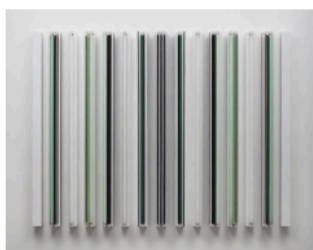


# IAS WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

Robert Irwin  
Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, California  
Continuing through February 27, 2021  
by Jody Zellen



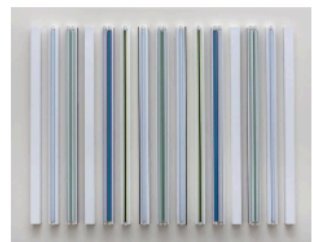
Robert Irwin, "Mesquite," 2018, shadow + reflection + color, 72 x 95 1/4 x 4 1/4"



Robert Irwin, "Mozambique," 2018, shadow + reflection + color, 72 x 101 1/4 x 4 1/4"



Robert Irwin, "Muscle Shoals," 2018, shadow + reflection + color, 72 x 97 x 4 1/4"



Robert Irwin, "Fargo," 2018, shadow + reflection + color, 72 x 99 1/4 x 4 1/4"

In "Unlights," Robert Irwin uses basic industrial materials to create sculptural wall works that play with viewers' perceptions as well as expectations. Each piece consists of six-foot fluorescent tubes mounted to rectangular fixtures that are vertically attached to the wall in sets of fifteen units. None are plugged in, nor are they intended to be. They are formal experiments that engage with the principles of geometric abstraction to form visual palindromes that confound our expectation of them as electrical hardware. The fluorescent tubes are wrapped with translucent gels and strips of electrical tape to become oscillating waves of subtle colors and tones.

In the past, Irwin has juxtaposed lit and unlit fluorescent lights that examine the ways in which their halos both blur and expand the space around the vertical lines of the fixtures. In "Unlights," he creates and explores implicit undulations of the wrapped fluorescent light fixtures without their glowing luminosity. Though firmly ensconced on the wall, the works change depending on angle of view. From the side, they appear sculptural, while from the front they resemble color field paintings made from wall paint, metal, plastic and glass objects. Because the fluorescent tubes are round, they reflect light in myriad ways, changing as we pass by or as the light between the fixtures fluctuates. A similar shift occurs when regarding the reflective white supports.

The five works (all from 2018) are each 72 inches high and range in width from 95 to 104 inches — the discrepancies based on the relationship between single and double tubes and the spaces between them. Each is named after a place: "Muscle Shoals," "Mesquite," "Fargo," "Mozambique" and "Balboa," suggesting they are landscapes in which disparate places are represented by striations of color.

The fifteen sections of "Fargo" span the wall alternating between blank units (solid white boxes that are approximately 4.5 inches wide) and units with one- or two-colored tubes. Irwin's soft palette contains blues and greens augmented by traces of light yellow and deep purple. The work is perfectly symmetrical, the colors and number of tubes mirrored, as the composition extends out from the center to either side. A unit with two light green tubes is flanked by units (with single light blue-gray tubes) whose outside edges are lined with black tape. From here, the pattern moves to yellow then blue and gray, then a blank unit, followed by two more light green tubes, then another single blue-gray tube. While "Fargo's" spaces in between are empty, in other works, such as "Balboa," Irwin adds a medium gray to the thin strip of wall between the units. In some he also colors the side of the units, which increases the illusion of depth. The effect confounds what is painted, what is light and what is shadow.

In "Mesquite," Irwin tapes black lines down the sides of six of the fixtures to create a visual border. The only double unit (tubes wrapped with black gels with lines of gray tape) is positioned in the center. From there, Irwin intersperses gray, copper and white (clear) tubes with tubeless fixtures. There is a Mesquite in Texas, as well as Nevada. Mesquite is also a plant. The various associations of the word both ground and obfuscate the feeling of the work. But perhaps that is Irwin's point. He has remarked that, "It's not about answers. It's the constant pursuit of the possibilities of what art is." These intriguing and beautiful works encapsulate the different phases of his creative endeavors. What at first glance seems to be floating lines, turns out to be carefully constructed objects that investigate complex color and perceptual relationships. Irwin uses minimal materials to deeply contemplate ideas pertaining to color, light, perception, space, environment and illusion. "Unlights" are at once minimal and maximal works that blur the boundaries between object and environment.



Jody Zellen is a LA based writer and artist who creates interactive installations, mobile apps, net art, animations, drawings, paintings, photographs, public art, and artist's books. Zellen received a BA from Wesleyan University (1983), a MFA from CalArts (1989) and a MPS from NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program (2009). She has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1989. For more information please visit [www.jodyzellen.com](http://www.jodyzellen.com).