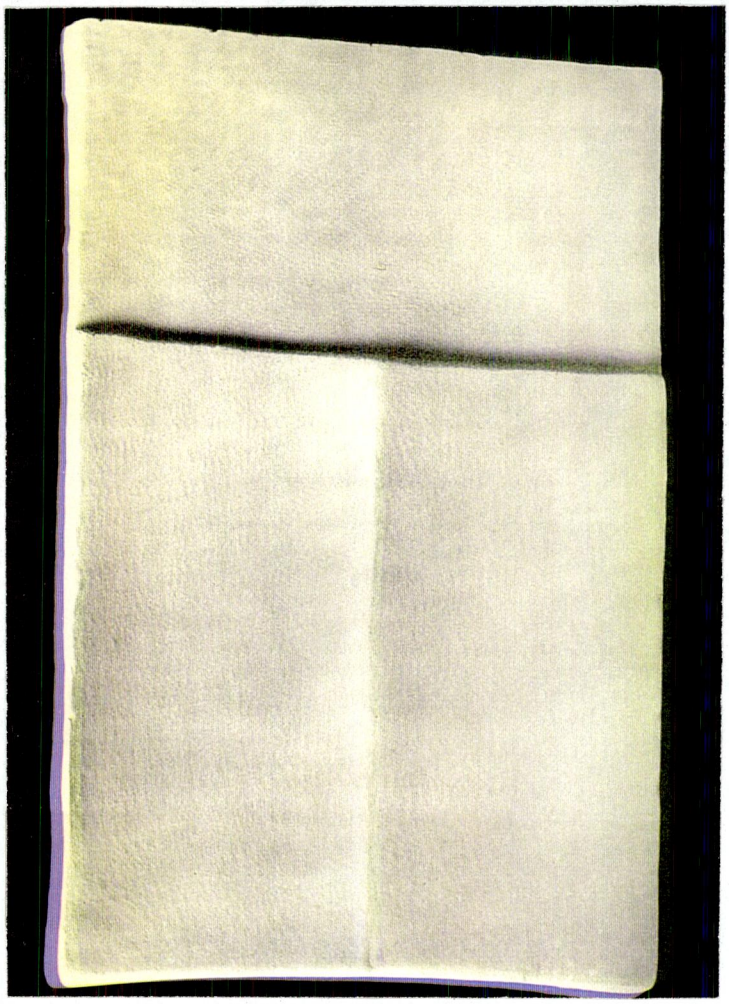

Fig. 9. Chryssa Vardea, Cycladic Book, 1954.

Aluminium and Copper paintings of Frank Stella which were also contemporary of this time. Its interesting to note that she was also in a group exhibition in Paris 1961 at Jean Larcades Gallery, the event of which has been previously mentioned, with artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Yves Klein and Jasper Johns. What's important of her work and that of Jasper Johns is that they both acknowledge the importance of words and letters in their work. In Chryssa Vardea's work of the late fifties and early sixties she repeats images as in the previously discussed *Americanoon*. Chryssa Vardea also used recognisable imagery and in her signage she used words or letters of words commonly associated with advertising. In her "fragment paintings" she used a lot of media material, in fact she even used the actual rubber stamps from the New York Times.[8] At around this time Andy Warhol emerged with his repeatedly printed imagery of commonly recognisable imagery taken from the media and advertising (his *Marlyn Monroe's* and *Campbell soup cans* are good examples). Both Chryssa Vardea and the Pop artists used neon and this has been discussed in Chapter one, but as Leo Castelli remarked on her use of neon, "Other people did use neon, but she used it in a very different more interesting way, in which the medium was essential rather than just incidental".[9] Chryssa Vardea's development shared time with Pop development and there are many connections between the two and although Pop may be the movement she is most closely engaged with, her work does connect with that of assemblage and kinetic art also.

Chryssa Vardea went on to work with neon right up to the present. After the Metternich project, to do a series of works for a room in the castle of Count Peter Wolf Metternich in Adelebsen, she went back to her signage work. This time she concentrated on Chinese and Japanese signage. It didn't matter that she couldn't read the script, in fact this was to her advantage as all she saw was the form of the letters and she could exploit this aesthetically without worrying about what the sign actually said. This work of the eighties is a lot more subtle than her work from the sixties, as she uses less violent colours of neon and uses shadows cast from the surrounding metal of the piece onto the other metal layers and the wall behind the heavy sculptures. Nevertheless Chryssa Vardea is still renowned for the work she produced in the sixties which was also the busiest time of her art career, and it is this work that influenced so many artists after the sixties to use neon and she suggested the three ways in which neon would move, words and images, light and colour, and kinetic and performance art, as in the work of Bruce Nauman and Michael Hayden and many others.

CHAPTER 3 - DAN FLAVIN

Dan Flavin was born on April fools day 1933, in the Mary Immaculate Hospital, New York. His father was an Irish Catholic truant officer and his mother a distant descendent of German royalty whom Dan Flavin says had descended "without a trace of nobility".[1] He, when very young, had begun to draw himself and states that his mother had said that he made "a vivid, if naive, record of hurricane damage on Long Island in 1938".[2] Subsequently she went and destroyed it along with almost every other drawing from his childhood. His "Uncle Artie" Schrabel, the vice president of his father's boat club, was his first instructor on art. Dan Flavin recalls how once "Uncle Artie" showed him how to put down pencil water around a ship by lightly dappling just some of the surrounding space with the tiniest "half-moons". Dan Flavin claims that this cosmic touch for space is in his drawings even now. "Soon religion was forced upon me, to nullify whatever expressive childish optimism I may have had left"[3], says the artist, claiming that religion was his downfall and the result of a miserable childhood. At ten he was admitted into parochial school where the nuns taught him how to use watercolours but did not permit much freedom for thought about what was to be painted. At fourteen, also against his will, he was committed to a junior seminary by his father.

At eighteen Dan Flavin began to think more seriously about art. He bought books and visited exhibitions, he was then frustrated when directors of the Hansa Gallery, Dick

Bellamy and Ivan Karp and artists George Segal and Allen Kaprow engaged in a "bull session" before him, he understood little of what he strove to hear. So since leaving high school he attempted little drawing and no painting, until while in Korea in 1955 with the army he began figure drawing with another G.I. These sessions were stopped after a few weeks as the army did not approve of men drawing other men stripped to the waist. Following this discouragement Dan Flavin had the personally concerned criticism of a new "American" painter Albert Urban who as a young man, had his work displayed in Hitler's museum for "degenerate" art. Albert Urban suggested that Dan Flavin become a religious art historian, as his former religious upbringing was showing strongly through his art work. This secretly shocked Dan Flavin, who then poured out over the following months poor drawings and horrid aspirations in oil. Urban was not encouraging, and then suddenly one evening, had a heart attack and died. This was April 1959. Also at this time Dan Flavin had been studying art history and participated in Ralph Mayers drawing and painting tools program. In February of the same year he burst from Columbia University into a full-time affair with art. Donald Judd had also attended Columbia University, though earlier.

By 1960 Flavin had established his first studio on Washington Street. Here he collected many objects, most found upon his wanderings of the piers. But by 1961 this had to be abandoned as he felt that his flat was being shrunk to a "mental closet". At this stage Dan Flavin and

his wife Sonja rented a large loft in Williamsburg, Brooklyn where he hoped he would produce "more intelligent and personal work".[4] It was at around this time that Dan Flavin began to notice electric light as an art commodity. While walking floors at the American Museum of Natural History as a guard, he would cram his pockets with notes on electric light art. The custodian warned him, "Flavin, we don't pay you to be an artist", Dan Flavin agreed and quit. That was Spring, by Autumn the notes began to take structure. He was fascinated by light and paint together on the wall before him. This was the start of his work on electric light.

Some friends were slightly shocked and felt that Dan Flavin was going the wrong way because of this use of lights as opposed to painted canvas. Dan Flavin claims that this only made him more rebellious against painting and painters who he thought of as victims, "a declining generation of artists whom I could easily locate in prosperous commercial galleries."[5]

In time Dan Flavin came to some conclusions on what he had found with fluorescent light.

> "The entire interior spatial container and its components, wall, floor and ceiling, could support a strip of light but would not restrict its act of light except to enfold it. Regard the light and you are fascinated, practically inhibited from grasping the limits at each end. While the tube itself has an actual length of eight feet, its shadow, cast from the supporting pan, has but illusively dissolving ends. This waning cannot really be measured without resisting consummate visual effects. Realizing this, I

> knew that the actual space of a room could be disrupted and played with by careful, thorough composition of the illuminating equipment. For example, if an eight foot fluorescent lamp be pressed into a vertical corner, it can completely eliminate that definite juncture by physical structure, glare and doubled shadow. A section of wall can be visually disintegrated into a separate triangle by placing a diagonal of light from edge to edge on the wall; this is side to floor for instance."[6]

During 1963 Dan Flavin produced *The Diagonal of Personal Ecstasy* (later named *The Diagonal of May 25, 1963*, the day he declared the piece). It was a common eight-foot strip of fluorescent light of any commercially available colour (Fig. 10). At first Flavin chose "gold", this would be related to his idea that his pieces were like "icons", but he insists that this reference has no religious connection, to him the meaning of "icon" goes back further than the holy portraits with gold background, the church used this term to describe the portraits. Dan Flavin's lights are "icons" just not religious ones. The *Diagonal* was placed at forty five degrees from the horizontal, as Dan Flavin explains, it seemed to be a "suitable situation of resolved equilibrium", but goes on to say that "any other positioning could have been just as engaging".[7] He reckoned that the piece didn't need any more work done to it as the tube and its support seemed ironic enough to hold alone.

At the Kaymer Gallery during March of 1964 and the Green Gallery during November and December 1964 Dan Flavin began to use his research in manipulating the structure of

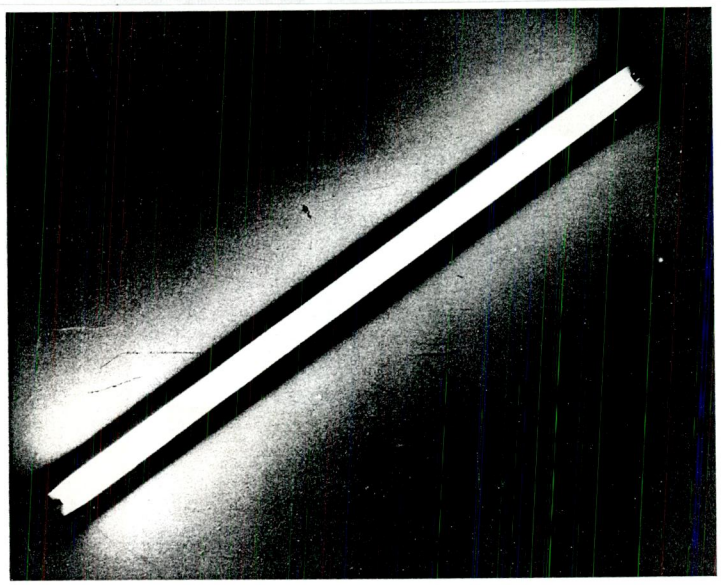

Fig. 10. Dan Flavin, The Diagonal, 1965.

a room, but had not at this stage progressed to using the actual space which he regarded later as "much more extensive than the rooms box."[8] Since these exhibitions he has, however, attempted this and also experiments with the light tube as his "icon".

It seems that at this time Dan Flavin embraced the influences of both Vladimir Tatlin and Marcel Duchamp. Dan Flavin's use of fluorescents, which we associate with institutions of mass employment or consumption (factories, office buildings and supermarkets), can be linked to the type of anti-high art ideals of the constructivists (as well as Pop art) who thought that the idea of "Fine Art" being superior to the so-called "Practical Arts" was no longer valid.

> "Thus far, I have made a considered attempt to poise silent electric light in crucial concert point to point, line by line and otherwise in the box that is a room. This dramatic decoration has been founded in the young tradition of a plastic revolution which gripped Russian art only forty years ago."[9]

Its his "monuments to V. Tatlin" that give the link away. This link is obvious when we think of Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* which symbolised the unification of painting, sculpture and architecture. The monument would also contain the most up-to-date technology available at the time, and involved moving parts (the cylinder, cube and sphere in the centre, revolving at different speeds) so that the work bordered on the kinetic. Also included in Vladimir Tatlin's gigantic spiralling

tower would be projection equipment which would project images and slogans onto the clouds, although this type of use of light does not coincide with Dan Flavin's use of the material it is hard not to notice the other links. Both unify painting, sculpture and architecture and both have an interest in technology and modern materials. Dan Flavin's "monuments to V. Tatlin" are his biggest unified work complex. As with the name of the work, which connects with "Monument to the third International", some of Dan Flavin's structures do refer deliberately to Vladimir Tatlin's thwarted plan for the monument (Fig. 11). It is true that this work of Dan Flavin's does not emphasize architectural specifics, but it does make one experience a room in terms of gradient intensities, the metric of space itself seems to become elastic in the large intervals of darkness.

Dan Flavin too embraced Marcel Duchamp to the point of working with mass-produced material and calling the results not sculptures, but "proposals", sketching out preconceived ideas. Dan Flavin's use of fluorescent light, which is such a non-art material, seems just like a direct quotation of Duchamp's "readymade" gambit, but what makes Dan Flavin's work interesting is that he made an art medium of what is conventionally an unobtrusive factor in gallery stagecraft.

"What you see is what you get"[10] says Dan Flavin. This is precisely what to expect when entering a gallery to look at the work of Dan Flavin. In a Dan Flavin exhibition the rooms are bare, if one expects to see heavy lumps of sculpture on the floor or rectangular structures with

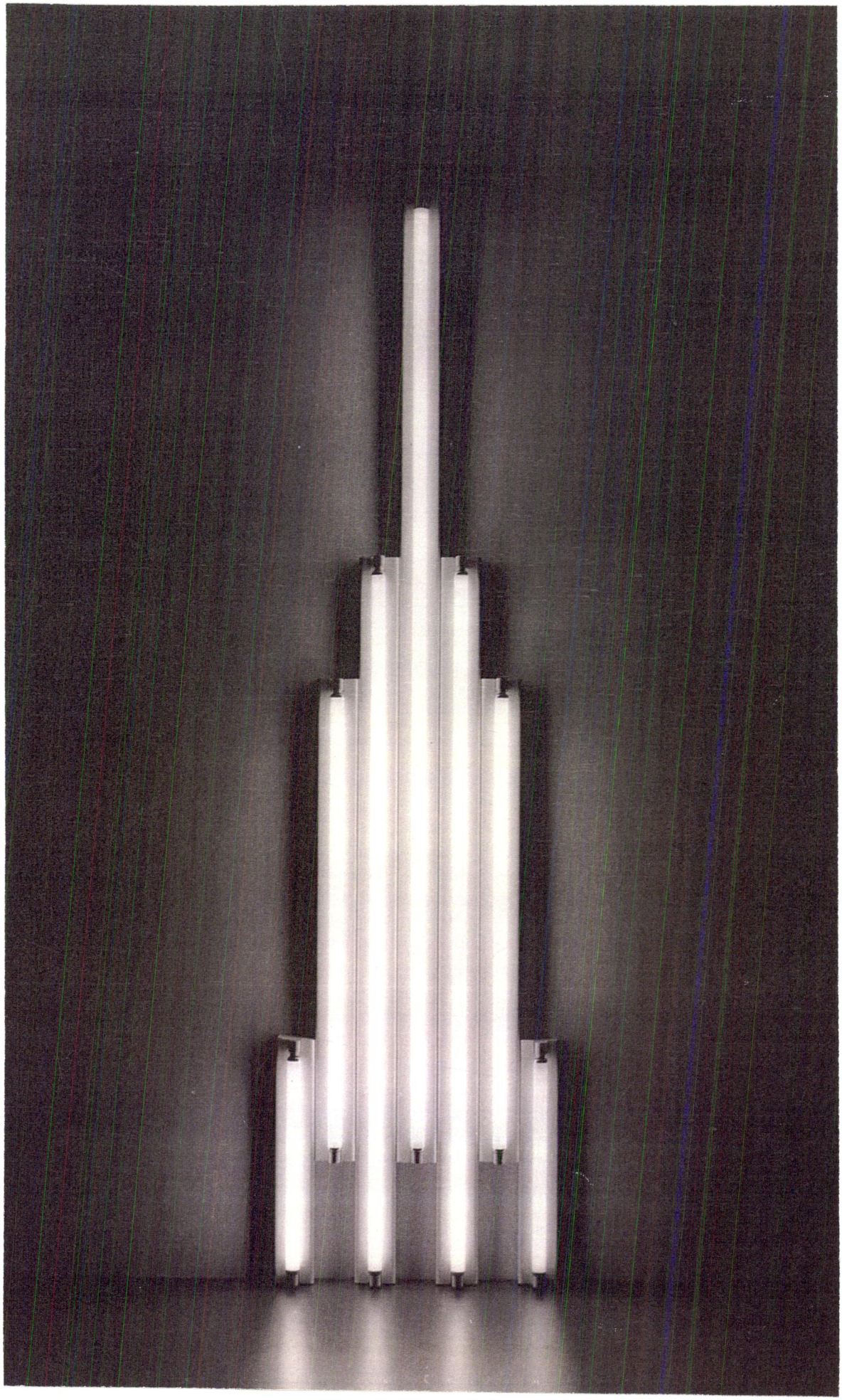

Fig. 11. Dan Flavin, Monument for V. Tatlin, 1966.

painted fronts on the walls, the rooms are full however, if one recognises the light. Fluorescent tubes and their pans are the only objects that he has added to the gallery space. The viewer would notice that these tubes, found in commercial buildings, are not in Dan Flavin's exhibitions, positioned where they are usually found. Common uses that he makes of the tube is to place them upright in vertical corners (fig. 12), use them to follow an architectural feature that normally wouldn't be of any interest, or place them strategically on the walls. The common aim here is to disrupt and manipulate the room of the gallery by using light and colour. With the upright tubes in vertical corners, he may wish to eliminate the juncture with light and the double shadow of the fluorescent pan. Highlighting certain architectural features that would normally go unnoticed, Dan Flavin disorientates the viewers expectations of gallery space. By the carefully planned placing of fluorescents on the walls he can disrupt the viewers sense of distance between the walls or between the floor and ceiling, light and shadow alone do not play in his exhibition but also colours, soft and intense. The artist uses the fluorescent colours to manipulate the rooms structure on to show that light is tangible, like paint. Dan Flavin uses the floor, walls and ceiling as a painter may use a canvas, and paints them with his tubes. In a show at the Kornblee Gallery in New York he punctuated a small room with intense green fluorescents, this made the daylight from the single small window turn pink.

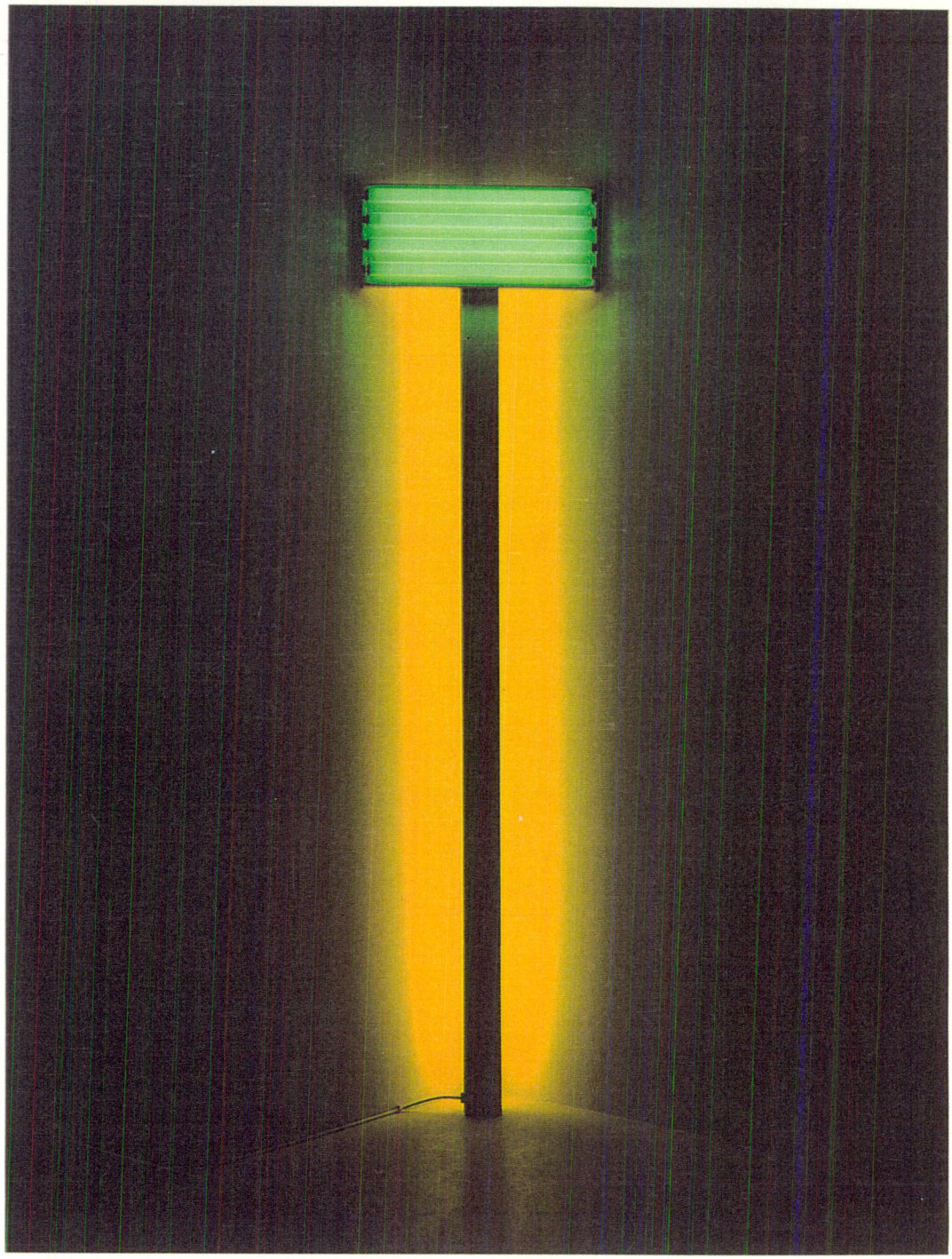

Fig. 12. Dan Flavin, Untitled (to Greta Garbo), 1993.

Its the way that Dan Flavin uses all these factors in his exhibitions that classify him as a minimalist. The use of gallery space, the conceiving of the idea totally before execution and the avoidance of the hand of the artist in the work. Like the other minimalists Dan Flavin believed in the work relating to its surrounding environment. Donald Judd used galvanized metal boxes with perspex. These were placed in straight lines with equal distance between all the intervals. Robert Morris' *L-Beams*, also recognised the surrounds. Apparently scattered they related to one another aesthetically. His use of a wide variety of different anti-art material meant that Morris always had to deal with the new medium in a different way (felt had to be folded, steam constantly changed then disappeared) and each time posed different problems for him in relation to space. The construction site bricks of Carl Andre, arranged carefully in rectangles, lines or stacks on the gallery floor also took into account the gallery environment (fig. 13). Its an ironic trait between the minimalists, especially Flavin and Andre, that although they used non-art materials and manipulated the gallery space, leading to the Earthworks movement, that their work was also dependent on the gallery space, without this the work as art was non-existent. The minimalists believed the work had to be totally pre-conceived before execution, in the mind. This made the idea clear on execution, free of fussing and extra chaos. It is this concept that makes the work of the minimalists so minimal, and this trait can be traced to them all. Also very important to the minimal

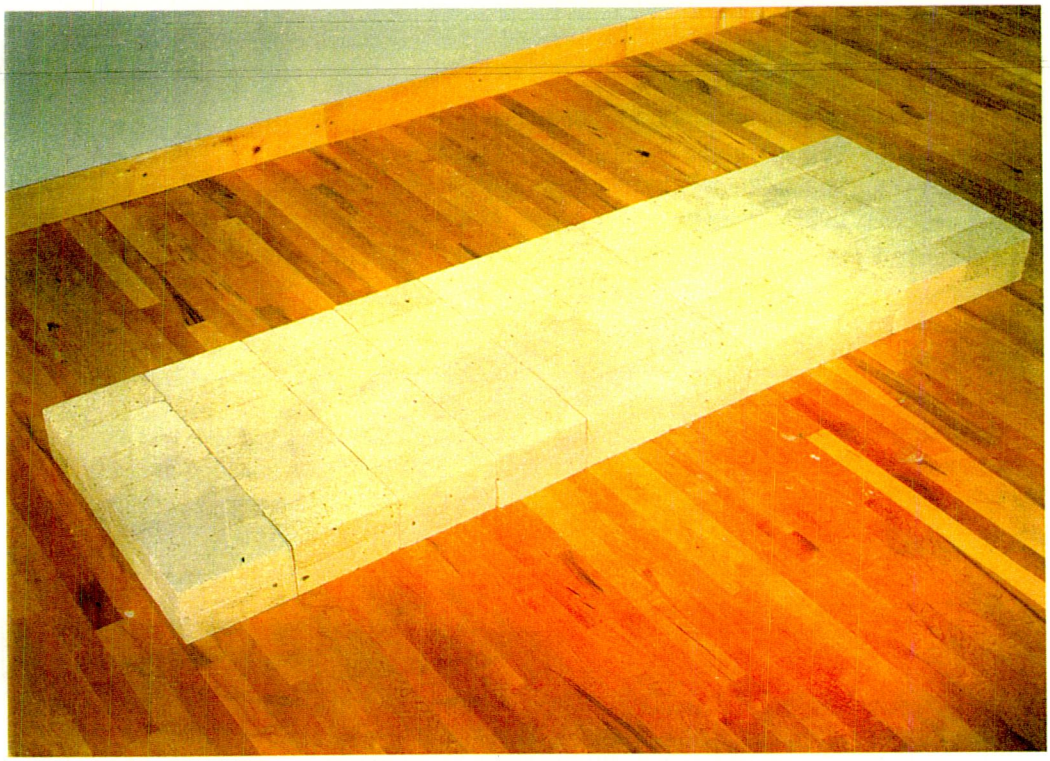

Fig. 13. Carl Andre, Equivalent VIII, 1966.

brethren was the idea of keeping the artist from the work. This meant the hand of the artist, like in a painters brushstroke, was obliterated. To the minimalists a work did not need the personal touch of the artist, which they considered were "self-indulgence". We can see all this clearly in the work of Dan Flavin. He uses fluorescent lights which are prefabricated in factories at standard issue sizes, he even buys the tubes in the city or region where he is going to work just to show how international and ordinary they are, this has no relation to the environment he works in, its just that why should he bring tubes around with him when he can buy the same ordinary standard tubes anywhere. its worth noting here that Dan Flavin doesn't even install the fittings himself, its all taken care of by electricians, he just says where to put them, this is a good example of where the preconceived idea comes in but also of where the artist keeps a distance between himself and the minimal work. Donald Judd used prefabricated galvanized iron and perspex, Carl Andre used bricks, bought at any builder providers for building and Robert Morris used an extensive range of prefabricated non-art materials, plastic, rubber, nickel, zinc, grey felt, and the list goes on.

Dan Flavin still works today and his work is still conceived with fluorescent tube lighting. Today his exhibitions seem to take the rooms perimeter and internal space and combine them using coloured light, and lately he has also moved outside the gallery and attempts his experiments with the building and surrounding environment

and space as with the *Staatliche Kunsthalle exhibition* (in Baden-Baden, Germany in 1989). For this chapter, however, I have concentrated on the main part of Dan Flavin's work of the 1960's and the build up to his conceptions of art at this time, as this was the time when he was at his most dramatic experiments and at his most influential to later artists. Also this stage in Dan Flavin's career was one of great development and coincides with Chryssa Vardea's development and experimentation which has already been discussed in the previous chapter. Light art really took off since the sixties and the work of Dan Flavin was part of this take off. It is important to remember that although his light was not kinetic (as most of those working with light were connected to kinetic art) and his work was minimalist (most of those working with light were also connected with Pop, the other major movement of the sixties), he did open up the eyes of many to the possibilities of light and made them, the viewers look at light in a way that no-one before him had done.

CONCLUSION

Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin, both born in 1933, both started working on light in the early sixties and the two made their names in the art culture of 1960's New York. Both artists have much in common but also many differences between them, nevertheless, the common connection between the two is their use of light in their work.

The two were among the first to use actual light as an essential element in their work, their concepts and uses of light were, however, very different from each other. Chryssa Vardea arriving in New York, was intrigued by the mass-advertisement in the city, in particular the signage and neon skyline of Times Square. This led her to produce signage related work which inevitably led to her use of neon after a few years. Even in her early pieces which do not contain neon she uses raised metal to catch light, as in her piece from 1956 entitled *Flight of the Birds*, which has been discussed in more detail in Chapter two. In using neon Chryssa Vardea portrays the neon skyline of Times Square and exploits its commercial usage, to her the light highlights the forms of text and symbols used in advertisement, and changes the night of cities into day. Dan Flavin, on the other hand, detested the use of light as far as general signage is concerned, he used light as a medium in itself. Light to Dan Flavin was tangible, like paint and he exploited this. To Dan Flavin signage was a thoughtless and insensitive desecration of light, "There is no room for mysticism in the Pepsi denigration".[1] While

Chryssa Vardea made text-like forms from neon and reconstructed the chaotic effect of Times Square, Dan Flavin disentangled light in its chaos and used it in it's purest form. Chryssa Vardea's use of light is quite figurative, depicting signage, neon in the night sky and fragments of abstracted words commonly found in signs, she explores what it is that neon gives to signage, in particular its highlighting qualities and the effect it gives signage as day changes to dusk. Her light is bold and part of a metal gravity-bound sculpture, imitating the signage that intrigues the artist. Dan Flavin's light is quite opposite to this. His work is not gravity-bound but light and weightless and questions our conception of space, he explores the space within a room, disrupting it by using light and colour. It is not a heavy mass which the viewer circles, but rather the whole exhibition space that surrounds the viewer so that the viewer is in the sculpture. Instead of viewing the whole piece from different angles, the viewer sees the piece from different areas within the sculpture itself. There is no additional material in Dan Flavin's pieces save that of the gallery architecture and the fluorescent tubes, the rest is light in its pure form. Unlike Chryssa Vardea he prefers a subtle use of light and his light source is not open and bold like hers but, peripheral and using the spaces around itself instead of being the actual sculpture.

In continuously using light sources in their work both artists involved themselves to a certain degree in the technology of electrical light. Chryssa Vardea involves

herself much more in the craft and technology of neon than Dan Flavin did with fluorescent, but this was due to the minimalist concept of the absence of the artists hand in the work. Chryssa Vardea, the first to use neon in an expressive manner got many involved in its manufacture. After her first couple of sculptures incorporating neon, she really got to know the craft of making neon, through this knowledge she could communicate better with the neon manufactures and therefore she achieved better results. Chryssa Vardea also knew what could and couldn't be done with neon and therefore knew the limitations of neon, so that where one idea might fail Chryssa Vardea would have the knowledge to go about it in another way. Along with neon knowledge, she also kept in touch with the latest in signage technology, so when more neon signs were incorporating various timing devices and programmed patterns, she also used these gadgets. In her work from the later sixties such as the *Studies*, after *The Gates*, and *Clytemnestra*, we see the use of such programming devices and also black neon. To get the full expressive potential from neon Chryssa Vardea had to have a fair knowledge of the Craft, but she also believed that a structure is not modern simply by virtue of the fact that its author employs modern materials, it is on the mastery of a material and of a new technology that any search for a language must be based. It should be acknowledged that she is also quick to warn that "It does not work out when technology and materials dominate"[2], she then finds that the artist is a "foreigner to the object", and does not relate to the work.

This is an important point that she has in common with Dan Flavin because he too believes that if the material or technique prevails over the idea, one can only end in failure. Dan Flavin being a minimalist would stick to his idea foremost as that is what mattered most in minimal art. This is one reason why he, although equipped with some knowledge on his material, stayed a distance from it more than did Chryssa Vardea from hers. Dan Flavin, like Chryssa Vardea, had to go to the manufacturers, but with him, making tubes to his specifications and unique shapes didn't occur. He used fluorescent light as it came, in standard size and shape, this removed the artists hand from the work. His ordinary tubes would be bought in the city or region he was working in to emphasize their unpreciousness as a material, Chryssa Vardea usually found sign fragments in her locality but these would be unique and precious. Dan Flavin's knowledge of fluorescent really only covered the area he was interested in, light, the gathered information on the power of the tubes and how far their light might travel along surfaces or penetrate into the space of a room.

If we associate Chryssa Vardea with Pop Art and Dan Flavin with minimalism we can make more comparisons between the two. Pop and minimalist art, although with many contrasts, also shared a lot in common. Richard Wollheim grouped pop and minimalism together in an article entitled *Minimal Art* in the January 1965 issue of Arts magazine, this was however an exceptionally broad application. He saw works that displayed little or no evidence of the

personal, craftsmanly skill and expressive inflection long considered to be the hallmarks of fine art, as possessing "minimal art content". To Richard Wollheim, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, who used prefabricated imagery, could be regarded as minimalists just as much as Tony Smith, Donald Judd and Robert Morris who also used prefabricated materials.[3] To Richard Wollheim Chryssa Vardea would also be considered Minimalist like Dan Flavin, because she used neon which incorporated a factory process and didn't involve the artists touch, even though Chryssa Vardea may have totally conceived the design of the tubing. The Duchampian spirit was at work throughout the sixties and this can be accounted for in the work of both Pop and minimalism. Artists such as Yves Klein, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns used its irony yielding rich content, and Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Robert Morris used its love of the ready-made. Chryssa Vardea's neon signage pieces hold a mirror to society's face and contain much irony, while Dan Flavin from the very core of minimalism, makes use of the Duchampian ready-made with his fluorescents, very ordinary, very everyday and lighting being such an usually hidden factor in gallery stagecraft, Dan Flavin also contains some of that irony. As with Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin both Pop and minimalism broke away from painting and artists began to prefer sculpture over painting. This is because Abstract Expressionism had left little to the two movements that wanted to use non-art material, in painting by the mid-fifties an unpainted canvas passed as art. In their use of non-art materials

both movements looked to the three dimensional, but with this use of these everyday non-art materials came an air of anti-high-art in the work of the Pop and minimalist artists, including both Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin.

The work of Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin is an important development in the use of light in art. The use of artificial light sources in art works was almost inevitable during the sixties, but both artists pushed the use of light further than most at the time, and are the two leading light artists of the sixties by way of this. Both artists involved themselves in the art culture of 1960's New York, and their work can be related to many of the other movements and events happening at this time, and to do this they used the medium of light and made people see light in a whole new way and also as an art medium and it is these reasons, and the other facts discussed throughout this thesis, that connect Chryssa Vardea and Dan Flavin strongly together as the forerunners in Light Art during the sixties.

END NOTES

CHAPTER 1

1. Michael Webb from *The Magic of Neon* P.2.

2. Fontana went on to slash open stretched canvases. His work at this time was questioning the spatial concepts in art. In the slashed canvases, Fontana was looking at space beyond the canvas and in his neon pieces from 1951 to 1968, in particular that for the 9th Triennale in Milan in 1951, he made the viewer conscious of the space in drawing, he used the neon tubing as the drawing medium exiting the page.

3. Pop artists to use neon, but only as a minor element in their work and only after Chryssa Vardea had already begun to use it include, Martiel Raysse and his version of Prod'hons "Cupid and Psyche" entitled, "Tableau simple et doux", in which his cupid holds a neon heart. Also Andy Warhol's "Balloon farm light environment" (1966), Roy Lichtenstein's "Sunset" (1966) and Robert Rauschenberg's "Doorstop" (1963) are just some examples of Pop artists using neon in their work.

4. Minimalists didn't believe that the artists hand had to be evident in the work, to them self-expression was the same as self-indulgence.

5. Robert Morris quoted from "Notes on Sculpture, Part 3". Art Forum, Summer 1967, p. 27.

6. Dan Flavin quoted in "Dan Flavin" by Madeleine Deschamp's from *New Uses for Fluorescent light with Diagrams, Drawings and prints from Dan Flavin,* p. 18.

7. Leo Castelli in an interview with Dianne Kelder from *Chryssa Vardea Cityscapes* by Douglas Schultz, p. 18.

8. Ibid pg. 18.

9. Ibid pg. 19.

CHAPTER 2

1. Chryssa Vardea quoted from "Chryssa" by Pierre Restamy, pg. 18.

2. Chryssa Vardea quoted in "Chryssa - cityscapes" by Douglas Schultz pg. 14 quoted from Chryssa Urban Icons (Buffalo : Albright-Knox Art Gallery 1982) p. 5.

3. Chryssa Vardea also had a strong connection with her homeland, Greece, in her work and although her fascination with American style advertising in Times Square seems to have totally taken over her work we must remember that her past hasn't been erased. A stele, as well as just being a pillar with an inscription, goes back to ancient Greece where stele's were used to mark a grave. Her first work in America also has a strong homeland connection, "Cycladic Books" refers to the cyclades a group of people who flourished in the islands of the Aegean Sea in prehistoric Greece. Also her piece in 1968 called "Clytemnestra" represents the disconsolate mother in Euripedes tragedy Iphigenia in Aulis, another Greek connection.

4. Chryssa Vardea quoted from her journal, quoted in Chryssa by Pierre Restamy, pg. 55.

5. Clytemnestra was wife of Agamomnon, ruler of Argos. While he fought in the Trojan War, she fell in love with his cousin Aegisthus. She and Aegisthus killed Agamemnon on his return from the War. Orestes, her and Agamemnon's son, was young and was at school away from home at this time. When grown, Orestes returned and with the help of his sister Electra and a friend avenged Agamemnon's death by killing both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

6. Jean Larcade had a gallery in Paris which Chryssa had exhibited in earlier in her career (1961). This has already been mentioned on Page 2 of this Chapter.

7. Chryssa 1968 quoted from "Chryssa" by Pierre Restamy, pg. 45.

8. Quoted from "Chryssa - cityscapes" by Douglas Schultz, pg. 14.

9. Leo Castelli in an interview with Dianne Kelder. "Chryssa - cityscapes" Douglas Schultz, pg. 18.

CHAPTER 3 - DAN FLAVIN

1. Dan Flavin quoted in , "in daylight or cool white", from *New uses for Fluorescent Light with Diagrams, Drawings and Prints from Dan Flavin*. pg. 25.

2. Ibid pg. 25.

3. Ibid pg. 25.

4. Ibid pg. 27.

5. Ibid pg. 27.

6. Dan Flavin quoted from *Dan Flavin Installation in Floureszierdam Licht 1989-1993*. pg. 18 and 20.

7. Dan Flavin quoted in "in daylight or cool white". pg. 28.

8. Dan Flavin quoted in, Some artists remarks on the "monuments".... from *Monuments for V. Tatlin from Dan Flavin 1964-1982*.

9. Dan Flavin quoted in "in daylight or cool white". pg. 28.

10. Dan Flavin quoted in "Dan Flavin" by Madeleine Deschamps from *New uses for Fluorescent Light with Diagrams, drawings and Prints from Dan Flavin. pg. 18.*

CHAPTER 4

1. Dan Flavin quoted in "Dan Flavin, A Neutral Pleasure of Seeing by Jochen Poetter from *New uses for Fluorescent Light with Diagrams, Drawings and Prints from Dan Flavin*. Pg. 15.

2. Chryssa Vardea quoted in *Chryssa* by Pierre Restamy, pg. 54.

3. Daniel Wheeler in *Art Since Mid-Century*. Pg. 214.

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