

Julio Le Parc:
*Continuous Light
Cylinder*, 1962/2013,
painted wood,
stainless steel, motor,
metal disk, and
light, dimensions
variable. Courtesy
Galeria Nara Roesler,
São Paulo, Rio de
Janeiro, and New
York. Photo Everton
Ballardin.

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RADICAL DESTABILIZATION

With his paintings and installations, Argentinian artist Julio Le Parc seeks to shake up viewers through optical stimulus, prompting them to reconsider the status quo.

by David Ebony

DYNAMIC, CACOPHONOUS, and often dizzying, Julio Le Parc's large-scale environments with flashing lights and mirrored surfaces, along with his kinetic sculptures and mechanical "games," might be regarded as an extraordinary effort in the service of art as pure spectacle. But in fact, the Argentina-born, Paris-based artist, who is eighty-eight, has always had a subversive political agenda in mind for his works.

Take, for instance, *Cell with Vibrating Projection* (1968).¹ Within a twenty-foot darkened cube, its walls and ceiling covered in sheets of mirrored Mylar, sits a motorized metal box (about two feet high) with thin horizontal bands cut out of its sides. Light bulbs from within cast high-intensity beams through the slats as the box pulsates on a waist-high pedestal, sending frantically shifting bands of light around the room, fracturing the space and making one's position and direction increasingly difficult to gauge. One emerges from the enclosure through a narrow exit in a rather confused state, but with a strangely heightened awareness. Even more disconcerting, blinking lights obfuscate distorted reflections of one's body in *Cell with Curved Mirror and Light in Motion* (1963). And in *Visualized Vertical Light* (1978), floor-mounted lights scattered throughout the room cast beams onto sheer silvery curtains in a mesmerizing, if unnerving, up-and-down motion.

With his installation pieces, Le Parc, who left Buenos Aires for Paris in 1958, aims to disorient viewers and supplant conventional spatial relationships. He wants to challenge perception and rote behavior. His activities and ideas over the years

have been antagonistic toward the art world. As he expressed in a 1978 address at a conference in Caracas:

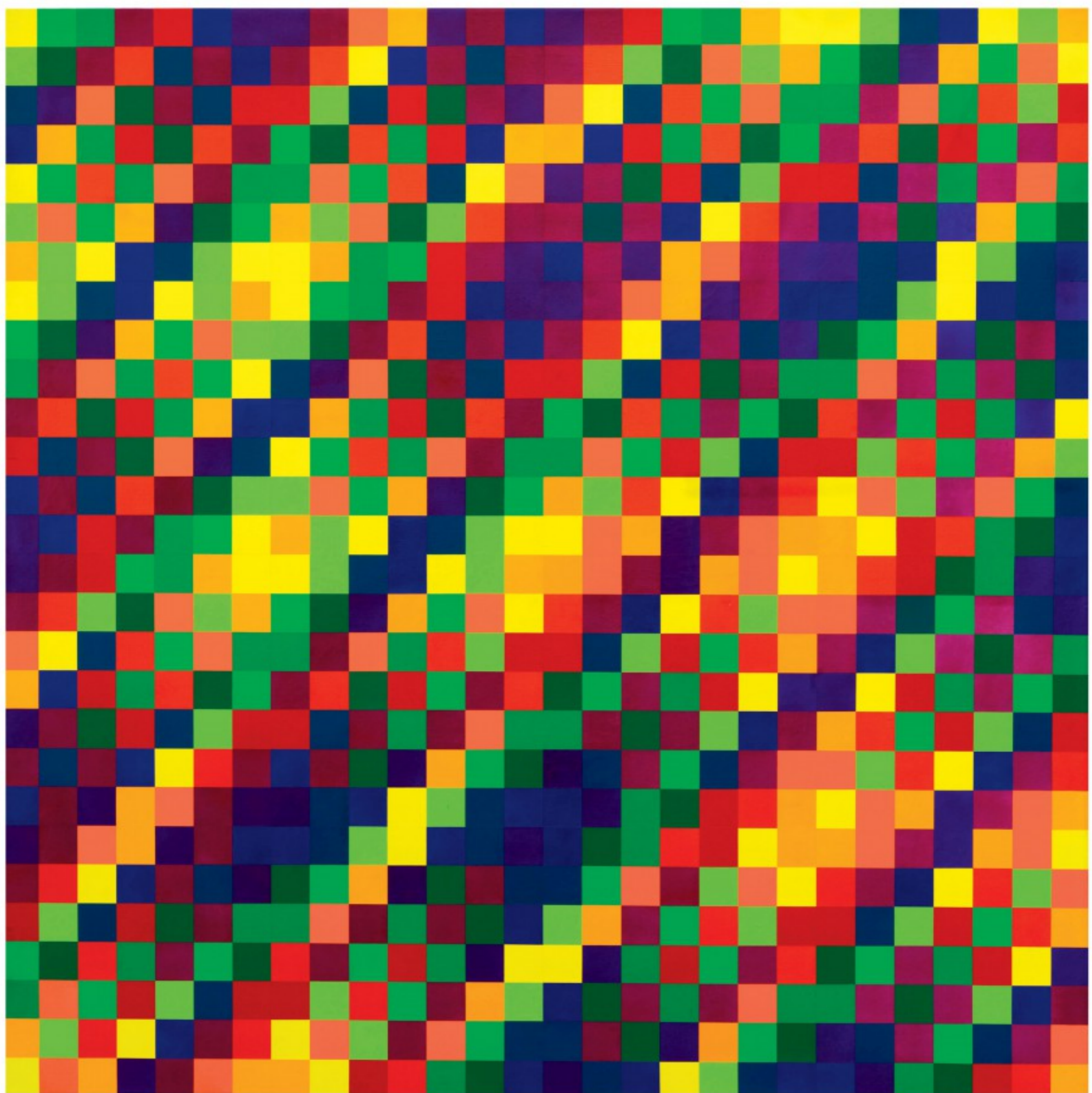
The dominant classes are conservative. They locally reproduce the capitalist power frameworks, imitate the life model disseminated by the imperialist centers, impose their own criteria and values, and impede the development of creativity. . . . With art, in the best case, they accept only that which reflects their situation and helps them maintain power—that is, art that increases passivity and dependence, art that exports esthetically pleasing harmless models, art that subscribes to the model of supply and demand.²

Le Parc wanted to rattle his audiences, as did many of the artists involved in the short-lived international Op and Kinetic art movements during the 1960s, which included the Düsseldorf-based Zero Group as well as Italy's Gruppo N, and Spain's Equipo 57. They shared an interest in pure abstraction, unorthodox materials, and reflective surfaces. These works were seen in a number of international exhibitions, including "New Tendency," a landmark 1961 show at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, Yugoslavia (now Croatia). Le Parc's work, and that of many others in the Zagreb show, toured the United States in "The Responsive Eye," a well-received survey of Op and Kinetic works that opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in early 1965. Last year, Le Parc's work of that period

CURRENTLY
ON VIEW
"Julio Le Parc: Form
into Action," at the
Pérez Art Museum
Miami, through
Mar. 19.

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Contributors page.





In a quest to demystify the artwork, GRAV members took to the streets with a variety of impromptu performances.

was included in “The Illusive Eye,” a show at New York’s Museo del Barrio that marked the fiftieth anniversary of the groundbreaking MoMA exhibition.

“JULIO LE PARC: Form into Action,” on view at the Pérez Art Museum Miami, is the artist’s first North American museum retrospective. Organized by independent curator and patron Estrellita B. Brodsky, in consultation with the artist’s son, Yamil Le Parc, the show contains approximately one hundred works spanning fifty years, with a focus on the earlier decades. On view are more than a dozen room-size installations, plus major sculptures, paintings, and a broad selection of works on paper.

Le Parc has always favored homemade mechanical devices and ordinary light fixtures, and, even in recent endeavors, he rejects the use of computer programs and digital processes.³ His work resonates with younger artists like Chile’s Iván Navarro, who creates sculptural objects with neon lights and mirrors. Growing up during the oppressive Pinochet regime, Navarro remembers the nightly blackouts that authorities used to keep people indoors, and his work addresses the potential political power of light and electricity.

Born in 1928, Le Parc moved at age fourteen with his family from Mendoza, in the foothills of the Andes in far western Argentina, to Buenos Aires. There, he attended the School of Fine Arts, studying with Lucio Fontana, and learning the avant-garde ideas of Neo-Concretism, a movement popular in much of Latin America in the 1940s. Practitioners regarded geometric abstraction as a political statement, one that embodied a spirit of idealism disconnected from the grim reality—and the favored realist artwork—of many military regimes in Latin America at the time.

Responding to the regressive Peronist policies, especially those affecting Argentina’s education system, Le Parc dropped out of school and left his parents’ home in 1947. He befriended a coterie of Marxists and anarchists, and spent seven years hitchhiking around the country. Returning to school in 1955, he soon became involved with student demonstrations and a temporary takeover of the administration.

A major Victor Vasarely exhibition in 1958 at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes caused a stir among artists of the Buenos Aires avant-garde. The optical experiments Vasarely explored were of great interest to Le Parc, and inspired his move to Paris, which, aside from being Vasarely’s home, was a haven for Latin American artists fleeing oppressive governments. Soon he met like-minded artists like Venezuelans Carlos Cruz-Diez and Jesús Rafael Soto, who shared his interest in visual perception and the phenomenological properties of light and color.

In Paris, Le Parc began a systematic exploration of color and movement in painting. Beginning in 1958, he produced a series of meticulous abstract compositions of densely packed hard-edge geometric forms, most often based on the grid or concentric circles, plus works with wavy bands of color. He returned to these motifs periodically in later years. Eventually, he limited his palette



to fourteen colors, which ranged the spectrum, as well as black, white, and gray. In small paintings on paper or cardboard, such as *No. 5 Rotational Sequences* and *No. 6 Mutation of Forms* (both 1959), myriad little shapes seem to rhythmically dance on the surface.

Le Parc’s light pieces grew out of his painting practice, as he sought more provocative ways to convey the mutability of perception. For his earliest light works, he suspended multicolored plexiglass in front of bulbs ensconced in black-painted wood or metal containers. One of the first pieces, *Continuous Light, Plastic Screen* (1960), is included in the Pérez exhibition. When one views the work, the plexiglass shapes and colors continually shift, thwarting attempts to establish a sense of depth or perspective.

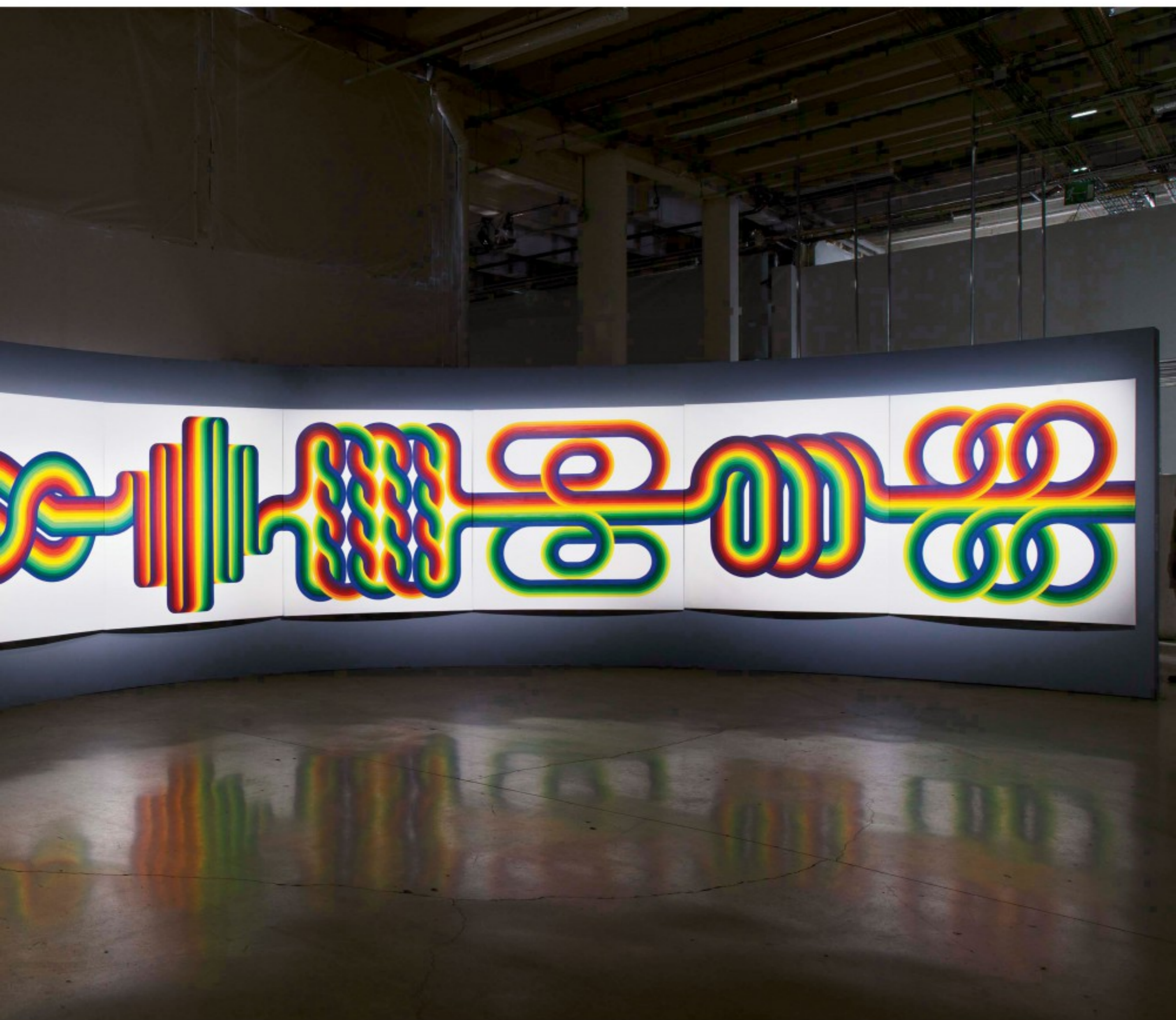
In the 1970s, after a decade of experimentation with various mediums, Le Parc made large acrylic paintings on canvas with dynamic patterns of color forming grids, targets, or waves. In the Miami survey, this group of paintings culminates in the mural-scale *The Long March* (1974), installed in its own room. The work’s ten abutting panels, each six feet square, are arranged in a gently curving ellipse that envelops the viewer. Arcing and intertwining bands of color on white grounds meander from one panel to the next in a continuous composition.

Le Parc set aside painting again as he refined the light environments, but he resumed it in the 1990s, producing the large-scale “Modulation” and “Alchemy” series. In works such as *Modulation 1125* (2003) a dark central oculus is surrounded

Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel (GRAV):
A Day in the Street,
1966, performance.
Photo Julio Le Parc.

Opposite,
Series 38, no. 1,
1970, acrylic
on canvas, 67¼
inches square.





The Long March,
1974, acrylic on
canvas, ten parts,
each 78 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches
square. Photo
André Morin.

by overlapping concentric circles, while *Alchemy 331* (2013) and other images from the series feature countless colorful points of pigment radiating across a black background.

THE ARTIST REGARDS painting as one facet of his exploration of visual phenomena and perception. Early on, he disavowed the primacy of originality and the autonomous art object. In 1960, he cofounded the Paris-based Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV), composed mostly of expatriates who regarded themselves as researchers or cultural scientists rather than as artists. They rigorously questioned the societal status quo, as well as art world structures, the role of the artist, and prevailing notions of the meaning and function of an artwork.

A prolific writer, Le Parc contributed extensively to GRAV's public statements and manifestos, which specify their aims:

to escape the current artistic tendencies in which the focus is the individual painter, and to attempt to clarify, through collective work, the different aspects of the visual arts.

We would like to remove the word art from our vocabulary and all that it currently represents.

We prefer to consider the artistic phenomenon as a strictly visual experience located on a physiological and non-emotional plane.⁴

Modulation 1125,
2003/13, acrylic on
canvas, 78¾ inches
square.



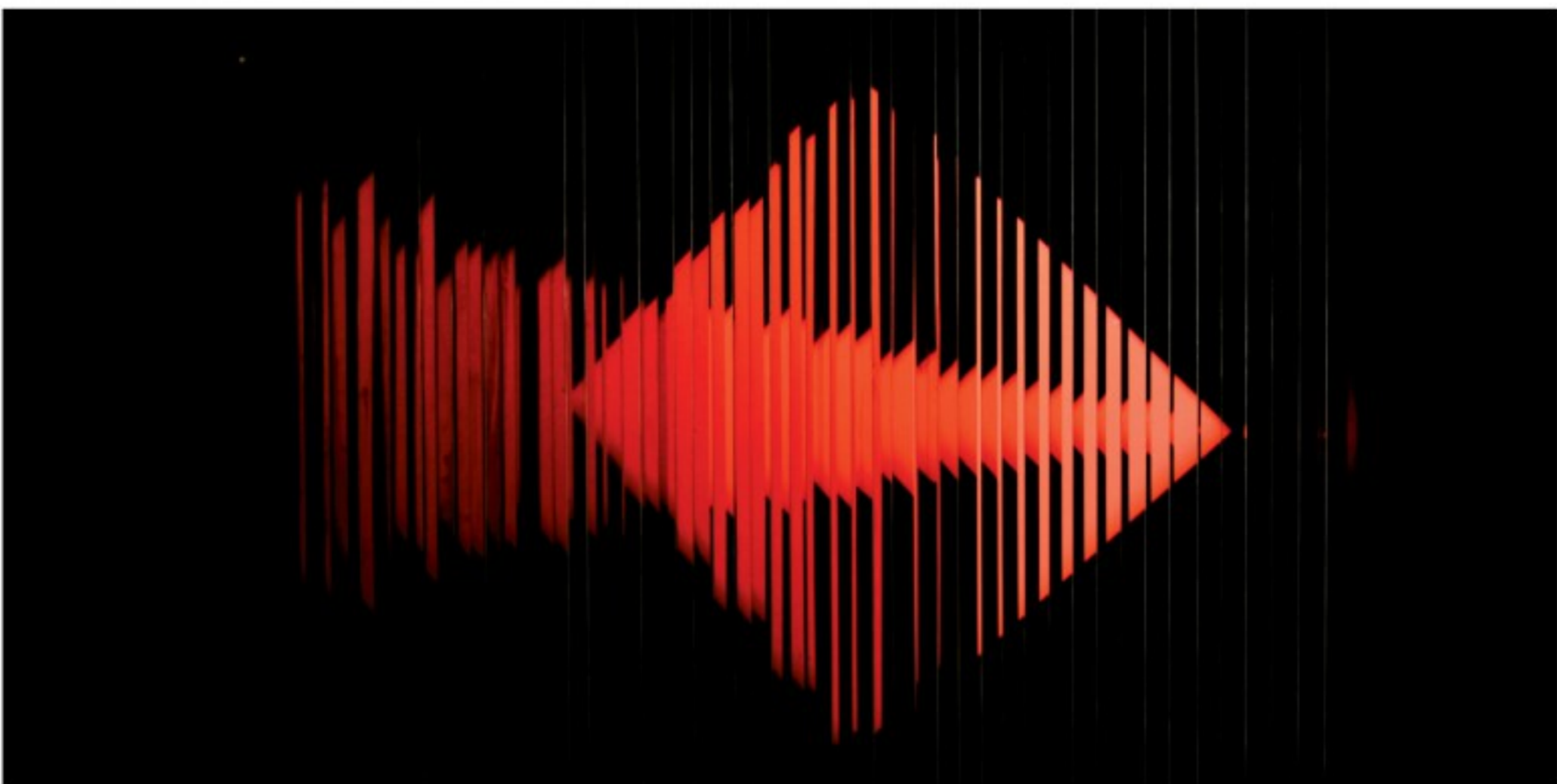
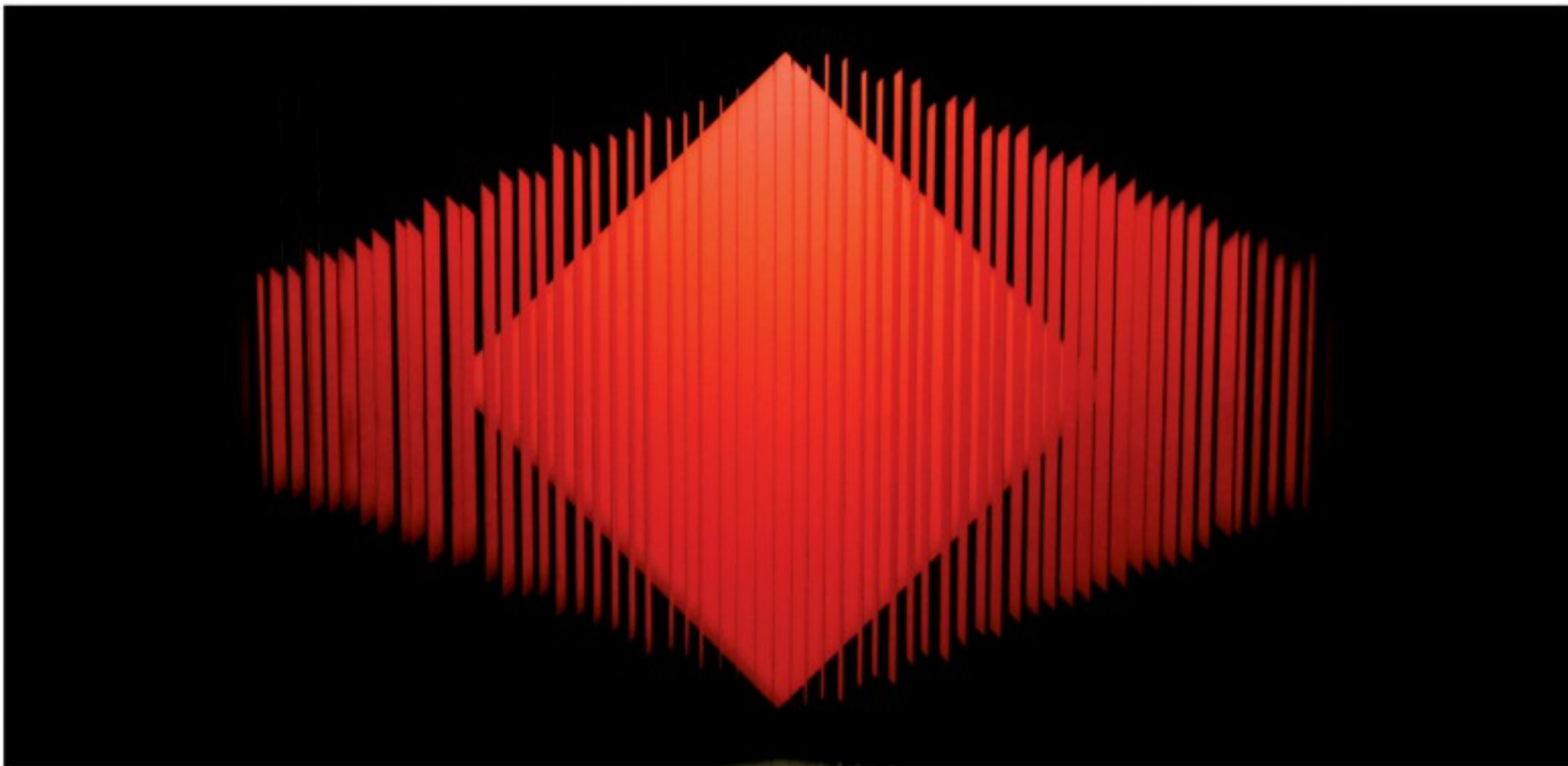
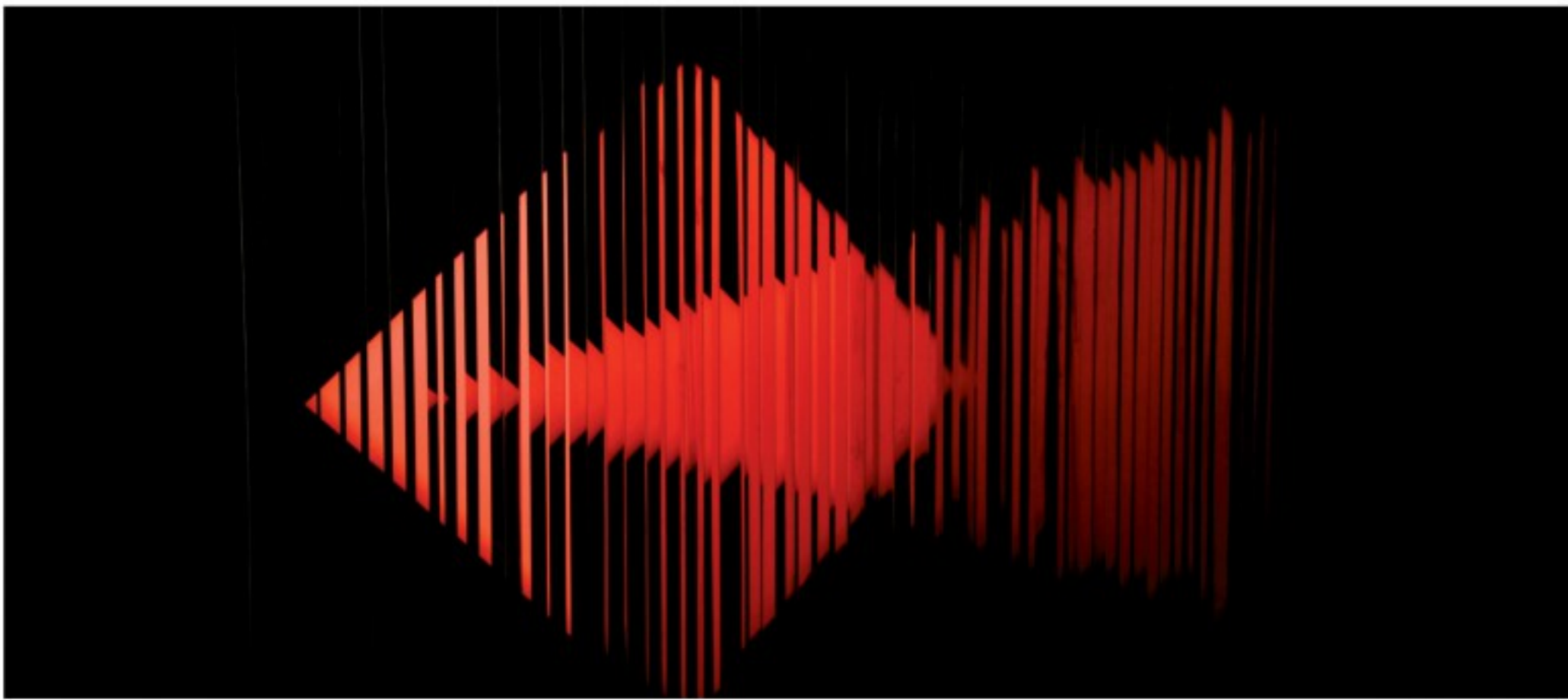
GRAV members took to the streets with a variety of impromptu performances, handing out questionnaires and surveying public opinion about political affairs and hot-button social issues of the day. GRAV often incited the ire of local police, who tried to break up the crowds that the group attracted.

Le Parc also made mobile hanging sculptures and interactive machines. Several of the latter are clustered together at the Pérez, making one room like a noisy arcade. *Ensemble of Eleven Surprise Movements* (1965), for example, is an open cabinet with multiple compartments outfitted with buttons that, when pushed, trigger spinning wheels, clattering cylinders, banging hammers, and the like in an absurdist clamor. *Partition with Reflective Strips* (1966), featuring a large red diamond-shaped panel suspended from the ceiling, exemplifies the mobiles. Hung directly in front of the panel, a row of narrow, vertical strips of reflective stainless steel causes the contours of the diamond to shift as one moves through the room. This work led to an ongoing series of large spherical mobiles, made of hundreds of rectangular facets of translucent plexiglass.

GRAV prided itself on the anonymity of its artist members and their endeavors. Once Le Parc was awarded the Grand Prize for Painting at the 1966 Venice Biennale for his individual works, and after French Minister of Culture André Malraux made him a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres the following year, a rift began in GRAV, which ultimately led to its dissolution in 1968. That same year, Le Parc was exiled from France for some months due to his activist role during the student riots. However, his reputation in France and throughout Latin America grew. While continuing to produce a variety of artworks and actions, Le Parc spent much of his time as an unofficial ambassador for Latin American art and artists. He traveled the world throughout the 1970s and '80s, attending conferences on numerous global issues and socialist causes.

While Le Parc has sought to create interactive and anarchic work largely devoid of ego, an intense artistic personality, albeit an unconventional one, nevertheless emerges from the Pérez retrospective. He opposes the concept of art aimed at a passive audience obliged to absorb an artist's carefully calibrated gestures. Engaging the viewer in novel ways, Le Parc suggests a means to grapple effectively with volatility and uncertainty, a strategy that should prove to be a lasting inspiration in times of political tumult and social change. ○

1. All dates for works in this article refer to completion of the original piece. Elements of some of the originals have been restored or replaced, as indicated by dual dates given in the exhibition catalogue *Form into Action: Julio Le Parc*, ed. Estrellita B. Brodsky, Miami, Pérez Art Museum, and New York, DelMonico/Prestel, 2016.
2. Julio Le Parc, "Questions," an address to the Ibero-American Meeting of Art Critics and Visual Artists, Caracas, June 1978, in *Form into Action*, p. 186.
3. His work, which contains no film or video components, is rigorously abstract, with one exception. The eccentric slide projection *Vibrating Image, Self-Portrait* (1981) shows the smiling face of the artist continually bouncing in and out of focus due to an intentionally shaky, mechanized projector.
4. GRAV, "Proposals on Movement," January 1961, in *Form into Action*, p. 172.



Three views of
*Partition with
Reflective Strips*,
1966/2005, steel,
approx. 91 by 109
by 31 inches.
Courtesy Galeria
Nara Roesler.



EXPOS

JULIO LE PARC, HYPNOTIQUE



GALERIE PERROTIN

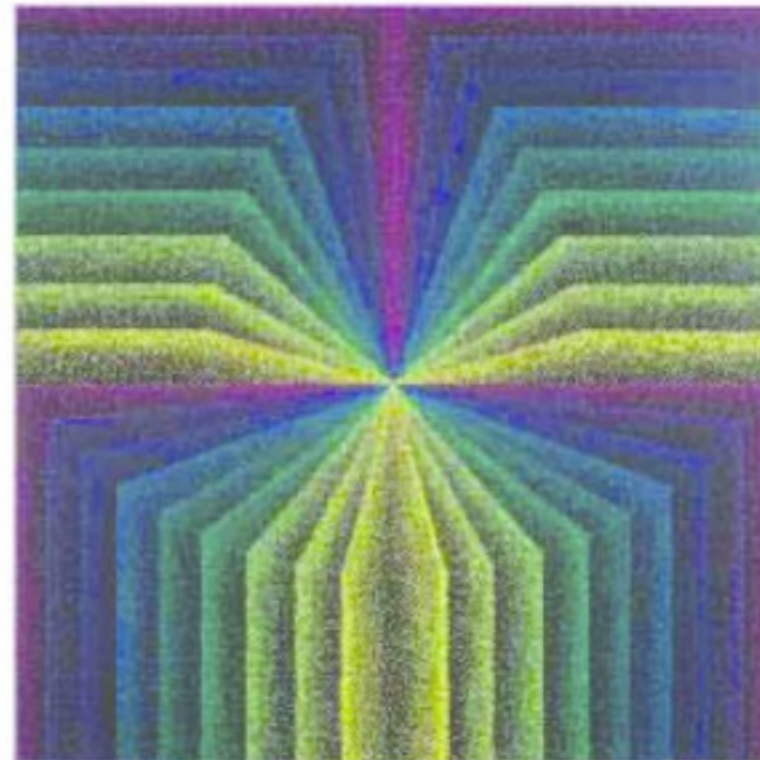
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JUSQU'AU 23 déc.

L'insatiable Argentin de Cachan, 89 ans, qui, tel un coureur de fonds, fabrique un art en expérimentation perpétuelle depuis les années 1960, enchante une nouvelle fois les amoureux de son art cinétique. On est toujours fasciné par son utilisation de la lumière à travers des installations récentes et d'autres plus anciennes. Des projections, des mouvements et des reflets créent cette dynamique de mouvement. Le spectateur est toujours au cœur du dispositif. Il voit son reflet démultiplié dans les fragments de miroir ou de plastique découpé en lamelles. Il se laisse volontiers prendre au jeu hypnotique des mobiles suspendus ou encore des fameuses cibles multicolores. « Dans mon travail, on voit



ce que l'on voit. Une certaine mystification entre en jeu dès qu'il y a des intermédiaires... », coupe court Julio Le Parc, qui, toute sa vie, a refusé le carcan des institutions. Même si celles-ci multiplient les hommages (au Grand Palais en 2013, au Pérez Museum de Miami en 2016). ■

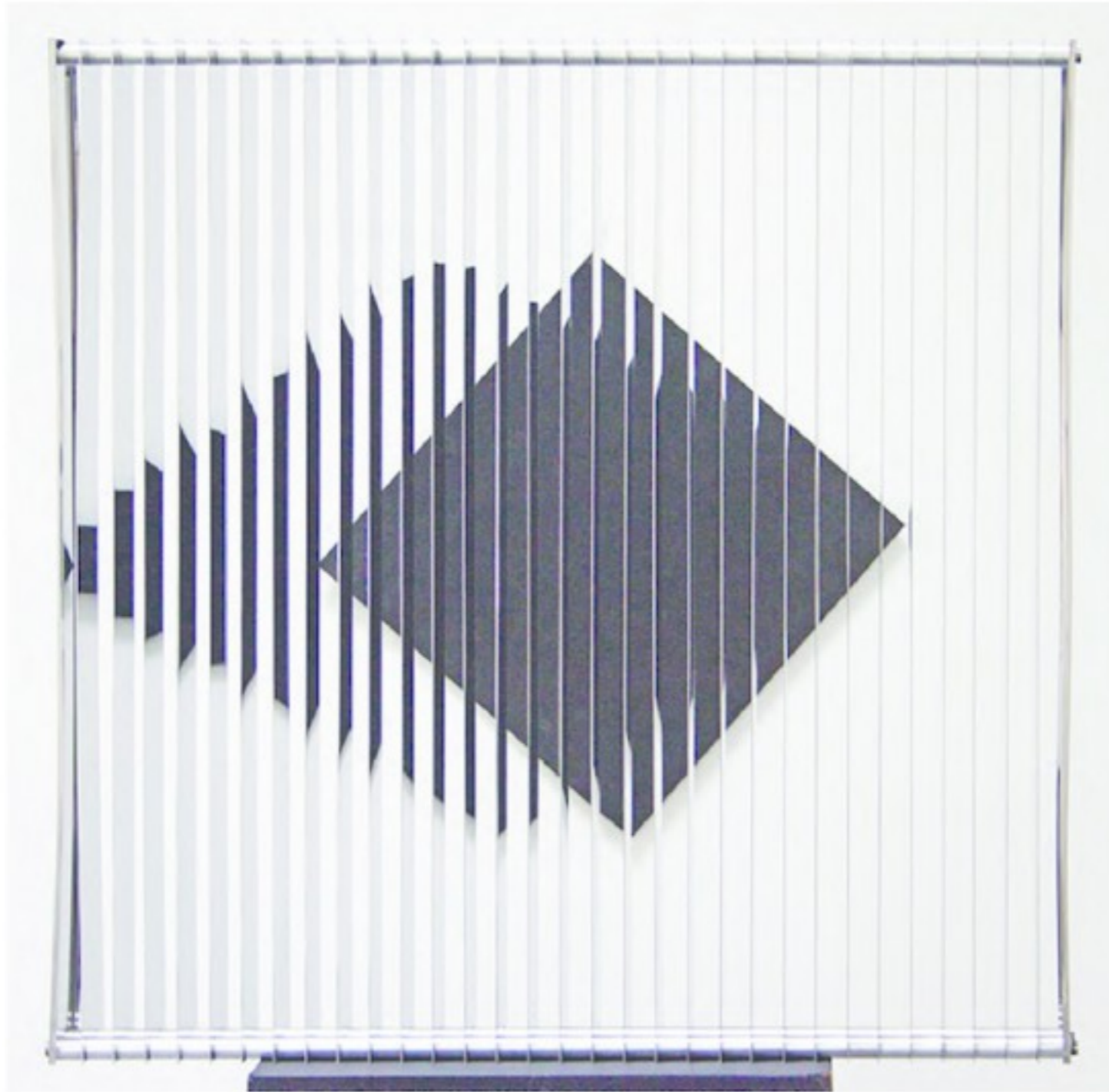
SOPHIE DE SANTIS

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Julio Le Parc at Perrotin

A blouinartinfo.com/news/story/2574905/julio-le-parc-at-perrotin

Sarah Moroz, Modern Painters



Julio Le Parc's work has experienced a global revival of late: exhibitions at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2013, the Serpentine Sackler Gallery in London in 2014, and a major retrospective at the Perez Art Museum in Miami last year. His latest exhibition at Perrotin Paris (following an exhibition in the New York space in 2016) features some 40 paintings, sculptures and installations produced between the '70s and '90s, as well as new installations, mobiles and recent paintings.

His dynamism hasn't faded a bit: his 2016 "Alchimie 349," a bright whirling dervish in acrylic paints, is as energetic as a spiraling 1976 canvas, "Modulation 204." At 89 years old, the Argentine-born artist has a storied past with the French art scene, ever since he arrived in the country on a grant in 1958. He has worked and resided here since, headquartered in an atelier in the southwestern Parisian suburb of Cachan, a veritable funhouse of whirring mechanized installations that transform light into undulating shadows or bright fantasias (including a venture into virtual reality experiences, developed with the help of his sons).

Since 1959, Le Parc has self-imposed a 14-scale selection of colors (plus white, gray and black neutrals), a systematic palette he endlessly recalibrates. The vibrant hues are deployed into electrifying geometric forms that rouse one's sense of perception, toying with shifts in luminosity and sleights of hands to produce optical illusions. His work has been qualified as Kinetic Art, although Le Parc has vocally resisted this term. Ceaselessly motivated by experimentation, he has christened himself a "tinkerer," elaborating in an interview with *Purple* magazine in March 2017: "If you have a little imagination, a little curiosity, a little stubbornness, you'll stumble upon things." This artist-as-explorer approach not only keeps him creatively satisfied, but enables more forthright connections with the viewer: "Play is, perhaps, a good way station toward opening people up to other things."

Le Parc has infused a political dimension to his work: He has criticized dictatorships in Latin America through assorted anti-fascist projects, and was temporarily exiled from France because of his local art activism during the country's political upheaval around 1968. But playfulness has been paramount, even when delivering an activist message. He was a founding member of GRAV (Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, an acronym that winks at

LE QUOTIDIEN *THE ART DAILY NEWS* DE L'ART

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JUNE 2017 *SPECIAL ISSUE*

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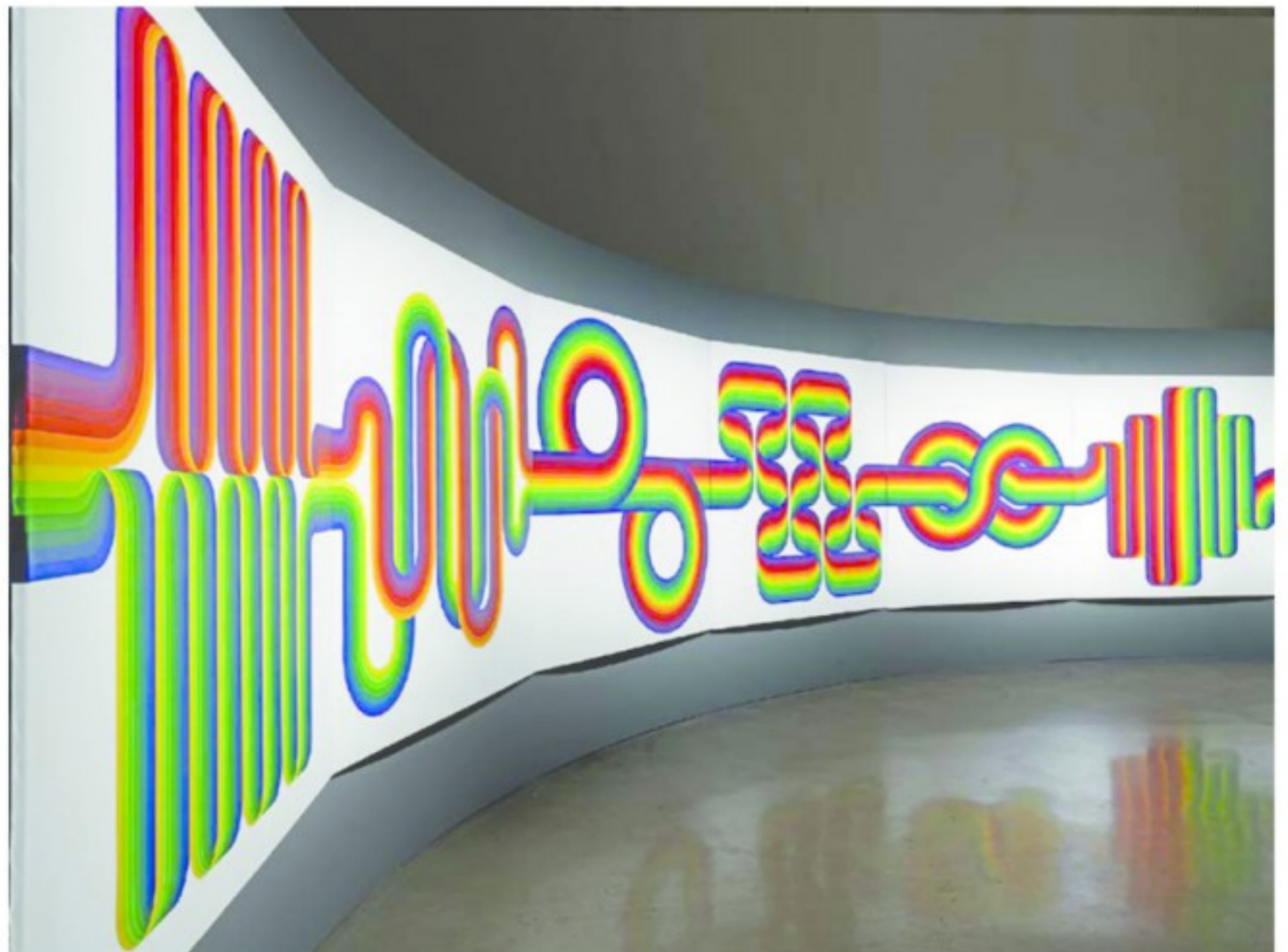


PERROTIN (Paris, New York, Seoul, Hong Kong, Tokyo) –
Stand U65

Par/By Roxana Azimi

Julio Le Parc

— Cofondateur du mouvement GRAV, l'artiste argentin Julio Le Parc se plaît depuis les années 1960 à taquiner notre rétine, dilater nos pupilles et affoler nos repères. La galerie Perrotin présente sur Art Unlimited l'une des œuvres majeures de sa carrière et une pièce maîtresse de l'art cinétique, *La Longue marche*, réalisée en 1974. Cette marche sinueuse composée de dix panneaux ne se réfère ni à celle de Mao en Chine ni à celle de Simon Bolivar en Amérique du Sud. Ici, c'est le prisme coloré qui est en mouvement, par des effets de superpositions, torsions, variations et imbrications des couleurs. Pas de centre, pas de début ni de fin dans ce jeu de chromie infini. La Longue marche, c'est aussi, sur le plan biographique, celle qui l'a conduit à franchir l'Atlantique et à atterrir à Paris. « *C'est ma longue marche. Mais la fin de cette longue marche n'est pas la mort, observe Julio Le Parc. La longue marche continuera. C'est la métaphore de la condition humaine, une métaphore heureuse* ». Un hymne à la couleur et à la vie. ●



— Co-founder of the GRAV movement, the Argentine artist Julio Le Parc has enjoyed teasing our retinas, dilating our pupils and perturbing our bearings since the 1960s. At Art Unlimited, Galerie Perrotin presents one of the major works from his career and a masterpiece of kinetic art, *La Longue marche*, produced in 1974. This sinuous march composed of ten panels refers neither to Mao in China nor Simon Bolivar in South America. Here, the colored prism is in motion via effects of superimpositions, rotations, variations and color overlaps. There is no center, beginning or end in this play of infinite chroma. *La Longue marche* (The Long March) was also, on a biographical level, the work that led him to cross the Atlantic and end up in Paris. “It’s my long walk. But the end of this long march is not death,” observed Julio Le Parc. “The long march will continue. It is the metaphor of the human condition, a joyful metaphor.” A hymn to color and life. ●

Julio Le Parc,
La Longue Marche
(détail), 1974, acrylic
on canvas. © Julio
Le Parc / ADAGP,
Paris 2017. Courtesy
Perrotin, Paris,
New York, Hongkong.

Julio Le Parc

1928 Born in Mendoza,
Argentina

2013 Solo show, Palais
de Tokyo, Paris

2016 “Julio Le Parc, form into
Action”, Perez Art Museum,
Miami