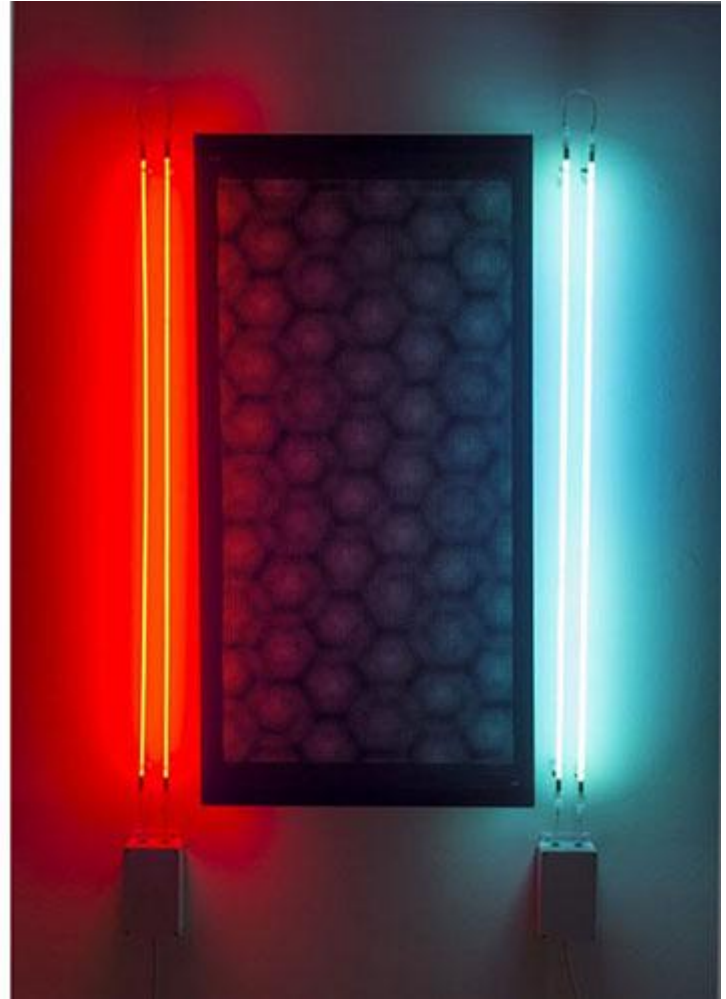


Chris Fraser @ Wendi Norris

Posted on 11 October 2015.

It's tempting to think of Chris Fraser as a magician: his phenomenological experiments with sculpture and installation use light in a way so foreign to everyday perception that they appear to be tricks or illusions. But Fraser is not trying to trick us; instead he is amplifying the minute and unexpected behaviors of light in the manner of a microscope or a pinhole camera, rendering concrete an image of it that is more revelatory than what our minds typically perceive.

For *Animated*, Fraser uses perforated metal grates with neon, argon, and helium lights to give the impression of movement across the surface of metal boxes. Each box hangs or leans on the wall and is flanked on either side by two sets of colored gas tubes. For instance, *Mobile | 0°, 90°, 90° | Argon and Neon* has red-orange lights on the left (neon) and blue lights on the right (argon). The vertical tubes cast light behind the sculpture in a soft gradient that passes through the perforated grates and into your eyes. Each of the three grates is angled differently to produce a specific pattern of light that shifts as you move around the room, and each of those patterns is different depending on your location. No two viewers have the same experience at the same time. If you have ever walked swiftly past several rows of chain link fence in the face of a setting sun, you may have noticed this effect, though in the gallery extraneous stimuli have been removed, leaving only the phenomenon in front of you.



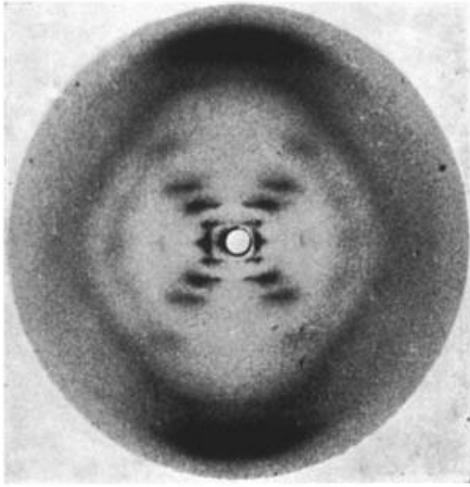
Mobile | 0°, 90°, 90° | Argon and Neon, 2015, Powder coated steel, gas discharge tubes, transformer, argon, neon, 42 x 21 x 12"

Accompanying the metal sculptures are nine prints that are actually photograms of the metal grates. It's useful seeing a distilled version of the light patterning that won't shift when you move, but the *Mobile* wall sculptures far outstrip the *Static* prints in terms of impact and inventiveness. The entire installation seems like a laboratory from the Atomic Age, with quivering and buzzing gas tubes and large black-and-white exposures as evidence



Installation view: *Static* | 0°, 20°, 30°; *Static* | 8°, 30°, 355°; and *Static* | 11°, 352°, 0°, 2015, gelatin silver prints, 70 ½ x 23 ¼" each

of micro-scale discoveries. The prints immediately reminded me of a famous photograph of DNA, [Photo 51](#), that James Watson, Francis Crick and Maurice Wilkins used to develop the chemical model of DNA that won them a Nobel Prize in 1962. It's apparent that Fraser treats his own work with a scientific rigor, traversing every permutation of this idea of light in an attempt to answer his Big Question, whatever it may be.



Raymond Gosling and Rosalind Franklin: Photo 51, 1952, X-ray diffraction image

Fraser started as a “straight” photographer. Then, by way of David Hockney, he happened upon the same experiments that led Robert Irwin and James Turrell to start conducting their own investigations into Light and Space. Now Fraser appears to be in Bruce Nauman territory, keenly aware of that fact, and generating new ideas because of it. I talked with Fraser last year about the difference between Turrell’s focus and his own. Fraser sees a distinction between the phenomenology of space and the viewers’ perception of that space. He focuses on the latter, using clear allusions to neon as a medium but stripping it of any intention, any added symbolism by the artist. He uses so-called noble gasses because

they are non-reactive. Thus, light is a passive element and you are an active participant. Like Bruce Nauman stamping around in his studio in front of a

camera, the work on view is an earnest attempt at understanding the relationship of the body to the space, and the viewer as a medium for sight. The difference here, delivered through extremely clever manipulation of materials, is that Fraser is letting you participate in his experiment.

– MIKKO LAUTAMO

Chris Fraser: “Animated” @ [Gallery Wendi Norris](http://www.squarecylinder.com/2015/10/chris-fraser-wendi-norris/), through October 31, 2015.

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