



## Print Article



Robert Irwin, "Way Out West," installation view at L&M Arts, Los Angeles



Robert Irwin, #3 x 6' - Four Fold, 2011, installation view of four works, at L&M Arts, Los Angeles



Robert Irwin, *Durango*, 2011, at L&M Arts, Los Angeles

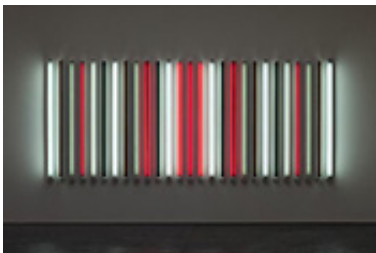
## Robert Irwin ON LOOKING

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Robert Irwin may not be included in "Crosscurrents in L.A.: Painting and Sculpture, 1950-1970" at the Getty Museum, but his work is being featured in a number of other exhibitions. In addition, he is having his first show in a Los Angeles gallery since he was with Ferus Gallery back in the '60s. "Way Out West," as his show is called, is at [L&M Arts](#) in Venice. It is about a mile east of the Market Street studio where he had progressively reduced the content of his paintings until he was working principally with the effects of light.

Over his illustrious career, Irwin has moved outside the boundaries of the canvas, the boundaries of the gallery, and the boundaries of architecture to work in the great outdoors as a designer of landscapes and gardens. He even thought that he was done with studio art altogether -- until San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art director Hugh Davies gave him a studio to use in January 2007. Despite his reluctance, Irwin started going there and found himself producing an entirely new body of work, still dealing with the nature of perception but back inside the gallery space.

His current show does seem to capture the shifting light of sunshine in a garden, despite being comprised only of fluorescent tubes. Wrapped in gels of quite specific colors, sometimes with a thin opaque line running up the middle, the tubes are lined up vertically. The most curious aspect is that some are on, some are off, some have a dimmed



Robert Irwin, *All That Jazz*, 2011, at L&M Arts, Los Angeles



Robert Irwin, *Four Corners*, 2011, at L&M Arts, Los Angeles



Robert Irwin and Charles Arnoldi at L&M Arts, Los Angeles

effect. Irwin has the lighting set for the two gallery spaces in Venice but once they are in your possession, you can light them according to your preference.

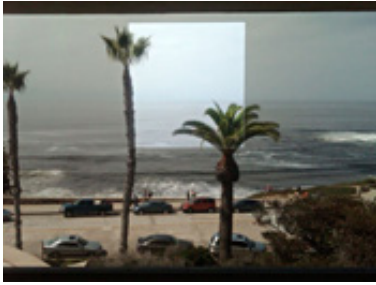
Irwin, who lives in San Diego, agreed to talk about his decision to have a show in L.A. after an absence of 45 years. "In one way, having a show is having a dialogue, so not having a show was a problem. I realized I had not had a show in my hometown.

"Since I didn't have a studio for 45 years and I had to experiment to make wall of fluorescents, Hugh Davies insisted on giving me a studio down here. I went back and forth for a year and dipped in shit and come up smelling like a rose. Out of that grew what I'm doing right now. It was a strange turn of events.

"The fluorescents, interestingly enough, were the last thing I did at my studio on Mildred Avenue in the early '70s. I had a room, I covered the corners to make it like a **ganzfeld**. I brought every light I could find; the idea that something having to do with energy is what I would be working with instead of clay or bronze. I liked a lot of the qualities of the light but I couldn't separate it from the object and the plug. It would separate me from what I was interested in, which was the phenomena.

"The fluorescent fixture worked better than others. The plug is hidden and it's dumb, so dumb, in a way you go past it. Others had more interest as objects. I'd seen the early **Dan Flavin**, I knew him and went to him. I said they look great but I'm not interested in that shit. I expounded my thoughts to him, which was probably a part of my process. But he was more interested in his own "Tatlin" series, which was the best, with a kind of dumb, simple geometric mathematical logic. But art is what he was interested in. He made them into patterns and walk-through tunnels. I'm interested in making them as dumb as I can as objects to enable you to see a mix of light and shadows as opposed to objects.

"These new things are very fun in a way. I used to work months for a 'wow' moment. Now I get six or seven a day. These are so fun I can't tell you. When someone comes over, I always walk them through



Robert Irwin, *1°2°3°4°*, 1997, apertures cut into existing windows, installation view at the San Diego Museum of Art

the studio because people see them as objects and often can't see the phenomena.

"I'm interested in what the eye is doing. It is always neutral, always acting and interacting. It is all about looking or not looking at something. That's the part I like."

Robert Irwin, "Way Out West," Sept. 17-Oct. 22, 2011, at L&M Arts, 660 South Venice Boulevard, Venice, Ca. 90291.

**HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP** is the author of *Rebels in Paradise: The Los Angeles Art Scene and the 1960s* (Henry Holt, 2011).