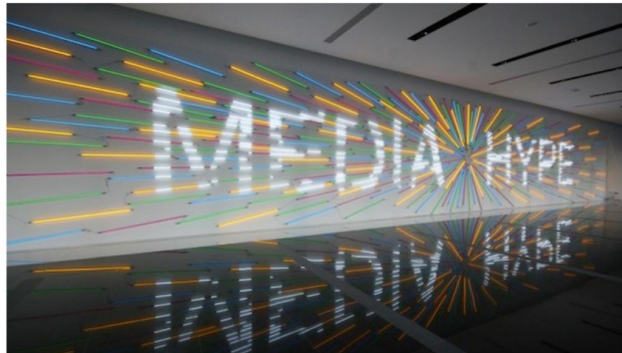


How James Clar Prints Stunning Light Sculptures To Illuminate The Nature Of Perception

by Creators Project Staff October 25, 2012



Media Hype (2011)

The work of [James Clar](#) has always revolved around the notions of technology and visual information as they pertain to pop culture. However, in recent years, prompted by a move to Dubai and his experiences there, Clar has started to venture away from the examination of how technology and pop-culture work towards an exploration of how these two things play off of and inform one another. Whereas his previous work took on the form of analytical studies, his current work seems much more culturally engaged, touching on themes of globalization, nationalism, and mass media. Despite his obvious growth as an artist, over the years he has stayed true to the principles of his medium, continuing to play with light and sculpture, making use of the most current technologies all the while.

The Creators Project recently sat down with Clar to talk about his process, specifically his use of fluorescent lights and 3D printing:

The Creators Project: When and why did you begin using fluorescent lights in your work?

James Clar: I originally studied animation at NYU Film and then went to ITP (Class of '03). It was during ITP that I moved away from screen-based animations and into creating my own light systems. Originally I was using a lot of LEDs and microcontrollers, because they are low-voltage and easy to manipulate. However, in the last few years I moved more into fluorescent-based works. I prefer the clean linear lines that fluorescent tubes create as opposed to the small short dots that an LED makes. Even those 'linear' LED lights that are supposed to be a replacement for fluorescent lights still have very evident dotting to them that I find distracting. These artworks use technology, but the technology should not distract from the visuals and concept.

Can you describe your process? Tell us about how you create the filters and custom 3D printing parts.

Because the lights are linear, it lends itself to certain visual concepts. So for instance in the artwork *Orchid* I wanted to create this idea of synthetic plant life being generated. I used [Maya](#) to create a virtual arrangement of lights, so I can check the sizes and angles of the sculpture. Then I figured out the colors to use, which are printed on a high-resolution printer.



Orchid, (2012)

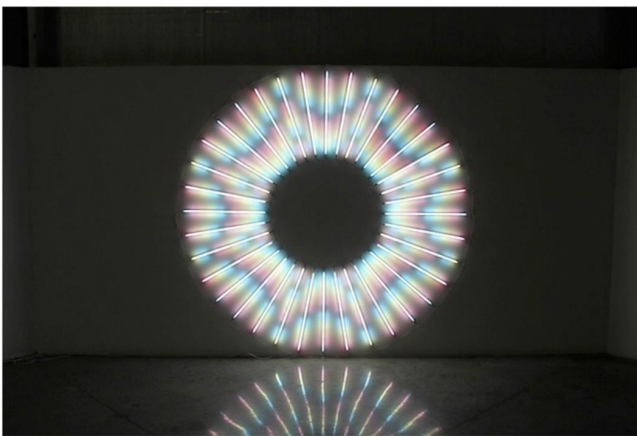
Then I use a [Makerbot](#) to create custom joints. These custom joints allow me to pass electricity through the work and hide the wiring in a clean minimal way. The orchid itself is a fake orchid I bought online. It came in this vase with fake dirt in it, which I removed it from. Then I designed these low poly geometric roots in 3D and had it printed out. The idea was the plant is rooted in this low poly geometric world and then sprouts up into a more organic shape. The whole plant was then drip-cast upside down in rubber, allowing the rubber to set while still dripping.

The plant is placed in the middle of a spiral of light. Because the orchid is pure white it reflects the colors from the lights. So depending on which angle you view it from, it reflects a different color.

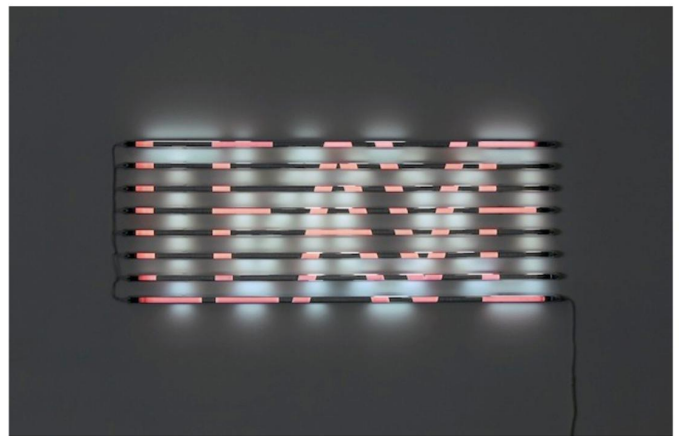
What are some unexpected challenges/benefits of working in this way?

Well, my work is kind of a hodge-podge of different techniques and programs. I understand programming, but I'm not a programmer. I can wire up lights but don't ask me about electrical regulations. I just try to understand the concepts of different applications and mediums and what they mean.

I think one of the biggest challenges for artists who use technology is archivability. Motors break, lights go out, programs change. So it's a balance of pushing technology and developing an idea that's relevant and lasts.



Iris, (2011)

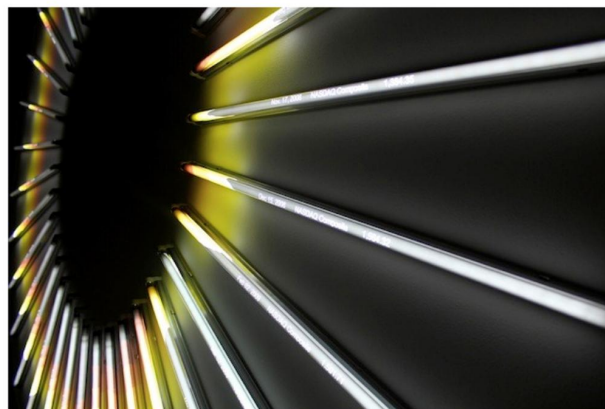


Lovers Quarrel (Don't Leave), (2011)

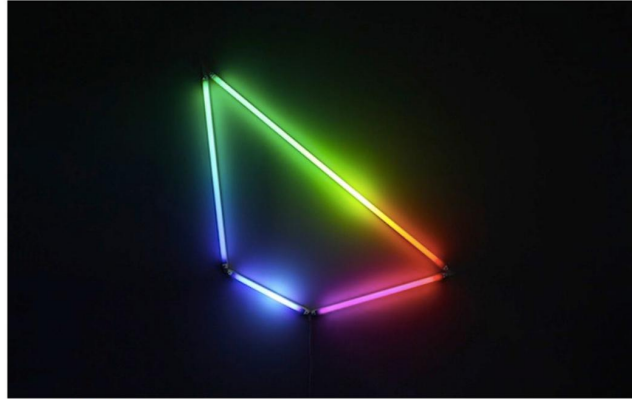
What is it about light as a sculptural medium that appeals to you?

More and more people spend the majority of their time staring at some sort of computer screen. If you think about this, So what I'm trying to do is pull these pixels out of the screen and into our physical reality. Then they can exist not as a flat 2D surface, but as a physical object that interacts with the real environment they are placed.

That is the aesthetic. The concepts of what I create often revert back to the medium itself. So they might deal with the limitations of technology or the use of technology and media.



Nasdaq Recursive Loop, (2012)



Standard Observer, (2012)

How did your time living in Dubai inform your work?

Living in Dubai was extreme in both positive and negative ways, but from both ends you learn things, so it was a great experience overall. It was like concentrated globalism, and it was amazing to see the ridiculous boom times, the extreme recession, and to be in that area during the Arab spring.

The thing that you become very aware of is the effect of the media, and related to it, the use of technology by the media to spread information. Take for instance people's own perception of Dubai. When I moved there in 2007, people thought (myself included), "Dubai, interesting! That place is so futuristic with their buildings." But the reality is the place was one large construction site, nothing had been finished yet. Dubai had a very efficient PR system, so for people who had never been there the only information we got were of those amazing building renders, and that was our perception of Dubai.

Here's another example; Dubai is very international, but it happened so quickly that there was little time to adjust to all the different cultures. One of the first questions people would ask was "Where are you from?" And when you answered you could tell they were thinking about what that country meant to them, and this could be either positive or negative for you. But again, where does this information come from? This person is judging based on information given to them, not on their personal interaction. It's information and information spreads through technology.

So it was in Dubai that I started thinking about the effects of technology and the media on notions of culture and identity. So in a way I am using technology to create artworks that reflect on technology.

Check out James Clar's upcoming exhibition "Iris was a Pupil" at Carbon 12 Dubai from November 5—December 8th.

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