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# Iván Navarro: Fluorescent Light Sculptures

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Iván Navarro

## Fluorescent Light Sculptures



**Iván Navarro**

**Fluorescent Light Sculptures**

Curator and editor Julia P. Herzberg

The Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum  
Florida International University, Miami

Published for the exhibition

***Iván Navarro: Fluorescent Light Sculptures***

Organized by

The Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum

Florida International University, Miami

November 17, 2012–January 2, 2013

Cover: ***Nowhere Man I***, 2009  
Cool white fluorescent lights  
and electric energy  
65 x 77 inches

Back cover: ***Nowhere Man III***, 2009  
Cool white fluorescent lights  
and electric energy  
73½ x 70½ inches  
Installation in progress Towner  
Eastbourne, England

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## Director's Foreword

When Julia Herzberg proposed this exhibition featuring the fluorescent light works of Iván Navarro to the Frost Art Museum, I felt compelled to fully investigate both the artist and the inspirations behind his art. While I had been aware that Navarro was an internationally recognized Chilean artist, mostly known for his light sculptures and that he had represented his country at the 2009 Venice Biennale and also at numerous other museums and biennials over the past two decades . . . that was about all I knew. I was not familiar with the story of his life and the events that influenced him and continue to influence him today. As I discussed his very profound artistic trajectory with Dr. Herzberg, I learned that his work is integrally related to a life and career that began under a repressive political regime and continued through excellent and influential academic training.

This exhibition, and the brilliant essay and conversation with the artist written by Dr. Herzberg, offers our visitors the opportunity to fully understand the context of work that may, at first, appear as fragile constructions made of ordinary man-made objects, electrical materials, and fluorescent light tubes in particular, that range from lamps and other types of furniture, to illusionistic spaces that appear as cuts through walls or floors, to pictograms. Just as these illusionistic objects seduce us into gazing into their never-ending black holes, so do the other works reach beyond their basic shapes to express profound memories of political torture and social disruption.

It is also a coincidence that this exhibition is being organized while the Olympics are taking place in London. Iván Navarro was fascinated with the Olympic rings and universal signage developed for the 1972 Munich Olympics by Otl Aicher and continued to explore his pictographic process, transforming the signs into schematized human figures made of fluorescent lights. The *Nowhere Man* series of fourteen sculptures made from fluorescent lights is a highlight of this selection of works that take the viewer through twenty years of his artistic production. They are being presented for the first time as a complete series in a museum.

I am grateful to Julia P. Herzberg, Adjunct Curator for the Frost Art Museum, for her tireless work in organizing the exhibition (and expanding it on short notice into our largest spaces), doing the research, and presenting our South Florida audience with the work of one of the most provocative artists of our day. I am also happy to have met Iván Navarro, to have heard him talk about his work, to feel a special connection with him as well as his art, and I appreciate his full cooperation and collaboration on this project. I would also like to acknowledge his galleries and collectors who have generously supported this project and loaned work for our exhibition. The Paul Kasmin Gallery, Baró Galeria, Galerie Daniel Templon, Distrito 4, Las Brasas Tenedor Libre, Fundación Artistas Unidos, the Martin Z. Margulies Collection, the Cricket Taplin Collection, and the Sagamore Hotel have assured that this very important exhibition is brought to our South Florida community.

**Carol Damian**, Director & Chief Curator  
The Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum

## Acknowledgments

I have known Iván Navarro and observed his work at close hand for about ten years and have had several opportunities to write about it. One very special occasion—preparing for a group exhibition—resulted in the “Conversation with Iván Navarro” of 2004, which is published here for the first time. The questions in that conversation relating to three early sculptures, their sources, and technical and material processes inspired me to investigate the multi-forked steps of the artist’s journey from his university days to the present. This essay discusses a variety of topics—the artist’s family background, schooling, formation under the Pinochet regime, use of electrical materials, musical tastes, transition to New York, as well as his adoption of fluorescent light as a primary medium in his sculptures and his diverse conversations with a broad range of artists, designers, architects, and musicians. I trust it will provide a broader base for understanding the complex and engaging practice of this very talented artist.

This exhibition, which has been in the planning stages for several years, presents the entire sculptural project *Nowhere Man*. The three other sculptures and three videos connect to major series of work the artist has created during his career. We are thrilled to finally see the realization of *Iván Navarro: Fluorescent Light Sculptures*.

I thank Iván Navarro for his extreme generosity and collegiality as I plodded through issue-by-issue and work-by-work. He responded to seemingly endless inquiries with patience and aplomb. I am grateful as well to two of the artist’s friends and colleagues, Christian Torres for his discussions on the videos and to Pedro Pulido for his technical explanations of the *Nowhere Man* drawings. I am very appreciative of Hayden Dunbar, director of the Paul Kasmin Gallery, for his encouragement and enthusiasm from the beginning of this endeavor, and for the gallery’s support in making this catalogue possible.

At the Frost Art Museum, I thank Raymond Mathews for his sensitive reading of, and valuable suggestions on, all the material included here. I extend my utmost gratitude to Carol Damian, who foresaw the enrichment that the Navarro exhibition would bring to the university community, to Miami and beyond.

Postscript: I have used Spanish titles with English translations in parenthesis until around 2001 when the artist used English as the primary language for titles.

**Julia P. Herzberg**, Adjunct Curator  
The Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum





***Nowhere Man IV*** (in progress), 2009  
Cool white fluorescent lights and electric energy  
95 x 88½ inches



# Rethinking the Possible

Julia P. Herzberg

More than twenty years of artistic production presents us with an outstanding range of Iván Navarro's sculpture, installations, drawings, and video. This mid-career exhibition of an artist who is considered a leading innovator of contemporary sculpture offers distinctive opportunities to reflect on the importance of his training, experimentations, intentions, contexts, and sources of inspiration. It also provides an occasion to examine how the early work evolved into mature work, becoming ever richer thematically, visually, and conceptually. *Nowhere Man*, *Red and Blue Electric Chair*, *Red Ladder (Backstage)*, *Man Hole (Icon)*, and the videos *Homeless Lamp: The Juice Sucker*, *Flashlight: I'm Not from Here, I'm Not from There*, and *Resistance*, offer insights into the thematic avenues the artist has explored, the materials and media he has used, the social and political concerns he has embraced, and the artistic dialogues he has sustained.

Iván Navarro (b. 1972, Santiago, Chile) grew up during the seventeen-year Pinochet dictatorship and studied in art school during the transitional years of the first two democratically elected presidents.<sup>1</sup> His earliest works in art school reveal his interests in light, electrical materials, and electricity, elements that would define his sculpture in the following decade when fluorescent and neon lights became a principal medium.

In 1997 Navarro moved to New York City, where he currently lives and works. During the first year of transition, the artist concentrated on geometric drawings, returning to sculpture the following year. In 1998 and 1999 he expanded his formal vocabulary, worked with recycled materials, made sculptures from everyday objects, and extensively researched American art, discovering contemporary and modernist artists whose work has been inspirational to his thinking and practice. Since 2001, sociopolitical issues in Chile, in the United States, and beyond weave in and out of his work. Common objects such as wheelbarrows, chairs, doors, fences, ladders, drums, and architectural footprints are endowed with narratives simultaneously familiar and unknown, intimate and institutional, cool and hot, alluring and forbidding. Having found starting points in the work of designers, sculptors, and architects, he deconstructs historical artworks by investing new meanings within re-created forms. Navarro's dialogues with such artists as Dan Flavin, Gerrit Rietveld, Marcel Breuer, Otl Aicher, Gordon Matta-Clark, Tony Smith, and Ellsworth Kelly offer a sense of appreciation for their artistic contributions as well as an opportunity to forge an independent vision.

## Family Background

Iván Navarro, together with his brother Mario, grew up in Los Cerrillos, an industrial neighborhood of Santiago. In caring for the household, his mother did the electrical repairs; his father was an art teacher and director of the printing department at the Universidad Técnica del Estado (State Technical University). Prior to the military coup on September 11, 1973, Mr. Navarro (aka NAKOR), together with his colleagues, created the printed materials for the University as well as for other universities in Chile.

On September 10th, the day before the coup d'état, the printing department was preparing a huge design project for President Salvador Allende, who was scheduled to give a televised speech the following day at the University. In that speech, Allende would have called for a plebiscite to decide whether the majority of citizens wanted him to remain in power.<sup>2</sup> The posters designed for the political event advocated peace as they simultaneously opposed the politics of the right, whom the designers referred to as fascists.

In order to complete the graphic design work for the following day's event, the printing staff spent the night at the University. By the time they awoke the next morning, the armed forces had overthrown the democratically elected socialist government of President Allende. Prior to the bombing of the Presidential Palace, Allende gave his farewell radio broadcast to the nation announcing the military takeover and imploring everyone to remain at work, to defend themselves and their nation without risking their lives. Just after the broadcast, Victor Jara, the famous Chilean singer and songwriter, arrived according to plan at the University to prepare for his concert there. Shortly thereafter, the military, which had been ordered to close the University, arrived and forcibly removed the teaching staff to the Chile Stadium (Estadio Chile), where Jara, among others, was killed a few days later.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Navarro, who hid under the stage of the theater, managed to avoid imprisonment for a couple of weeks.<sup>4</sup>

In 1975 Mr. Navarro found work in an advertising company as art director, a position he held until 1985. The following year he began teaching graphic design in several universities in Santiago, and in 1988, after political restrictions had eased, he worked as a political cartoonist for *La Época*, an opposition newspaper that began publication the previous year.<sup>5</sup> When Mr. Navarro's cartoons were too critical of the Pinochet government, the newspaper's editor had him alter the content and design so that the political message was less explicit.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout much of the Pinochet dictatorship, from 1973 until 1987, the country lived under a State of Emergency. When the armed forces deposed Allende, they imposed a national curfew, dissolved Congress, banned political parties, and severely limited civil and political rights. Restrictions were placed on what people read, watched, and listened to. Art was not allowed to express social, economic, or political issues.<sup>7</sup>



1

NAKOR (Mario Navarro Cortés)  
 447, 1988  
 Ink on paper  
 4 7/10 x 4 7/10 inches  
 Drawing published in *La Epoca* newspaper,  
 June 1988, Santiago, Chile



2

NAKOR (Mario Navarro Cortés)  
 Untitled, 1988  
 Ink on paper  
 4 7/10 x 4 7/10 inches  
 Drawing rejected by *La Epoca* newspaper's director,  
 Santiago, Chile

A State of Siege, declared in September 1986 following an attempt on Pinochet's life, ended in early 1987. Among Iván's many memories, he recalls the electrical blackouts in his neighborhood when the police suddenly raided the neighbors' homes, taking some people prisoner, disappearing others.<sup>9</sup> Iván also heard friends talk about their parents who had disappeared. In general, however, there was not much discussion within the Navarro family regarding the missing. For many, the political situation was terrible, and it seems that Navarro's parents wanted to shield their sons, at least during their childhood and adolescent years, from realities that would have been emotionally unbearable for them to understand given their age.<sup>9</sup>

In 1984 Navarro entered middle school at Sagrados Corazones. Located in the center of Santiago near many government buildings, the French Catholic school was close to many conflicts between leftist protestors and the national police force (*carabineros*). When the opposition threw Molotov cocktails, the police retaliated with guns and tanks, and the bloody, disruptive battles left people dead or dragged off to prison to be disappeared. Iván remembers it as "a horrible time in Chile because the dictatorship was repressing people very openly. It was like a civil war."<sup>10</sup> When these street battles occurred, the priests kept the students in school, past dismissal time, until the conflict subsided. Because of censorship and fear, the priests did not talk openly to the students about the political situation.

Turning to a more enjoyable side of everyday life, Iván also grew up listening to many different kinds of music. His parents adored Chilean folk music, especially that sung by Quilapayún, Itni-Illimani, Violeta Parra, and Víctor Jara, singers who continued the tradition of protest music, which in the 1970s and 1980s had a large following in Chile, especially among people opposed to the regime.<sup>11</sup> Because protest music was banned, Iván's father frequently warned him not to tell people that they listened to "that kind of music." The Navarro family also listened to the Beatles; Iván became totally absorbed in English pop music in the 1980s when his brother Mario introduced him to rock. "Chilean rock music in the 1980s was a very interesting alternative kind of scene, because it was against the dictatorship." Music became a passion for Navarro, one, as will be noted, he expressed in sculpture as well as in video.

### **The Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (PUC)**

Navarro studied art at PUC from 1991 to 1996. During his undergraduate years he developed an interest in light, made objects that fused sculpture and decorative design, and adopted electrical materials as a medium for his work. Eduardo Vilches' classes in color (1991–1992) and advanced printmaking (1994–1995) were of critical importance to Navarro's early development. Vilches taught Joseph Albers' theory of color, "which proposed an understanding of how color behaved in different situations."<sup>12</sup>

Among the fundamental lessons that Vilches took from Albers and in turn translated in his own teaching was the imperative to learn to look, to develop the power of seeing things differently than one is routinely accustomed to seeing them; to be present; to structure through color.<sup>13</sup> Although color is absent in Navarro's 1990s work, it would become a very important element, as noted, for example, in several sculptures in this exhibition.

In 1994 Navarro took Vilches' advanced printmaking class where he learned that printmaking could be freed from its traditional boundaries in terms of materials and techniques. Vilches taught Luis Camnitzer's innovative ideas on printmaking as a conceptual act, one that entails repetition in producing multiples.<sup>14</sup> Through a photocopied text written by Camnitzer,<sup>15</sup> Vilches advanced the understanding of printmaking as a process of serialization, one that extends to the production of a print or of an object. The following ideas contain Camnitzer's key thoughts:

If instead of working with the notions of techniques such as the woodcut, intaglio, the lithograph, silkscreen, as well as the various hybrid versions that have evolved from them, excluding the monotypes, we work with this more general idea of an 'image-producing surface,' we can approach a

redefinition of Printmaking. We will also be able to affirm our freedom to use any material, leaving the confines of more or less traditional materials, and freeing ourselves from the inherent traditional prejudice that a print must be two-dimensional.<sup>16</sup>

In the advanced printmaking class, Navarro came to understand the centrality of serialization in printmaking and the representation of mass-produced objects as an end product of that medium. Aside from the theoretical importance of the above, Navarro is indebted to Vilches for “making him understand that his life and his art go hand in hand.” This lesson, one of many, finds its expression in the artist's student work.

Navarro's early experiments with photography preceded those with sculpture. In Navarro's first class in painting in 1992, he did a series of photographs on albinos outside of his class assignments. The young art student attempted to understand the way light affected them. That passing interest led to another experiment, one closer to home. Iván began to think about the possibility of making objects with electrical materials, sockets, bulbs, wires—materials that are mass-produced. Having grown up watching his mother and grandfather fix all kinds of household appliances so they could be reused, he learned how to do basic electrical work, and thus felt at ease working with electrical materials, including parallel cables. The art student also spent a lot of time with friends who were studying electronics in technical high schools. Their interests were more related to the study and production of sound systems, strobe lights, and equalizers for stereos. Because of a scarcity of materials, they made strobe lights with parts of an old turntable and an equalizer inside a shoebox. Navarro learned how to recycle different kinds of materials in order to build a sound system and a light fixture.

Sometime in 1993 Navarro decided to make lamps out of aluminum pipes, angles, pots, as well as glass, producing a small series of these objects. From the young art student's perspective, the idea of making an object that was both functional and sculptural at the same time held great appeal. In Navarro's mind, these lamps had a kind of subversive quality because they did not fit a clearly defined category, such as fine arts or decorative arts. They were not even ready-mades—but the readymade idea was one he consciously considered while creating these objects that privileged artisanal know-how. Since Navarro had no possibility of showing these lamps in an art gallery, commercial or otherwise, he placed them in small stores that



3

*Lámpara Tubo 2 (Lamp Tube 2)*, 1993  
Light bulb, aluminum pipe, aluminum pots,  
glass, and electric energy  
30 x 30 x 5 (diameter) inches  
Studio view





4  
***Especial Technique*, 1994**  
 Bamboo cane, wire, incandescent light bulb,  
 and electric energy  
 18 x 5 x 10 inches  
 Studio view



5  
***Farolitos (Lanterns)*, 1994**  
 Light bulbs, aluminum, glass,  
 electric cable, and electric energy  
 12 x 5 x 5 inches, each  
 Studio view

sold different kinds of merchandise where he benefitted from having his work displayed while also earning a small profit from the sale.<sup>17</sup> After making several metal lamps, he designed one that looked like the one in his own bedroom. For *Especial Technique*, he used bamboo from his mother's garden, cut the stalks into lengths of varying sizes, used a thin metal wire to weave the delicate stalks together, and wired the lamp for electrical use. The finished object had a handmade look to it, a quality Navarro would develop to perfection over the next several years.

Navarro interviewed for Eugenio Dittborn's class, *Puesta en Escena* (Set Design), prior to being accepted in his class beginning in March 1995. Architects, designers, and art students enrolled in the class—if they passed the interview.<sup>18</sup> Navarro, who at the time was Dittborn's studio assistant, had to present his work before being accepted into the class;<sup>19</sup> he chose to show two lamps, *Farolitos (Lanterns)*. Dittborn had never seen Navarro's work and was very impressed with the conceptual idea of the lamps as hybrid sculptures. In part, Dittborn saw them as related to his Air Mail paintings, which are put inside envelopes so they could travel through the postal system to reach their destination (museums, galleries, or biennials). No one could detect from looking at the envelope that an artwork was inside. Dittborn saw an analogy between his Air Mail paintings and the lamps, which were "not noticeable as sculptures." They did not even look like art even though they were conceived as such.



6  
**Corredor (Runner)**, 1995  
 Incandescent light bulb, electric cable  
 on the wall, and electric energy  
 72 x 72 inches  
 Installation view Catholic University,  
 Santiago, Chile



7  
**Ocho (Eight)**, 1995  
 Incandescent light bulbs, sockets,  
 wire on the wall, and electric energy  
 144 x 144 inches  
 Installation view Catholic University,  
 Santiago, Chile

About every two weeks Dittborn gave instructions to his students, who in turn had to create work based on those instructions. For the final student-class assignment, Navarro was responsible for finding an exhibition space in Santiago for a solo show. Navarro chose the big conference room (El Arca) in his former high school, Sagrados Corazones. There he exhibited his first floor installation featuring three bamboo lamps together with two electric cable drawings.

The electric cable floor drawings preceded the electric cable wall drawings that Navarro did in Vilches' advanced printmaking classes from March to December 1995. *Corredor* (Runner) and *Ocho* (Eight) are works he "thought about for a long time prior to installing them." The shape of the figure eight, drawn with wire and tilted diagonally, is intended as "an endless symbol, a symbol of infinity." A group of incandescent light bulbs located in the socket in the middle of the figure eight bursts with light, thus luminously energizing the space. The wall sculptures anticipate several subsequent works with electrical materials and electricity that are now hallmarks of Navarro's early style.<sup>20</sup>

Notable for several reasons, *Un día de camping* (Camping Day) is the first sculpture in which the artist used fluorescent lights. The wall sculpture, presented for Navarro's B.A. thesis, features three squares made with fluorescent lights that frame images of fish outlined with electric cables.<sup>21</sup> The fourth square features a man with





8

*Un día de camping (Camping Day)*, 1996

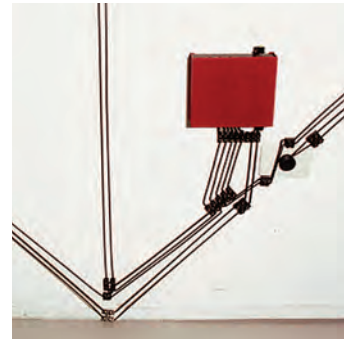
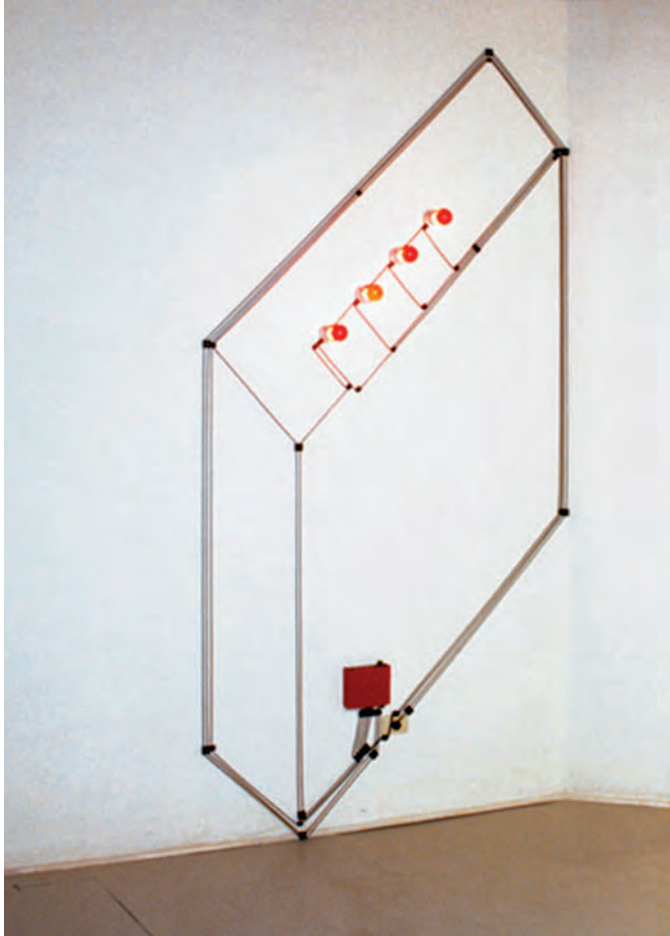
Fluorescent light tubes, electric cables on the wall, and electric energy  
500 sq. feet, approx.

Installation view Catholic University, Santiago, Chile

a fishing rod. The idea was to replace the fishermen's line with electric cables, implying that fish can be caught by electricity. One is tempted to connect this notion of "catching" fish to the act of "catching" (read "seizing") people and then interrogating them by means of electric current in Chile.

In conceptualizing *Un día de camping (Camping Day)*, Navarro used the electrical materials for the illumination of the classroom. In designing the wall sculpture, he took the fluorescent lights in the classroom and reinstalled them on the walls. He made the drawings of the fish and fisherman with parallel cables, which were the only materials used that were not part of the classroom's illumination. The circuits in the classroom provided the electrical power.

Later in the year after graduating from PUC, Navarro exhibited *La Gran Lámpara (The Great Lamp)* and *Juego de luces para la fiesta (Party Lights)* at the Galería Gabriela Mistral.<sup>22</sup> *La Gran Lámpara* features a mural-size drawing on two gallery walls in which parallel cables are covered with the electric conduits. Incandescent light bulbs attached to the conduits create an overall geometric design that fills the gallery with spots of light, creating a somewhat theatrical effect. The spectators could control the illumination of the gallery by turning the bulbs on and off, thereby lighting or darkening the space. Navarro wanted to invite the viewers' participation through their activation of electricity, thereby making them co-authors of the work.



9

***Juego de luces para la fiesta (Party Lights)*, 1996**

Light bulbs, sockets, control box, electric cable  
on the wall, and electric energy

113½ x 58½ inches

Installation view Galería Gabriela Mistral, Santiago, Chile

*Juego de luces para la fiesta* is an isometric drawing on the wall made with electric cables. The drawing mimics the shape of a box known as an intermittent light controller that powers the four colored light bulbs as they go on and off like strobe lights or even Christmas tree lights. Navarro's inclusion of the "real" box (set on one of the cables) sets up a tautological rendering—the representation of the object and the object itself.

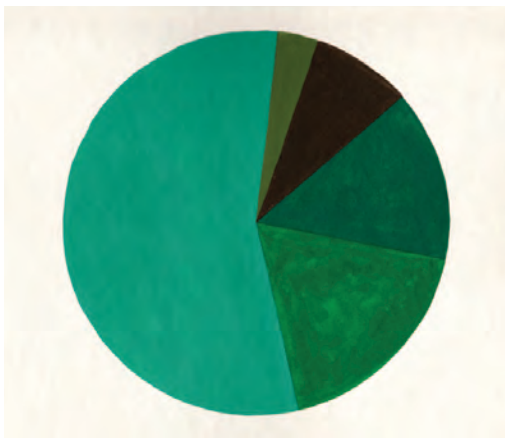
*Juego de luces para la fiesta*, together with the other sculptures noted above, offer examples of Navarro's use of mass-produced, industrial objects, such as electric cables, incandescent bulbs, fluorescent lights, plugs, and sockets, constructed in diverse forms so that electricity, light, and energy are produced as principal elements in the artwork. These are the elements that will define his visual evolution as he expands thematic issues.

## Transition to New York in 1997

Navarro, who arrived in New York about a year after he had finished working as a studio assistant to Eugenio Dittborn, had exhibited two of his wall sculptures at the nonprofit government-sponsored Galeria Gabriela Mistral and participated with a series of lamps in the Primera Bienal de Arte Joven at Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (the National Museum of Fine Art), both in 1996. In comparing the first four years of the New York work to that produced in Santiago during a like period of time, we find similar bursts of talent, imagination, and innovation. During the first year in New York, the young artist adjusted to a new life in which he found work to support himself, discovered how to keep his artistic practice alive by drawing instead of making sculpture, and immersed himself in an in-depth study of American art, namely Minimalism, especially the work of Dan Flavin.

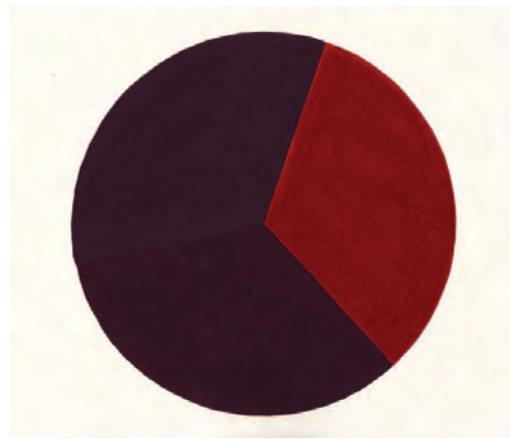
The result of Navarro's first year's work is an extensive series of drawings titled *Pie Graph*. Without a studio, the artist realized that by working on a small-scale project he could further advance some of the innovative directions of his Santiago work, using existing objects and putting his knowledge of color theory to new use. Having found pie graphs in newspapers, he cut them out and used them for the circular shapes he traced on heavy paper. He then filled the sections of the circles with gouache. In the resulting series of about thirty drawings, each is given an individual number to distinguish one from the other.

Following the series of drawings, Navarro did a somewhat unusual assemblage titled *Naturaleza muerta con zanahorias y ampollitas* (*Still Life with Carrots and Light Bulbs*). The wall installation was inspired by the Argentine conceptual artist



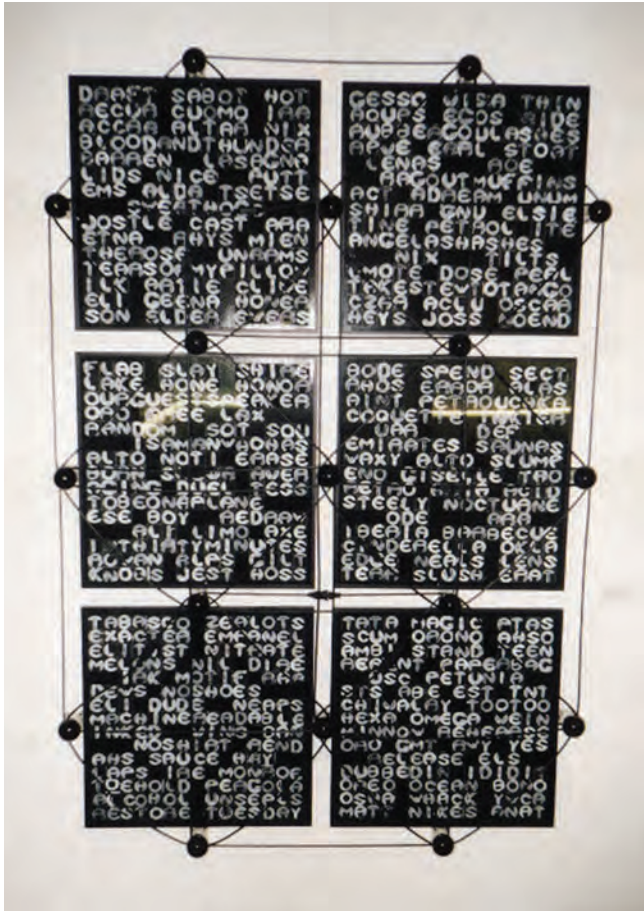
10

*Pie Graph #8*, 1997  
Gouache on paper  
12 x 9 inches



11

*Pie Graph #11*, 1997  
Gouache on paper  
12 x 9 inches



12

*Naturaleza muerta con zanahorias y ampolletas (Still Life with Carrots and Light Bulbs)*, 1998

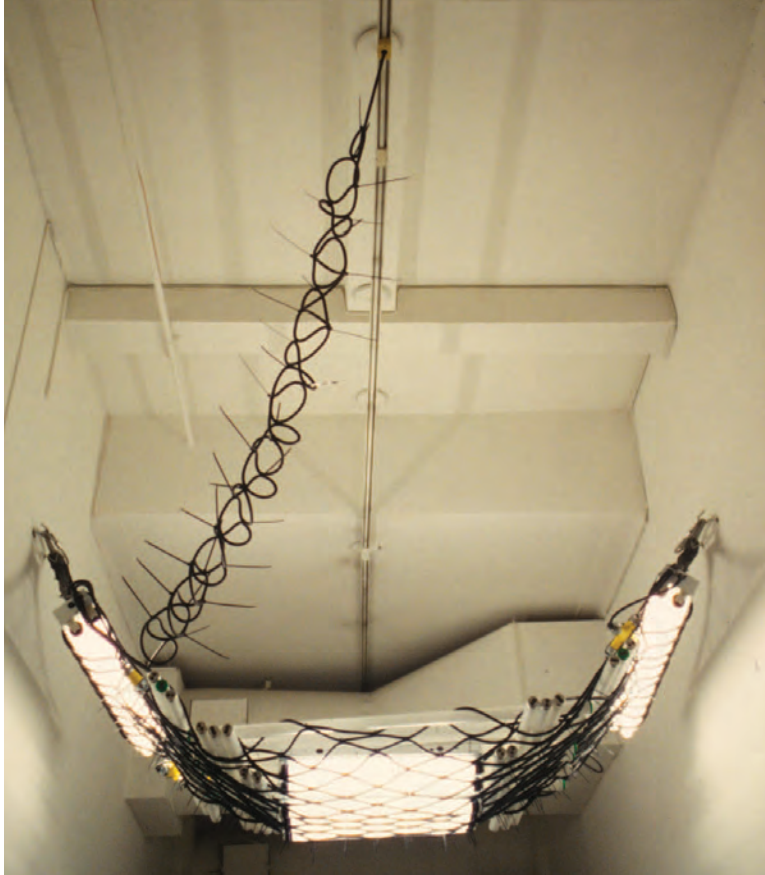
Incandescent light bulbs, carrot stamps, paper, and electric cables

78<sup>7</sup>/<sub>10</sub> x 51<sup>1</sup>/<sub>10</sub> inches

Victor Grippo (b. 1936, d. 2002), whose installations with potatoes generated a low volume of electric energy. Grippo's low-tech know-how, as well as his use of food-stuffs, the humble potato, to produce a small amount of electric power, appealed to Navarro. As a partial response to the Argentinean artist's experiments using the energy latent in organic matter, the younger artist used carrots that he hand-carved into words printed on small squares to form the lines of a crossword puzzle.<sup>23</sup> He did not connect the light bulbs, electric cables, and outlets that crisscrossed the surface of the puzzle. Instead Navarro emphasized the combination of objects, one organic, and the other mass-produced. Without the electricity, the work has a somewhat dadaesque air about it.

Sometime during the same year, 1998, the artist met a curator who was very interested in the geometric compositions of the *Pie Graph* series. In their discussions of his work and its relationship to his studies, experiences, and practice in Chile, she suggested he look at New York artists on the chance that he might find some interesting correspondences. Her suggestion struck a positive chord. Since Navarro was studying Minimalism, which he had not known about largely because it was irrelevant to the contemporary art scene in Chile, he perceived certain elements in





13

*Hammock*, 1999

Fluorescent lights, electric  
cables, and electric energy

120 x 120 x 48 inches

Installation view

El Museo del Barrio, New York

his work that conformed to minimalist practices—the simplified lines of his electric drawings and the serialization of elements. As ideas were churning, Navarro thought of Flavin's work, largely because of the appeal of fluorescent lights, electric materials, and energy. Of special interest was Flavin's early work with "social connotations."<sup>24</sup> At the beginning of his career, Flavin recycled the materials used to make light sculptures. During Navarro's research he had read an article by Dan Graham who wrote that when Flavin first began his fluorescent light pieces, he had very little money with which to purchase materials. He went to a hardware store where he could return the fluorescent lights within a certain time and have his money returned.<sup>25</sup> This kind of make-do with few financial resources struck a chord with Navarro, who, as we have seen, found similar ways of securing materials at little cost when he began his work.

In looking closely at Flavin, and considering his role in Minimalism, Navarro recalled several Chilean artists, such as Carlos Leppe, Gonzalo Díaz, and Francisco Brugnoli, who had also used fluorescent light in some of their work in the 1970s and 1980s without regard for Minimalism. Navarro was determined to use fluorescent lights as a primary medium for work infused with sociopolitical meaning. However, in his later sculpture he did not work in an abstract style as did Flavin.



14

***Satellite*, 1999**

Light bulbs, bicycle parts, tripod, metal,  
human-powered electric generator, and  
electric energy

86 x 36 x 86 inches

Three pivotal works—*Hammock*, *Table and Lamp*, *Satellite* of 1999—feature complex relationships between the materials and the theoretical aspects of his work as they look back on earlier interests in everyday objects as subjects of art. *Hammock*, exhibited in *The Selected Files* at El Museo del Barrio in 1999, was installed on the ceiling in a service area outside the restrooms in the museum, where the electricity is always on. The large accumulation of fluorescent tubes was woven with electric wires into the shape of a hammock and suspended from the high ceiling—a perfect fit for the space and a clever cross between two common objects illuminating an entire area. It is an unusual piece, one that relied more on fluorescent lights, as the principal medium, than had any previous work.

*Table and Lamp*, a straightforward representation of the objects named, is a sculpture object in the form of furniture. The connection between this work and *Hammock* lies in the artist's interest in constructing utilitarian objects made principally with fluorescent lights and electrical materials,<sup>26</sup> and thus affirms Navarro's commitment to Dan Flavin's use of fluorescent lights as the building blocks of sculpture. *Table and Lamp* points to Navarro's "social furniture," in the early years of 2000, a body of work that addresses social and political subjects.

After many months of work, the artist constructed *Satellite*, a complicated sculpture with many recycled bicycle parts, light bulbs, and a human-powered electric generator, all of which sit atop a tripod. In looking back to the artist's adolescent years, one recalls the lessons learned from Navarro's friends, who in high school used recycled materials in order to build sound systems and light fixtures. *Satellite* was the first object constructed with a generator, called a dynamo, which is attached to the metal frame of the bike. Energy is produced when the top part of the dynamo, in the form of a small wheel, comes in contact with the wheel of the bike. When that contact occurs, light bulbs flash. The wheels spin as a result of human energy or force through pedaling. A similar generator was used in the pedaled car in the video *Resistance*, discussed later in this essay.

2000 was a year of reflection and experimentation during which the artist explored different energy conversions that became part of *Molotov Cocktail Nostalgia* and new ideas in fluorescent light for *You Sit, You Die*.

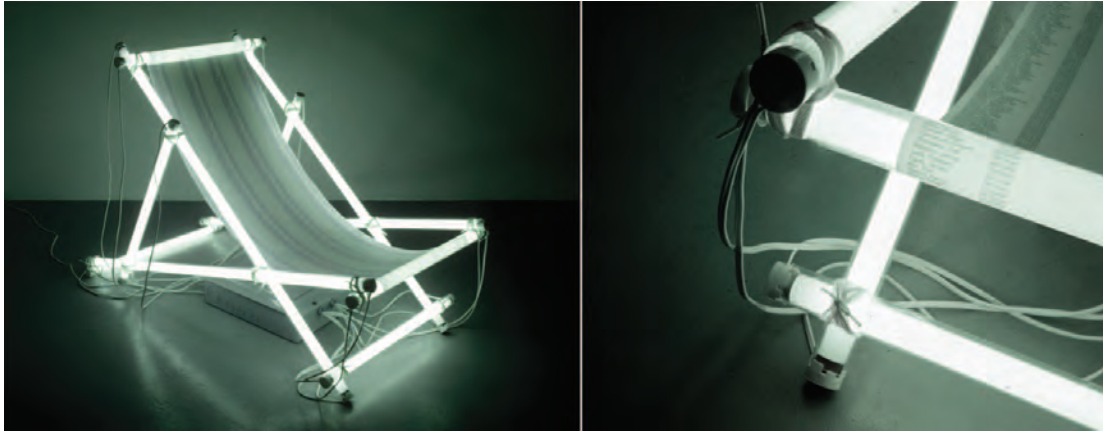
### **The Political Is Personal**

Beginning in 2001 Navarro engaged with subjects within the specific histories or events in the United States, Chile, and beyond.<sup>27</sup> *Molotov Cocktail Nostalgia* was a response to an event that took place at the Group of Eight (G8) Summit in Genoa in July 2001. (See illustration in "A Conversation with Iván Navarro," in this catalogue.) Some of the demonstrators, protesting the globalization of trade, threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at the police. A twenty-three year old activist was shot and killed by the police while throwing a fire extinguisher at the *carabinieri*. The violence surrounding the G8 meeting may have reminded Navarro of the street violence during the Chilean military dictatorship when protestors threw Molotov cocktails. From the artist's point of view, this work was in homage to the dead youth (see "Conversation").

*You Sit, You Die*, a watershed piece, is the first in a series of "electric chairs" and the first to address the subject of capital punishment. Although death by electrocution is no longer practiced in most states, Florida still carries out capital punishment either by the electric chair or lethal injection. Navarro provides a mini-history of the persons in that state who were sentenced to death by electrocution from 1924 to 2001 by listing them by name in rows on the paper seat of the chair. The shoelaces tied around and holding together the fluorescent lights are metonymic reminders of prison rules that require removing them from prisoners so they cannot hang themselves. In the usual mode of conflating objects and thematic references, each of which functions in opposing contexts, the beach chair is emblematic of leisure, even a vacation, but not the end of life.

The death penalty, the subject of *You Sit, You Die* and *Death Row* (2006–2009), is one of several references in the series of chairs titled *Red and Blue Electric Chair*, *The Blue Electric Chair* (2004), *White Electric Chair* (2005), *Black Electric Chair*,





15

*You Sit, You Die*, 2002

Fluorescent lights, electric cables, shoelaces, transparent sleeves, printed list of the people executed by the electric chair in Florida, and electric energy  
32 x 48 x 24 inches

*Pink Electric Chair*, *Glow in the Dark*, and *Zig Zag Electric Chair* (all of 2006).<sup>28</sup> For example, *Red and Blue Electric Chair*, in this exhibition, is based on the design of Gerrit Rietveld's *Red and Blue Chair* of 1918. The Dutch architect and furniture designer (b. 1888, d. 1964), a member of the avant-garde movement De Stijl, pioneered a new territory for his modernist geometric designs. Rietveld's chair was handcrafted with pieces of standard lumber—many years later the chair was mass-produced. In appropriating Rietveld's red and blue horizontal and vertical rectilinear planes for *Red and Blue Electric Chair*, Navarro maintained "the same scale as the 1918 chair."<sup>29</sup> Rietveld's *Zig Zag Chair* (1934) was also the direct source of inspiration for Navarro's *Zig Zag Electric Chair* (2006).

Similar interests in modernist design led Navarro to rethink the construction of Marcel Breuer's Wassily chair (1925), the first bent tubular steel chair,<sup>30</sup> a daring departure from traditional wood furniture at the time. Navarro achieved a sense of Breuer's linear delicacy by using neon light tubes in *Black Electric Chair* and *Glow in the Dark*. Breuer considered his designs for tubular chairs essential for modern living because they were affordable, hygienic, and resilient. The Chilean artist retained the salient features of the then radically new furniture designs in his series of "electric chairs," but they could not be sat in because of the delicate materials he used and the heat generated by the lights.

The electric chair, an invention of two men who worked in Thomas Edison's laboratory in 1888, was one of many discoveries within the electric industry that transformed aspects of modern life.<sup>31</sup> Within the context of Navarro's series, references to the "electric chair" as a mode of execution comes into full play: Look, don't touch, don't sit; for if you sit, you will die.



16

*Red and Blue Electric Chair, 2003*

Fluorescent lights, color sleeves, metal fixtures,  
and electric energy

45 x 31½ x 44½ inches

Collection Martin Z. Margulies, Miami, Florida

The “disconnect between appearance and truth”<sup>32</sup> is a concept embodied in *The Briefcase (Four American Citizens Killed by Pinochet)*, *Venda Sexy, Discoteque Sign, Criminal Ladder (Escalera de Criminales)*, and *Victor (The Missing Monument for Washington, DC or A Proposal for a Monument for Victor Jara)*, 2008. Three of these sculptures collectively give voice to the victims who lost their lives; the other calls attention to the victimizers who committed crimes against humanity. During the years the sculptures were constructed (2004, 2005, and 2008), Chile officially acknowledged the enormity of the suffering inflicted through detainment and torture between 1973 and 1990 in La Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura, otherwise known as the Comisión Valech (2004). That report published the names and testimonies of some 35,000 people who had been tortured by the state’s apparatus.<sup>33</sup> In response to those findings, President Ricardo Lagos, in his address to the nation, summarized his view of the horrific suffering that had affected so many lives.<sup>34</sup> In 2005, after having denied for years that torture was an institutional practice, the Chilean-armed forces accepted institutional responsibility for past human rights abuses.

*The Briefcase (Four American Citizens Killed by Pinochet)* features four black-sleeved fluorescent tubes with the names of four victims—Orlando Letelier, Ronnie Moffitt, Charles Horman, and Frank Teruggi. The briefcase, held three-quarters open by a switchblade, evokes a sense of foreboding. Orlando Letelier, an economist and Socialist politician, was ambassador to the United States in 1971. He was recalled from Washington to serve as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Defense. Imprisoned for more than a year after the coup d’etat, he eventually found refuge in Washington, D.C., where, as a senior fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies, he became the leading voice of the Chilean resistance. In 1976, as Letelier and his assistant Ronnie Moffitt were driving to work, they were assassinated by Pinochet’s DINA agents who placed a bomb under their car.<sup>35</sup>

American journalist Charles Horman was investigating the murder of René Schneider, the commander-in-chief in the Chilean army whose support for Allende and the constitution was seen as an obstacle to the coup. Horman was tortured to death in the National Stadium shortly after his arrest on September 18, 1973. Only in 2011 did a Chilean court indict a retired U.S. military officer, charging him with involvement in Horman’s murder.<sup>36</sup> Days after Horman’s murder, Frank Teruggi, a twenty-four-year-old American student and journalist met a similar fate.<sup>37</sup> In the context of *The Briefcase* one is



17

*The Briefcase (Four American Citizens Killed by Pinochet)*, 2004

Fluorescent lights, briefcase, Duratrans, knife, and electric energy

11 x 18 x 12½ inches



18

*Venda Sexy, Discoteque Sign*, 2005

Fluorescent lights, glass, mirror, one-way mirror, Plexiglass letters, wooden box, and electric energy  
18 x 20 x 4 inches



19

*Victor (The Missing Monument for Washington, DC or A Proposal for a Monument for Victor Jara)*, 2008

Fluorescent lights, metal fixtures, glass, posters for the video, and electric energy  
29 x 56 x 29 inches

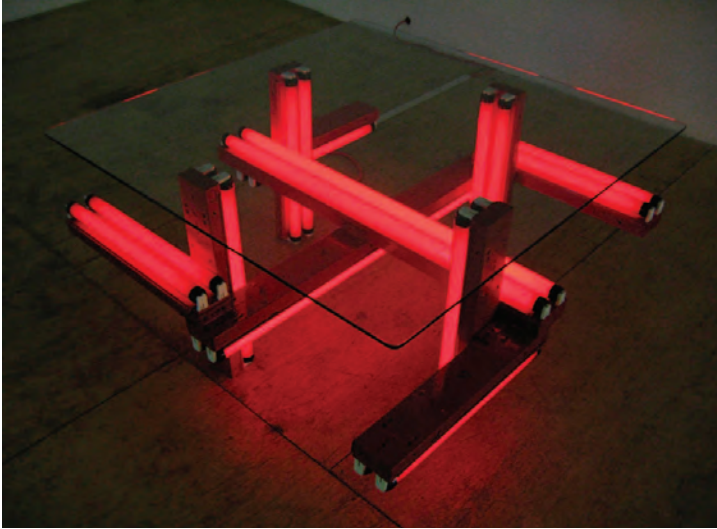
also reminded of Oscar Muñoz's 1996–1997 *Breath (Aliento)*, a wall installation in which the viewer breathes on steel discs to reveal the etched portrait of a Colombian whose face momentarily appears on it, rescuing the victim from oblivion.

*Venda Sexy, Discoteque Sign* alludes to a wrenching story of torture that took place in a house on Calle Irán 3037 in Santiago, where prisoners, many of whom were women, were detained, tortured with electrical currents, and sexually abused. The prisoners were blindfolded when interrogated, thus the words *Blind Sexy* in the title. The loud, constant music playing continuously muffled the victims' screams.<sup>38</sup> With respect to the victims in these works, Navarro's aim was to emphasize memory as an arm against forgetting. In recalling this place, among dozens, the artist attempts to express through art and music the testimonies of suffering given to the Comisión Valech.<sup>39</sup>

*Victor (The Missing Monument for Washington, DC or A Proposal for a Monument for Victor Jara)* features the images of two men whose heads are covered: one plays a guitar while standing on the back of another man who is on his hands and knees.<sup>40</sup> Although Jara's hands were broken, his captors ordered him to continue playing the guitar. Still in agony, he nevertheless continued to sing, and his new song was smuggled out of the stadium in pieces by survivors.<sup>41</sup>

*Criminal Ladder (Escalera de Criminales)* (2005) is about naming the perpetrators who committed human rights abuses between 1973 and 1990, and who had not yet been brought to trail.<sup>42</sup> The names on the rungs of the ladder are those of civilians, military personnel, secret police, and even Pinochet himself.<sup>43</sup> Many were





20

*Joy Division I*, 2004

Fluorescent lights, color sleeves, glass,  
metal fixtures, and electric energy  
24½ x 48 x 48 inches

still living “normal” lives, continuing to believe their actions had been justified. This work seemed to have been a warning to the guilty that they could not run away indefinitely.<sup>44</sup> In *Criminal Ladder* Navarro employs certain aspects of a minimalist vocabulary—seriality, modularity, repetition, precise mathematical proportions, elements that appear in all his work, infused with historical, psychological, and emotional sensibilities.

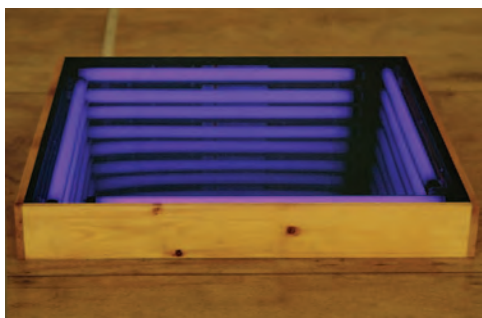
We are reminded of similar intersections of political expression, one by Catalina Parra, the other by Luis Camnitzer, both dealing with the subject of dictators and legal accountability. Parra’s series titled *Run Away, Run Away* (1998–1999) addresses the judicial predicament of General Augusto Pinochet following his arrest in London on October 16, 1998. Luis Camnitzer’s 195-part artwork *Memorial* (2009) replicates the Montevideo, Uruguay telephone directory, into which he inserted the names of the disappeared between 1973 and 1985.

Beginning in 2004, at the time Navarro began thinking about silence and violence, he also did work that addressed the Nazi era, Fascism, and the Holocaust. In a series of coffee tables and other furniture—works known as “social sculpture”—*Joy Division I* and *Joy Division II* (2005), and, even more recently, *Nacht und Nebel* (2012), figure prominently. In *Joy Division I* the glass top rests on a base in the form of a swastika, the most recognizable icon of Nazi propaganda associated with the idea of a racially pure state, a symbol that struck terror among Jewish people. The title *Joy Division* refers to an English punk rock band Navarro listened to in the 1980s. One of their songs, *No Love Lost*, refers to Nazi concentration camps with

brothels of imprisoned Jewish women. Navarro's selection of that historical narrative reaffirms his critique of ongoing forms of abuse by victimizers of whatever stripe. *Joy Division II* was constructed with a base in the form of the Star of David, the symbol worn on armbands by Jews to identify and stigmatize them before being deported to concentration camps. Together these pieces present an ironic artistic resolution to two sordid tales of historical significance!

## Fictional Spaces

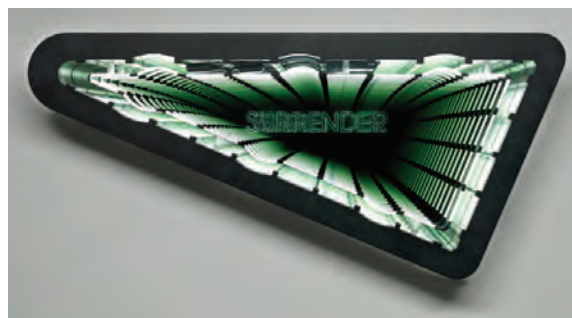
In 2004 when Navarro was elaborating the series of “electric chairs” and *The Briefcase (Four American Citizens Killed by Pinochet)*, he became intrigued with the possibilities of creating illusionistic spaces that would appear as cuts through walls or floors. Behind Navarro's investigation was Gordon Matta-Clark's cuts or splits in abandoned buildings where the American artist (1943–1978) often used a chainsaw to cut into the structures, creating openings that changed the relationship of the viewer to the architectural space of the gallery. Navarro's objective was to “make a connection with Matta-Clark's interventions.” *Black Hole of Light* was the artist's first light box constructed by combining a mirror, a one-way mirror, and four fluorescent lights to create a sense of endless spiraling space.<sup>45</sup> The title refers to black holes in outer space where the pull of gravity is so strong that light cannot get out. Space telescopes with special tools can help find black holes, but otherwise they are invisible. Despite the fluorescent lights, Navarro felt his work was “similar to a black hole because the center of the piece is completely dark, making it seem bottomless.” Light box constructions of no more than six to ten inches have become syntactical elements in the artist's sculpture, as noted recently in the extraordinary series of architectural footprints of the floor plans of world-renowned tall buildings and skyscrapers. The buildings are identified by two words: one that is both a verb and a noun, suggesting both action and object, as in *Surrender*; the second word, the one in parentheses, is the name of the building, such as *Flatiron* in New York.



21

### *Black Hole of Light*, 2004

Fluorescent lights, color sleeves, wood, glass, mirror, one-way mirror, and electric energy  
5½ x 43 x 43 inches



22

### *Surrender (Flatiron)*, 2011

Neon, wood, paint, Plexiglass, mirror, one-way mirror, and electric energy  
22¾ x 49¾ x 6½ inches

Two others in the series are *Abandon (Agbar)* in Barcelona and *Want (Citic Plaza)* in Guangzhou.<sup>46</sup> The selection of landmarks not only calls attention to the architects who designed these skyscrapers, but also to the economic and political power the buildings embody.

The floor sculpture *Man Hole (Icon)*, in this exhibition, achieves the same illusion of plunging depth, of unsettling balance, especially when you stand on it, which viewers may do. The design system for the mirrors is the same as in the above works. The title has two references, one to the utility or maintenance of holes usually located underground in urban areas, and the other to Dan Flavin, who called his first sustained series of constructions with light “icons” in reference to Kasimir Malevich,



23

*Man Hole (Icon)*, 2012

Fluorescent lights, plywood, glass, mirror,  
one-way mirror, and electric energy

9½ x 30 (diameter) inches



who referred to his abstract art as “the icon of my time.”<sup>47</sup> By means of a subtitle, Navarro wittingly brings Flavin, who compared his use of electric light to a modern type of icon, back into his artistic conversation while extending the historical references to early Malevich’s twentieth-century abstraction.

## Ladders

During the heady years between 2002 and 2005, Navarro’s thematic and formal explorations also included a series of common objects used backstage, in scene shops. *Backstage (blue, red, and yellow)* consists of three sculptures—*Blue Sawhorse*, *Red Ladder*, and *Yellow Stepladder*.<sup>48</sup> The artist built the three different objects using the same method of construction for each as he had used for the Electric Chair series. In realizing his objectives, he employed the horizontals, verticals, and diagonals, the “Cartesian system of furniture joinery,” that Rietveld had used for his *Red and Blue Chair* as well as other similar chairs intended to be mass-produced.<sup>49</sup> While the three objects remind us of multiple functions behind the proscenium, their agency is fictional; their heat, however, is real. Alluring, but impossible—the sawhorse cannot support a board or plank, and the ladders cannot be climbed.<sup>50</sup>

## Music and Videos

Key to understanding the artist’s inner world is the music that he developed a love for at a young age and selected for his videos, three of which are discussed here. Singers (Victor Jara, Jorge Saldaña, Facundo Cabral, and Jorge González), musical groups (Joy Division, the Beatles, Quilapayún), and images of musical instruments (drums, guitars) recall people and ideas that have been great sources of inspiration and crucial to his understanding and perception of the world.

After arriving in New York, Navarro made friends with many musicians who came to have their own bands. In 2005 he launched Hueso-Records to produce their music and release music related to his own artwork. *Hueso*, meaning bone in English, is an explicit reference to the DNA testing performed on bones to identify anonymous bodies that have been found in unmarked graves in Chile after the dictatorship ended.

Searching for a further relationship between sculpture, the viewer, and the site, Navarro began making videos. In his first video, *Homeless Lamp, The Juice Sucker*, produced the same year as *Red Ladder (Backstage)*, he worked with the band Nutria NN who interpreted Jorge Saldaña’s 1910 *corrido* (ballad) “Juan sin tierra.”<sup>51</sup> The scene opens with Navarro and an artist friend pushing a shopping cart made of white fluorescent lights on a street in Chelsea in lower Manhattan. Navarro carries



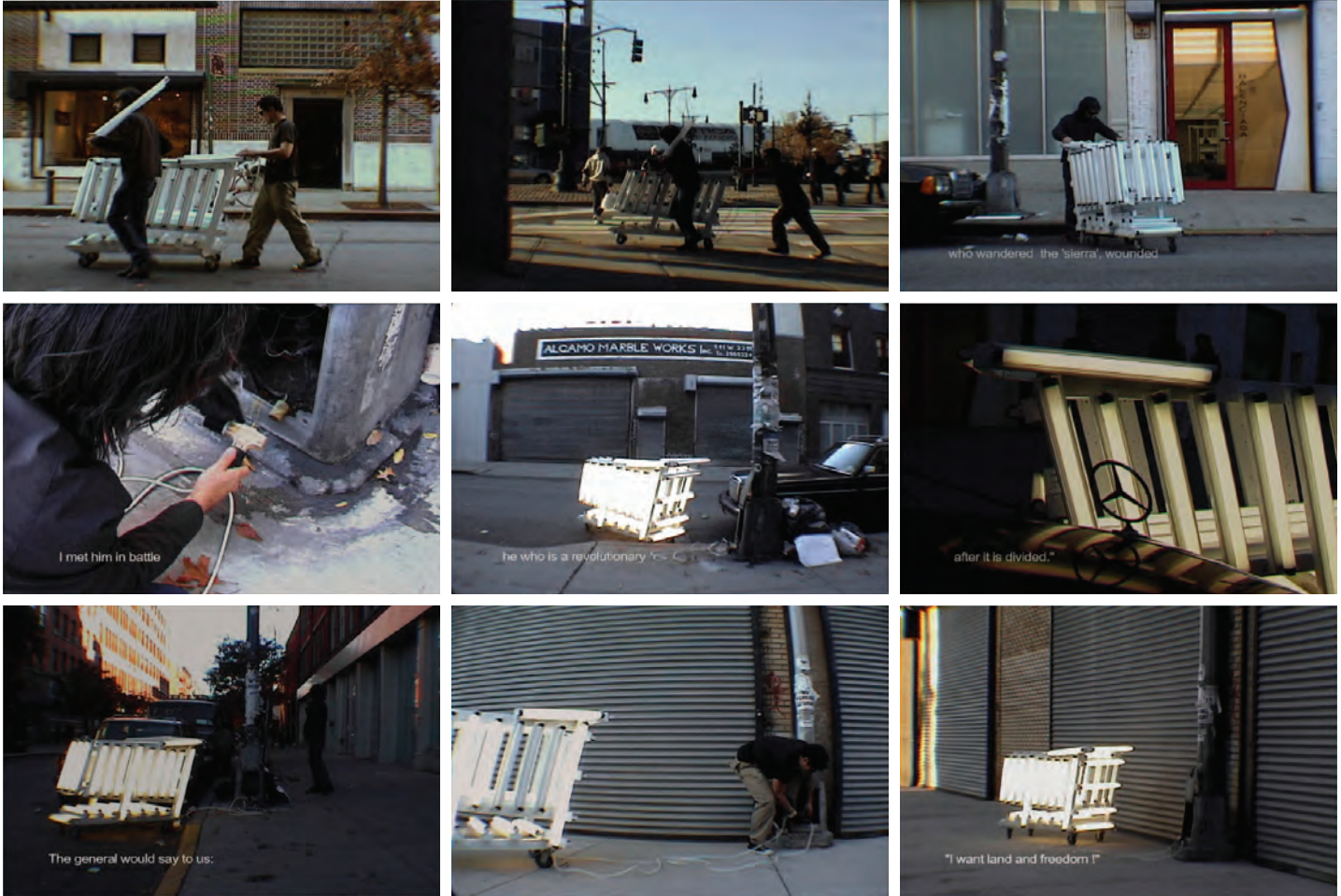
24

*Red Ladder (Backstage)*, 2005

Fluorescent lights, color sleeves, metal fixtures,  
and electric energy

96 x 29 x 7 inches

Cricket Taplin Collection, Miami, Florida



25

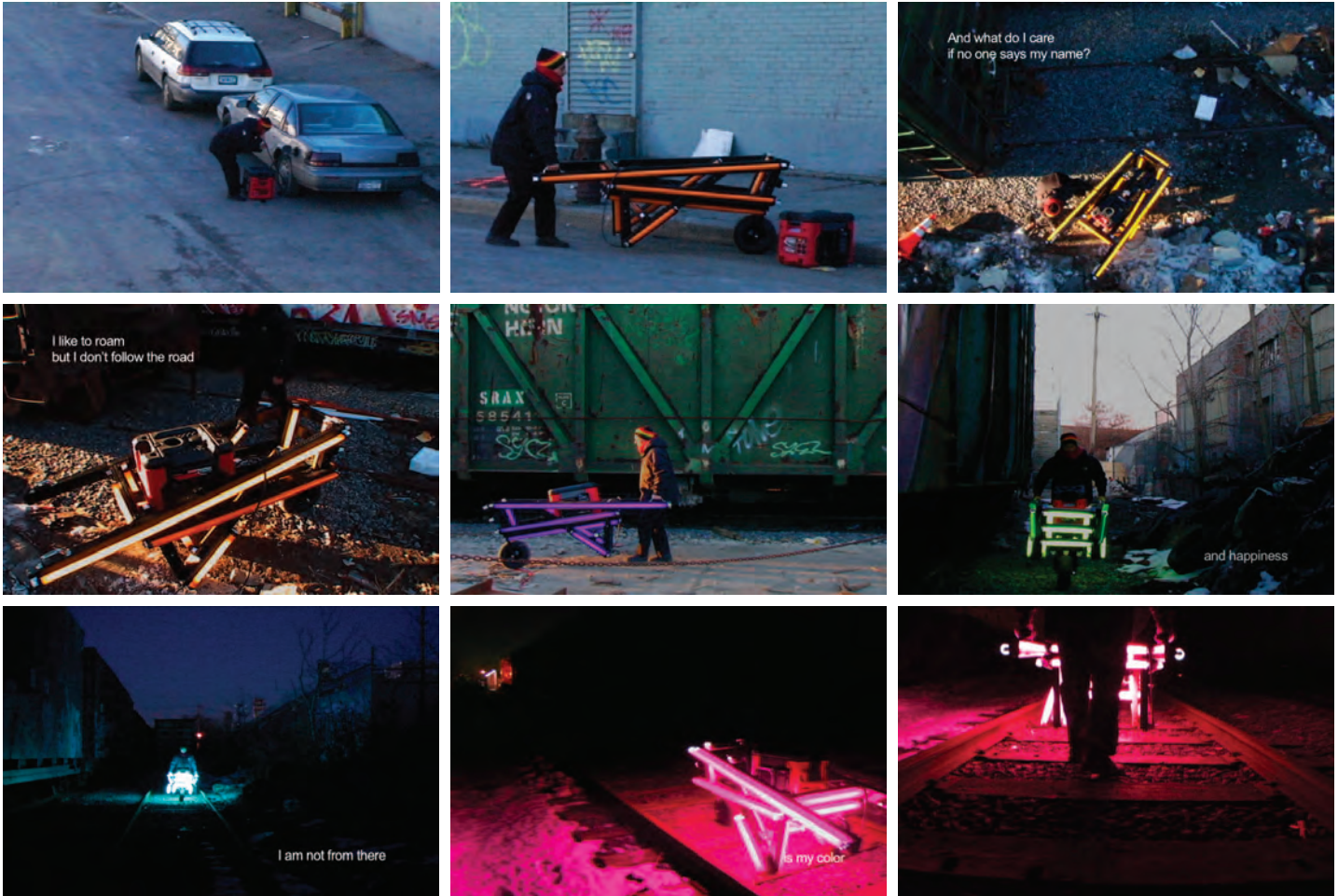
***Homeless Lamp, The Juice Sucker, 2005***

Video with music, 4:16

Song interpreted by Nutria NN (Original song *Juan sin tierra* by Jorge Saldaña, 1910)

extra fluorescent lights and his friend a long electrical cord. In a neighborhood of art galleries and warehouses, they look as if they are moving art from one place to another. They stop the cart at the curb in front of the Balenciaga boutique, next to a parked Mercedes, across from Alcamo Marble Works. Navarro plugs in the electrical cord from the cart to the outlet in a street lamp and “robs” the electricity for the homeless lamp. While the cart is charging, Navarro talks casually on his cell phone, and passersby take no notice of the illuminated object. The two artists walk away, leaving the cart near the street lamp, as if it were a sculpture in a public space, as the camera shows it from different angles, focusing on its construction, lines, color, and form. After Navarro removes the cord from the outlet, the two men walk the homeless lamp to another spot where they find another street lamp to power it.





26

*Flashlight: I'm Not From Here, I'm Not From There*, 2006

Video with music, 8:08

Song interpreted by Nutria NN (Original song *No soy de aquí, no soy de allá*, by Facundo Cabral, 1970)

The song “Juan sin tierra,” originally written and sung by Saldaña in the year of the Mexican Revolution, accompanies this performance.<sup>52</sup> The lyrics narrate a tale quite different from that in the video—therein lies part of the video’s message. While the sculpture in the form of a shopping cart, associated with consumerism as well as homelessness, gets paraded through the streets of Chelsea where it has to be powered in order to be illuminated, that power comes from the street. Ultimately, the empowerment of homeless people also comes from the street. Saldaña’s verses regarding Emiliano Zapata’s war on behalf of the landless Mexican peasants makes unexpected, but interesting points. The *corrido* tells of “a man who went to war,/who wandered in the ‘sierra,’ wounded to conquer his land. I met him in battle . . ./he [Emiliano Zapata] who is a revolutionary/can die where he wants./The general would

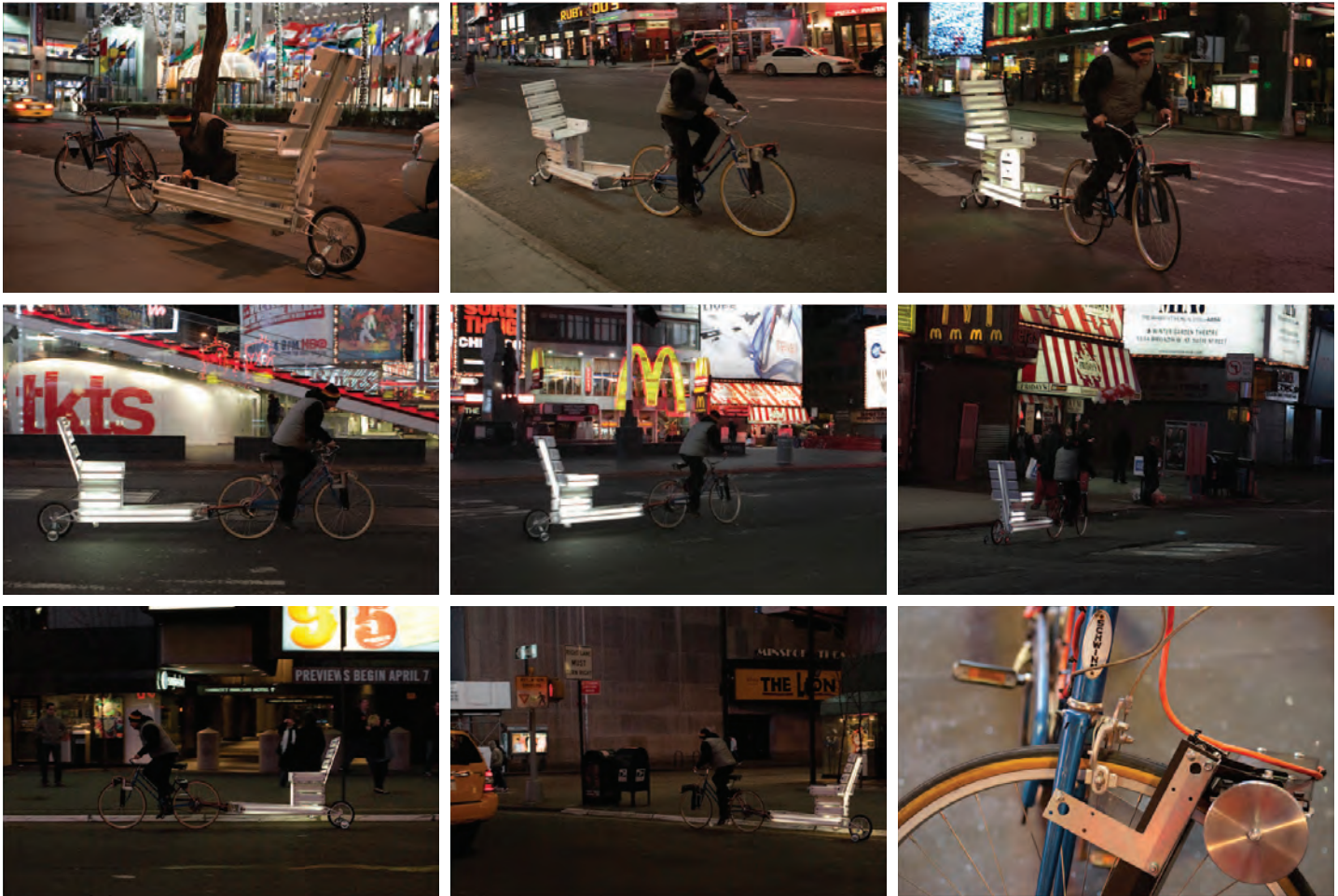
say to us: 'Fight with courage!/We will give you plots of land/after it is divided' . . ."

The homeless lamp seems to be, at least in part, the metonym for landless people, who in Mexico's history fought a revolution for freedom and land rights within a new economic and social order.

The second video in the exhibition, *Flashlight: I'm Not from Here, I'm Not from There*, is about a wanderer, a man who recognizes no borders, a man who is content to "roam." The video begins with the drifter walking along a sidewalk in a semi-desolate industrial area intent on siphoning gasoline from a parked car to fill his electric generator. As he spots the appropriate car, the first notes of the guitar in Nutria NN's rendition of Facundo Cabral's "I'm Not from Here, I'm Not from There" begin.<sup>53</sup> The drifter fills the electric generator, quickly pushes the wheelbarrow made of fluorescent tubes to the curb, places the generator inside the cart, activates its motor to power the lights, and walks away. After the motor starts, he pushes the self-illuminated cart off the street onto a rubble-strewn path alongside railroad tracks and abandoned railroad cars. Cabral's verses are the protagonist's inner thoughts: "When I carry the sun on my shoulders/the world is yellow/And when it rains, I get wet/but I don't mind because I don't shrink/A lettuce leaf is all I need to make some shade." While the drifter changes the color sleeves from yellow to purple beside the railroad cars, we hear his desire for anonymity: "And what do I care if no one knows my name?/I empty my cart/I sleep for a long week/I eat a slice of pizza/and I live on laughter/I like to roam, but I don't follow the road/for what is safe has no mystery . . ." As the action continues, the drifter adjusts the purple tubes and pushes his wheelbarrow past chain link fences, rundown buildings, and freight cars. We hear the lyrics: "I like it, I like it, I like it/I like the sun, Alicia, and the doves/good tobacco and also the ladies/jumping walls and opening windows/and the girls in April/I like wine as much as flowers/and lovers but not gentlemen/I like being friends with thieves/and songs in French."

As the scene changes, the song goes: "I am not from here, I am not from there/I have no age/I have no future/and happiness/is the color/of my identity." These key verses, as a refrain, expressive of the nowhere man's philosophy, repeat throughout the song. As daylight turns to dusk, the man places his wheelbarrow, now green, across the tracks, so he can roam! Close-ups of the fluorescent lights and their sockets offer a glimpse of the construction of the wheelbarrow and its dazzling colors. At nightfall when the wanderer's journey resumes, we hear: "I like lying in the sand/or chasing Manuela on a bike/or having time to see the stars . . ." Soon we see him pushing the wheelbarrow, as if it were a moving flashlight, on the tracks to the lyrics: "I am not from here, I am not from there/I have no age/I have no future/and happiness/is the color/of my identity." In the final sequence, the nowhere man pushes the wheelbarrow, now red, back down the tracks away from our view, to the whistling of the main melody—until the light disappears, evidently satisfied that he has found his source of happiness through following his own path.





27

*Resistance*, 2009

Video with music, 6:17

Song interpreted by Courtney Smith

(Original song by Jorge González, 1984)

The video *Resistance*, filmed at night, opens with a view of flags from different nations furling in the wind in Rockefeller Center on West 47th Street between 5th and 6th Avenues. The protagonist enters the scene as he walks to his bicycle and attaches it to a chair (in the form of a tricycle) made of white fluorescent lights. (The bike has a dynamo in the form of a small wheel, similar to the one in *Satellite* [see above]; when pedaled, the wheel spins, providing power to light the fluorescent bulbs.) As he walks onto the scene, a female voice recites part of a poem by the Chilean folksingers Quilapayún.<sup>54</sup> The verses express the inner thoughts of the anonymous cyclist. “At last the traveler arrives at the threshold/The pain behind him, in his memory/The night became voice, the light became word/The battle, won or lost, makes no difference.” After picking up the bike with the chair attached, the man

pedals along the avenue where the flags are visible from the south side of Rockefeller Center. We hear: "And also behind him are twirls of joy/Flashes, flags, illusions."

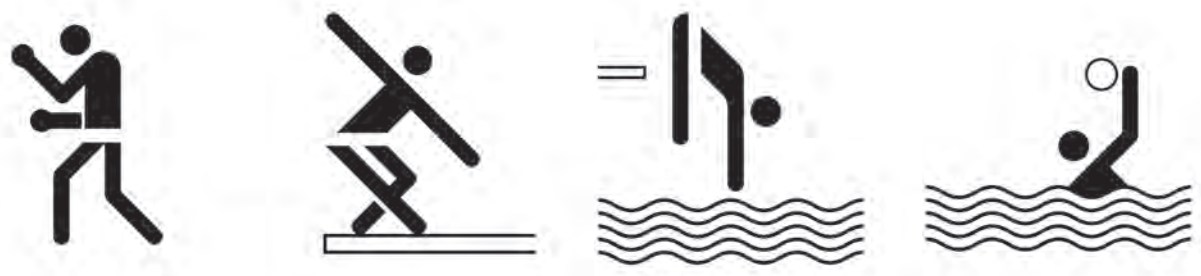
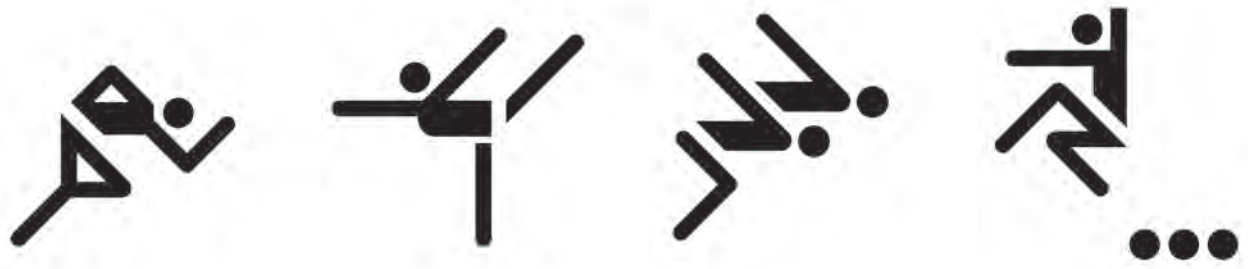
The cyclist walks and pedals the heavy illuminated bike with chair from West 47th to West 43rd Street on 7th Avenue around Times Square. The area pulsates with energy, creativity, and seduction. As he passes restaurants, theater marquees, the Times Square Information Center, spectacular billboards, and LED screens, his vehicle becomes just another bright light. Performing his rounds, he may be likened to a delivery person who depends on muscle-power and stamina to complete his route. The poem continues: "Insults, shred of a kiss/Bells, solitudes and victories/ And was that all?/And was that nothing?/More than the ruin over ruin/Or the last street or the birth/Of the relentlessly promised/What matters is that the poem opens doors/And it is not the twilight, the silent blaze/That the pilgrim has before his eyes/And the song is the sun in the distance."

The anonymous bicyclist—the everywhere man—is cast into the social imaginary, the site for invention, self-empowerment, precariousness, and contingency. He represents a collective voice for people who want to break with conventional rules: "With the authority/That gives us our good judgments/And with the full use of our reason/We declare our official break/With the ties that might have once bound us/ To an institution/Or form of representation/That claims us as part of its whole/To put on a badge and march behind a leader/And let them slay us for their own cause/ We will not wait." As the everywhere man cycles across West 45th Street, we hear: "They are not doing what they promised at the beginning/We do not need flags/We do not recognize borders/We will not accept affiliations/We will not listen to more sermons." With those words, the video ends. These are the sentiments of people who go it alone, who are self-starters willing to leave their past for a place that offers new possibilities. The three protagonists are individualists, self-reliant people who do not rely on government promises. Each, in his way, reveals the power of one.

### **The Olympics and Nowhere Man**

Navarro's strength, in part, lies in his ability to work simultaneously in multiple thematic directions, a practice noted throughout this essay. *Nowhere Man* was created the same year as *Resistance*. The striking series of fourteen fluorescent light sculptures form a coherent group of figures installed on the wall. The sculptures are based on a series of twenty-one pictograms designed by Otl Aicher for the 1972 Munich Olympics. Each sculpture depicts a particular Olympic sports category such as Athletics (*Nowhere Man I*), Floor Exercises (*Nowhere Man II*), Swimming (*Nowhere Man III*), Hop-Skip-Jump (*Nowhere Man IV*), Hurdle Race (*Nowhere Man V*), Wrestling (*Nowhere Man VI*), Football (*Nowhere Man VII*), Basketball (*Nowhere Man VIII*), Boxing (*Nowhere Man IX*), Balance Beam (*Nowhere Man X*), High Diving (*Nowhere Man XI*), Water Polo (*Nowhere Man XII*), Handball (*Nowhere Man XIII*), and Swimming (*Nowhere Man XIV*).





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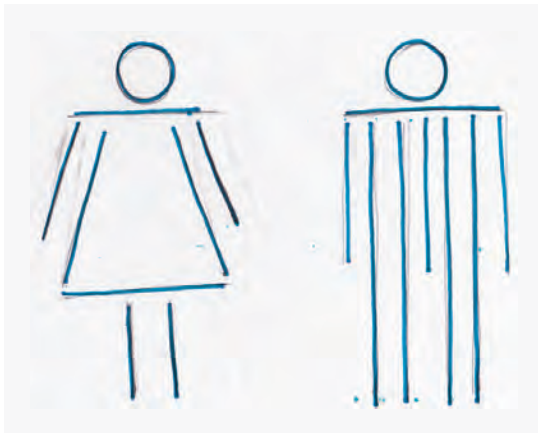
Fourteen of twenty-one original sports pictograms  
by Otl Aicher for the 1972 Munich Olympics  
© 1976 by ERCO GmbH

The illuminated figures are familiar reminders of the countless athletes who have competed in the Olympic games since their revival in 1896.<sup>55</sup> *Nowhere Man* exudes a visual energy contributing to a sense of drama and expectation surpassed only by seeing the athletes in actual competition.

Navarro's interest in the Olympics began in a somewhat serendipitous way—one query led to another. Early in his career he had become curious regarding the meaning of the five Olympic rings (see “Conversation”). In 2003 he had the opportunity to explore the subject, which resulted in *Blade Runner II* (2003). The floor sculpture employed 112 lamps, each with a handmade paper lampshade, a light bulb, and an aluminum sheet cut in the shape of a blade, secured at the top of each shade, which generated heat and moved the lamps.

In 2008 Navarro made further interesting discoveries with regard to his ongoing exploration of the Olympics. He began online research for images in the form of pictograms that identify “he” and “she” toilets, the ubiquitous signage one finds outside restrooms in many parts of the world. Navarro came upon two schematic figures—individual silhouettes of a man and a woman—and learned they had been designed by Otl Aicher (1922–1991),<sup>56</sup> the internationally acclaimed German graphic designer who created the signage for the 20th Munich Olympics.<sup>57</sup> Soon thereafter, Navarro bought the first monographic study of Otl Aicher, written by Markus Rathgeb,<sup>58</sup> and looked closely at Aicher's grids and studies of the visual language system for the 1972 games.

The graphic reduction and schematization of Aicher's twenty-one sport pictograms, deriving from typical postures in each sport, were designed using a set of standardized graphic elements arranged on a grid.<sup>59</sup> Aichler described his pictogram process in the following way: “All figures had to be developed in a field, consisting of a square with an orthogonal and diagonal grid. All lines were arranged with an angle of either 45 or 90 degrees, which was only made possible by drawing lines of the figures as parallels with a defined width.”<sup>60</sup>



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Sketches of a woman and a man after  
Otl Aicher, 2008

Prior to beginning the *Nowhere Man* series, Navarro had already executed a schematized human figure with fluorescent lights in *Crawling* (2006), a sculpture similar to *Nowhere Man XIV*.<sup>61</sup> Navarro followed Aicher's design, focusing on creating light sculptures based on the essential outlines of the figures as the German graphic artist had done for the original set of iconic signs.<sup>62</sup> First Navarro did some preliminary sketches of the athletes in different postures. Then he began to consider the question of scale—how to translate the proportions of the pictograms by using commercially available fluorescent bulbs? In determining the scale, Navarro collaborated with his friend, the architect Pedro Pulido, who drew the original pictograms on Aicher's grid until he established the right scale of the overall figures. Then he made technical drawings on the computer. Below the technical drawings, he wrote the specifications (the length and wattage of each bulb) used to construct the anatomical parts (the head and limbs) of the figures. (Large hardware stores sell the bulbs by wattage, not by their length.) The final sculptures were made following the specifications of the drawings.

*Nowhere Man* has many references and starting points.<sup>63</sup> As well as the iconographical specificity to Aicher's pictograms of the Olympic sports events, the fluorescent sculptures, made from standardized fluorescent lights bought and used anywhere (i.e., 220 or 110 volts are not specific to any country), are full of contradictory and complementary meanings.<sup>64</sup> Similar to the antagonists in *Flashlight: I'm Not from Here, I'm Not from There* and *Resistance*, the nowhere man is the everywhere man—from here, there, nowhere, and everywhere. Charged with conceptual and interpretive conundrums, *Nowhere Man* is compellingly open to multiple readings.

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This essay has come full circle—starting with Navarro's early work created during and immediately after his university years, continuing in New York during his transition years and beyond. Navarro's early use of electrical materials is cornerstone to his development. Through the sculptures and videos selected for exhibition at the Frost Art Museum, a larger view of the artist's processes, contexts, thoughts, and voice emerges. In his diverse conversations with modern and contemporary artists, designers, architects, and musicians, he has acknowledged art history as well as enriched it. Navarro has furthered those conversations with his light sculptures and videos, rethinking at every turn the possible.

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All comments or statements in quotation marks by the artist are from interviews with the author on December 16, 2010; March 20, 2012; May 4, 2012. Email communication took place between January and July 2012.

<sup>1</sup> In 1988, expecting the country to elect him president, Pinochet called for a nationwide referendum, but the following year the opposition candidate Patricio Alwyn was elected president instead. Alwyn served in the democratically elected center-left Concertación from March 1990 to March 1994 and was succeeded by President Eduardo Frei Luis-Tagle, who served from March 1994 to 2000.

<sup>2</sup> On August 22, 1973, the Chamber of Deputies accused Allende of violating the Constitution. Although Allende immediately defended his political position, he evidently felt it necessary to give the voters their say by holding a plebiscite.

<sup>3</sup> The university staff was leftist, many belonged to the Socialist Party founded by Allende, some, including the artist's father, to the Communist Party. Pinochet later reopened the university, renamed it the University of Santiago, and installed a new staff sympathetic to the political aims of the military government.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Navarro returned home a day after the coup. During the following two weeks, he met with colleagues and friends from the university who learned that the faculty's salaries were going to be paid. Upon identifying himself at the university in order to pick up his check, he was taken to another floor, interrogated, and subjected to physical abuse. Within a short time, he was thrown into a truck like "a sack of potatoes." He wound up at the National Stadium where he found himself in the company of many colleagues and where he learned about the murder of Victor Jara. Mr. Navarro was released six months later. After his imprisonment, Mrs. Navarro was able to retrieve her husband's two checks, the only ones that provided them with income for a long time.

<sup>5</sup> *La Epoca* circulated from 1987 to 1998. It opposed the Pinochet regime and supported Patricio Aylwin's candidacy for the Concertación. It was the first Chilean newspaper to have an online Website.

<sup>6</sup> The message of the published cartoon titled *Sí* expresses the idea that the *Sí* vote, the one on the ballot in favor of Pinochet, is the modern option (read the better choice), one that does not look toward the past. In the message on the unpublished cartoon titled *CASA DEL SÍ*, a man on the street looks up at a man on a balcony, who is recognizably Pinochet, and asks if he too is a squatter? The man on the balcony answers: "No, I am the owner of the house!"

<sup>7</sup> Mario A. Muñoz, DICTADURA MILITAR Chile, en estado de emergencia, <http://mensual.prensa.com/mensual/contenido/2005/12/03/hoy/mundo/419751.html>

<sup>8</sup> Mario Navarro wrote that his brother remembers throwing himself on the floor of his bedroom because the police were firing within range of his home; he also remembers that the government frequently cut off the electrical supply, forcing his family to listen to the news on the radio in the dark. "Documento desclasificado," *Produciendo realidad, Arte y Resistencia latinoamericana / Latin American Art and Resistance*, exhibition catalogue. (Lucca, Italy: Prometeo Associazione, 2004), pp. 157-163. The author was not able to locate the exact page for this reference.

<sup>9</sup> Only some thirty years later, the artist's father talked a little about his own experience in prison.

<sup>10</sup> Between 1983 and 1985 there were fourteen days of national protest, in addition to widespread demonstrations, strikes, and social unrest. For the different kinds of protests and the government's diverse reactions to them, according to the memories of the artist, see *Nunca más en Chile: Síntesis corregida y actualizada del Informe Rettig*, Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos, Fundaciones Ideas (Santiago: LOM Ediciones Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos, Fundaciones Ideas, 1999), pp. 91 and 92.

<sup>11</sup> The music, known as *Nueva Canción Chilena* (the New Song Movement), was a mix of traditional and regional folk songs and other forms of popular music with lyrics calling for social change. The musicians often played Andean instruments along with modern ones. Pioneering ensembles such as Inti-Illimani and Quilapayún had to go into exile during the Pinochet era. For the historical development of the New Song Movement in Latin America, see <http://www.folkways.si.edu>

<sup>12</sup> Eduardo Vilches, recognized as a great teacher and printmaker, has influenced contemporary artistic production of generations of students. Among other teaching positions, he has been a professor of art at the Pontifical Catholic University since 1962. Ana María Yaconi, "Abriendo camino: Eduardo Vilches, Mónica Bengoa, Arturo Duclos, Rodrigo Galecio, Iván Navarro," in *Beuys y Más Allá: El Enseñar como arte* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Bank Art Works, 2010), pp. 10-13 in section "Ensayos," pays homage to Vilches, and the four younger artists offer their views on the lasting impact Vilches has had. In 1960 Vilches received a Fulbright to study at Yale University where Josef Albers had taught color theory from 1950 to 1958. Although Albers was retired by then, Vilches took some workshops with Albers, one of the founding artists of the Bauhaus. Vilches introduced Albers' color theory in Chile

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through the German artist's book *Interaction of Color* (*Interacción del color*). Along these lines, artist and critic Florencia San Martín said that the Albers book was still in the bibliography when she taught the course on color at the Universidad del Desarrollo (Santiago) in 2008, some years after having had the class on color with Vilches. Email to the author, March 26, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> For an excellent analysis of the pedagogical and artistic work of Vilches, see María José Delpiano, "Las operaciones críticas de Eduardo Vilches para el grabado en Chile," *Ensayos sobre artes visuales: Prácticas y discursos de los años '70 y '80 en Chile* (Santiago: LOM Editions, 2011), pp. 53, 58, 59, 60.

<sup>14</sup> See Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, Ursula Davila-Villa, Gina McDaniel Tarver, eds., *The New York Graphic Workshop 1964–1970* (Austin: Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin, 2009), p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Camnitzer does not remember the title of the text Vilches used. Email to the author, March 28, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> In Camnitzer's email to the author (note 15 above), he suggested looking at the theoretical propositions of printmaking as set forth in the reproduction of the texts in the catalogue of the 1969 exhibition at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas. See *The New York Graphic Workshop 1964–1970*, pp. 91–108; the quotation used in this essay is from p. 93.

<sup>17</sup> In the 1980s and early 1990s, Santiago was not a cultural or artistic center in the sense that Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and Caracas were. The city's artistic infrastructure was at best precarious, in part because of seventeen years of cultural repression. While there existed, among a limited arts community, recognition of painting, sculpture, and printmaking as fine art, at the beginning of the 1990s there was little interest in or knowledge of conceptual art, installation art, or photography as fine art. There was certainly a fair share of talented and forward-thinking artists who struggled for recognition within the existing institutional framework. With few commercial galleries, few collectors, and no opportunity for art students to show their work outside a university setting, artists as well as artists-to-be had to invent ways of showing their work. In the American context it is interesting to note that in the late 1960s Richard Serra and a close group of fellow artists working in New York felt they had little access to, and equally limited interest in, the gallery environment and instead began to develop their practices in off-site projects. See Lynne Cooke, "Thinking on Your Feet: Richard Serra's Sculptures in Landscape," in *Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years* (New York: MoMA, 2007), p. 102, endnote 13.

<sup>18</sup> By 1994 Dittborn was recognized in his country as an important conceptual artist and had been invited to exhibit at Documenta X, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney.

<sup>19</sup> Having been introduced by a friend, Navarro was Dittborn's studio assistant from 1992 to 1996, the year after Navarro graduated from PUC.

<sup>20</sup> From the artist's perspective, *Ocho* (*Eight*) was significant enough to re-create in 2004 for an installation at Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende in Santiago. Several of the wall drawings with electric cable have been reproduced in *Las cosas y sus atributos: Iván Navarro, Mario Navarro* (Santiago: Galería Gabriela Mistral Departamento de Programas Culturales, División de Cultura, Ministerio de Educación, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> The installation *Un día de camping* was also the title of the B.A. project presented in January 1996. Vilches was Navarro's advisor for his project.

<sup>22</sup> For an earlier and informative reading of *La Gran Lámpara*, see Christian Torres, "Instalación Eléctrica: La Gran Lámpara," in *Las cosas y sus atributos: Iván Navarro, Mario Navarro*, pp. 7, 8.

<sup>23</sup> The carrot printing technique came from the artist's mother who, as a hobby, printed ornaments on different kinds of fabric when he was little. Email to the author, May 2, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Some of the lengthy dedications express Flavin's political and social engagement, as for example in the 1961 watercolor *to those who suffer in the Congo*; the 1966, *Monument 4 for those who have been killed in ambush (to P.K. who reminded me about death)*; the 1970 drawing, *to the young women and men murdered in Kent State and Jackson State Universities and to their fellow students who are yet to be killed*.

<sup>25</sup> Navarro remembers reading about Flavin in an article by Dan Graham many years ago. See <http://bombsite.com/issues/46/articles/1722>

<sup>26</sup> *Table and Lamp* is reproduced in *Threshold*, exhibition catalogue for the 53 Venice Biennale, with texts by Antonio Arévalo, Anne Ellegood, Justo Pastor Mellado, and Iván Navarro (Milan: Charta, 2009), p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> Anne Ellegood, in "Resisting American Flags," *Threshold*, p. 17, made a similar point: "Navarro's interest in the sculptural practices of certain American artists has more to do with locating himself within the history of American art—after having lived in New York beginning in 1997—and a desire to integrate the concerns and subjects of his homeland within the specific histories and movements of American art."

<sup>28</sup> These are reproduced in the *Templon* catalogue on unnumbered pages equivalent to 46–51, 54, 55, 56, 57.



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<sup>29</sup> Navarro's "electric chairs" are 45 x 31 x 44½ inches, a slightly larger measurement than the 1918 *Red and Blue Chair*. Navarro made what he considered an important discovery when he measured a copy of Rietveld's chair and found that the pieces of wood used by Rietveld were in the same proportions and sizes as the most standard-sized fluorescent light tubes.

<sup>30</sup> Breuer (b. 1902, d. 1981) studied and taught at the Bauhaus in the 1920s and became head of the carpentry workshop. After coming to the United States, he taught at Harvard University's School of Architecture.

<sup>31</sup> In 1890 the first prisoner was executed by the electric chair in a prison in New York State.

<sup>32</sup> John B. Ravenal, "Bright Lights, Bad Dreams," in *Iván Navarro* (Paris: Galeria Daniel Templon, 2006), p. 8. Hereafter referred to as Templon catalogue.

<sup>33</sup> For a brilliant commentary by interdisciplinary specialists on the legal case study of Felipe Agüero, who officially charged Emilio Meneses of torture at the National Stadium in 1973, and the difficulty at the time for victims to accuse their victimizers, see Patricia Verduga, ed., *De La Tortura No Se Habla: Agüero versus Meneses* (Santiago: Catalonia, 2004), pp. 11-16.

<sup>34</sup> On November 28, 2004, Lagos announced the formation of the Valech Commission. The phrase in his formal announcement to the nation is memorable: "Para nunca más vivirlo, para nunca más negarlo." Author's translation: "In order not to live that period of suffering and torture again, we must never again deny it." [es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comisi3n\\_Valech](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comisi3n_Valech)

<sup>35</sup> DINA is the abbreviation for Direcci3n de Inteligencia Nacional/ National Intelligence Directorate. It was Chile's secret police under Pinochet. For background on Michael Townley, a DINA U.S. expatriate who had once worked for the CIA, and his acknowledged role in the assassination of Orlando Letelier, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orlando\\_Letelier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orlando_Letelier) and [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letelier\\_case](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letelier_case)

<sup>36</sup> For the role of U.S. officials, including Navy Captain Ray E. Davis in the death of Horman, see <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/may2002/horm-m17.shtml>

<sup>37</sup> For one of many sources on the American complicity in the Chilean coup, confirmed in documents declassified during the Clinton administration, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank\\_Teruggi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Teruggi)

<sup>38</sup> The identity of the house and its location are written about in *Krassnoff arrastrado por su destino* (Santiago de Chile: Catalonia, 2008), p. 92. M3nica Echeverría Y3nez writes about the interrogations carried out in the basement under

General Krassnoff, one of the most "bloodthirsty" agents of DINA.

<sup>39</sup> *Venda Sexy, Discoteque Sign* was part of a larger installation titled *Venda Sexy, Discoteque* at Matucana 100 in Santiago in 2005. The sound system in the installation consisted of a remixed version of pop songs from the early-to-mid-1970s that victims who survived their incarceration in La Venda Sexy remembered hearing. The words were purposely distorted, making the music difficult to understand, thereby eliciting in the viewer a sense of unease.

<sup>40</sup> Mario Navarro, who has collaborated with Iv3n on many works and exhibitions, and whose own art has addressed the dark side of the dictatorship, suggested the idea of covering the heads of the two figures with plastic bags.

<sup>41</sup> In the early 2000s Jara's recordings were reissued by AOL Time Warner at which time he became the subject of several rock albums by young Chilean musicians who admired his courage. Jara's wife told BBC News: "They could kill him, but they couldn't kill his songs." Chilean artist Jorge Tacla's mural *Al mismo tiempo, en el mismo lugar* (2010), permanently installed at the Museum of Memory and Human Rights, also commemorates Jara's martyrdom.

<sup>42</sup> This work is illustrated in the Templon catalogue, pp. 12 and 13.

<sup>43</sup> *Criminal Ladder* was part of the exhibition *The Disappeared (Los desaparecidos)* in 2006 at El Museo del Barrio in New York. The exhibition catalogue (Grand Forks, North Dakota: Museum of Art, 2006) offers an excellent discussion of artists whose works are based on the loss of countless thousands of victims during military dictatorships or interneccine conflicts in Latin America in the last twenty to thirty years. For this exhibition the artist provided a list of names that he found on <http://www.memoriaviva.com> that had been compiled by la Fundaci3n de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas, FASIC. The list is revised when the guilty are brought to trial. This list became the text for the exhibition catalogue *¿D3nde Est3n? Iv3n Navarro* (Santiago: Galeria de Artes Visuales Centro Cultural Matucana 100, 2007-2008).

<sup>44</sup> In 2006, a year after *Criminal Ladder* was made, Judge Alejandro Madrid indicted Pinochet for kidnappings and torture at the Villa Grimaldi detention center, as well as for the 1995 assassination of the DINA biochemist Eugenio Berrios (himself involved in the Letelier case. Pinochet was judged too ill to stand trial, and thus he was never convicted.

<sup>45</sup> The process involves placing a mirror at the bottom of the base of the sculpture, then placing the fluorescent lights above the mirror and then

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placing a one-way mirror on the top of the lights to create an endless reflection, an optical illusion.

<sup>46</sup> For discussion of the skyscrapers or tall buildings, see Julia P. Herzberg, "Iván Navarro," *Arte al Día International* 135 (2011): 138–139.

<sup>47</sup> Between 1961 and 1963 Flavin completed a series of works he called "icons," consisting of eight painted wooden squares to which one or more lamps were attached; drawings document ideas for many more. The word "icon" was inspired by the artist's interest in Russian art of the early twentieth century, especially that of Kasimir Malevich, who referred to his abstract art as "the icon of my time." Flavin, however, noted that his icons "differ from a Byzantine Christ held in majesty; they are dumb—anonymous and inglorious . . . They are constructed concentrations celebrating barren rooms. They bring a limited light." See *Dan Flavin: Drawing*, press release, The Morgan Library & Museum, February 17–July 1, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> In 2005 the artist also created *White Backstage* (*White Sawhorse*, *White Ladder* and *White Step Ladder*). Both series are reproduced in the *Templon* catalogue, pp. 52 and 53.

<sup>49</sup> The Rijksmuseum has just acquired the rare white edition of the Rietveld chair of around 1918 for its collection. See <http://www.artfixdaily.com/artwire/release/5196-rijksmuseum-acquires-20th-century-masterpieces-white-chair-by-rie>

<sup>50</sup> The three sculptures together with *White Electric Chair* (2005) and two videos were part of the exhibition *Backstage* in Adelaide, Australia in 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Nutria NN was formed in New York in 2004 by Christian Torres. Because of Navarro's and Torres' long friendship and mutual involvement in music since high school and university days, Navarro asked Torres to sing and play the guitar in *Homeless Lamp*, *The Juice Sucker* and *Flashlight: I'm Not from Here, I'm Not from There*. Torres also played the roles of the protagonists in *Flashlight* and *Resistance*.

<sup>52</sup> One of Navarro's first recordings for Hueso-Records was a new version of the *corrido* sung by Nutria NN. Navarro listened to Victor Jara's version when he was young.

<sup>53</sup> Navarro first heard Julio Iglesias sing "No soy de aquí, no soy de allá (*I'm Not from Here, I'm Not from There*)." Navarro researched the song and found that the Argentinean singer Facundo Cabral wrote it in 1970. When comparing the two versions, Navarro realized that Iglesias omitted the first part of Cabral's song and decided to use the original version.

<sup>54</sup> Courtney Smith recites the poem that appeared on the cover of their LP album, *Umbral* released in 1980, and then sings the lyrics written originally by Jorge González.

<sup>55</sup> For an extensive overview of the Olympic Games, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic\\_Games](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games).

<sup>56</sup> The images for the men and women's toilets were on posters designed by Otl Aicher. See [http://www.google.com/search?q=images+toilets+signs+by+Otl+Aicher&hl=en&client=safari&rls=en&prmd=imvns&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=ljb7T72yK6Sn6wGGjPn6Bg&ved=OCEsQ\\_AUoAQ&biw=1879&bih=1248](http://www.google.com/search?q=images+toilets+signs+by+Otl+Aicher&hl=en&client=safari&rls=en&prmd=imvns&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ei=ljb7T72yK6Sn6wGGjPn6Bg&ved=OCEsQ_AUoAQ&biw=1879&bih=1248)

<sup>57</sup> Aicher, together with Inge Scholl and Max Bill, founded the Ulm School of Design in 1953, an experimental design school in the spirit of the Bauhaus. He was its director from 1962 to 1964. In addition to his design for the complete graphics program for the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, Aicher created the visual identities for dozens of major corporations, including Braun, BMW, Lufthansa, and the lighting company ERCO. Beginning in 1975 and continuing for twenty years, he collaborated with ERCO in designing more than 900 pictograms that "served to give direction in various areas of public life, including traffic, transportation, and healthcare. Aicher's pictograms established rules so that ERCO's in-house designers could add to the system without compromising Aicher's vision." Rathgeb, *Otl Aicher*, p. 119.

<sup>58</sup> The Rathgeb's book *Otl Aicher* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2006) is the most comprehensive study of Aicher's life and work.

<sup>59</sup> Rathgeb, *Otl Aicher*, p. 106.

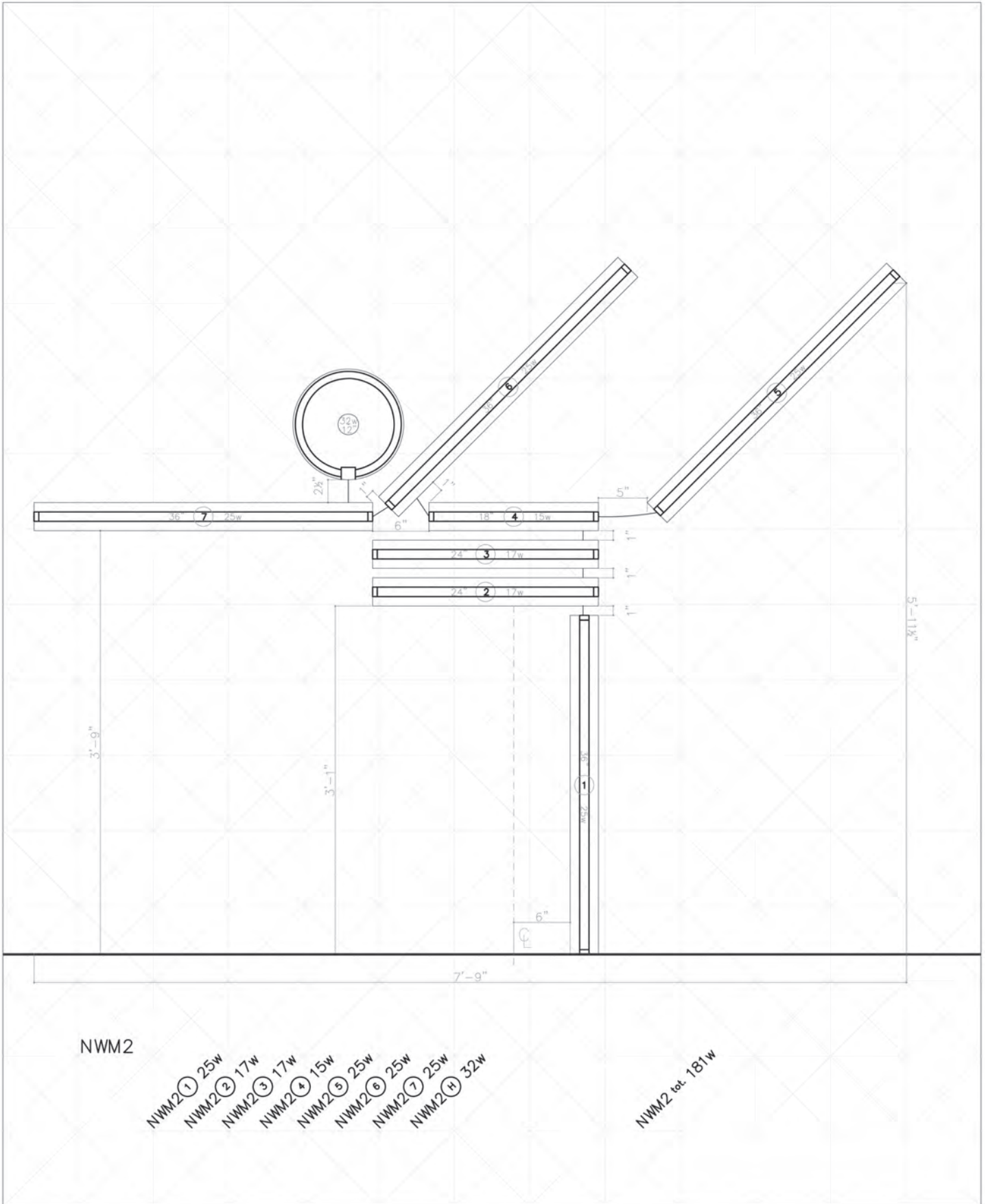
<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>61</sup> The fluorescent light sculpture, made for the artist's exhibition *Concentration Camp* at Roebling Hall, is illustrated in the *Templon* catalogue, pp. 18, 19.

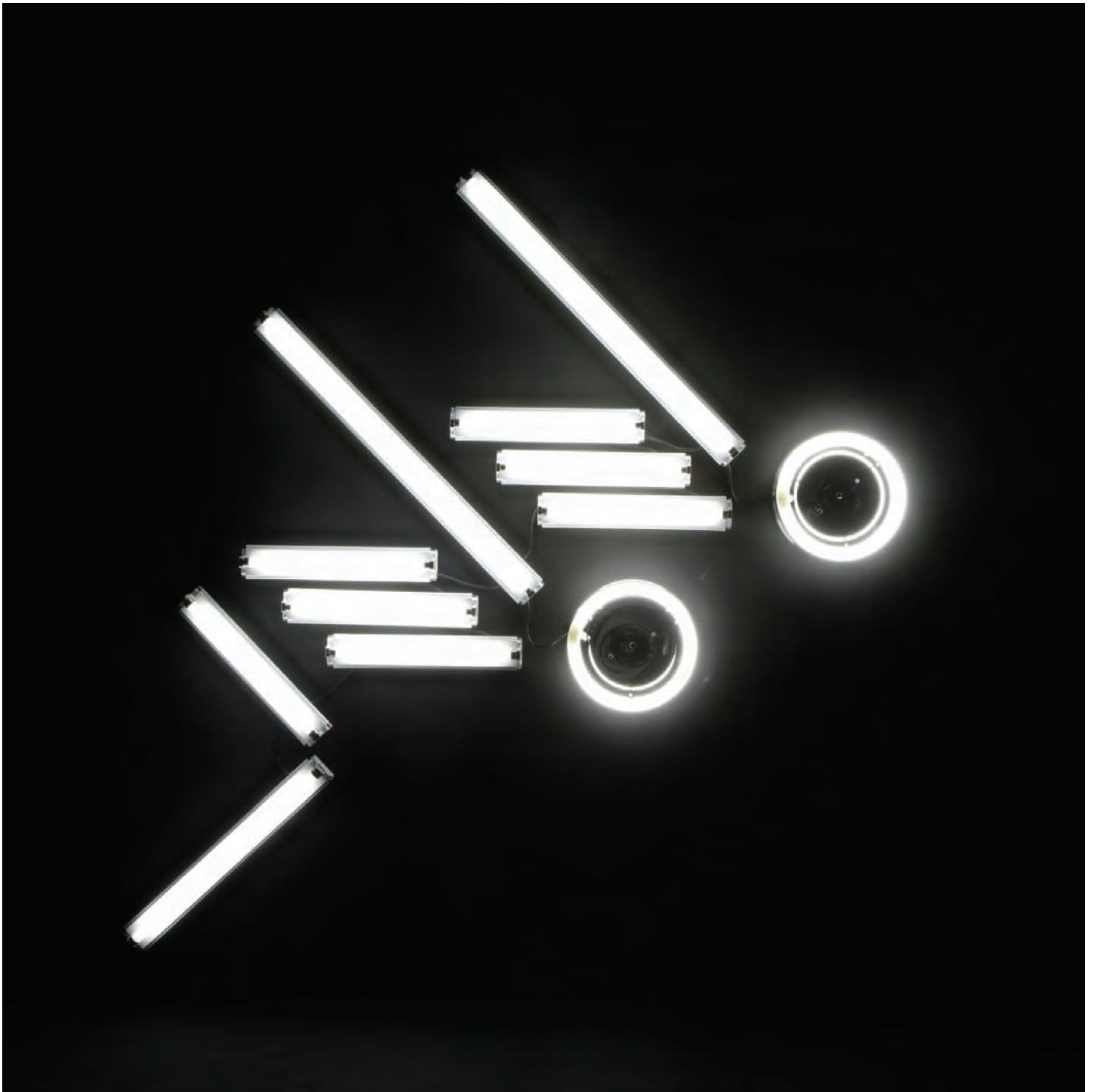
<sup>62</sup> In addition to the sport pictograms (illustrated in Rathgeb, *Otl Aicher*, p. 107), Aicher designed a total of about 180 pictograms, including those used to communicate different services for the Olympics.

<sup>63</sup> Certainly a reference to the overall subject is Navarro's adaptation of the Beatles song "Nowhere Man." It was an important element in his sculpture *Die Again (Monument to Tony Smith)*, a work exhibited in several group and solo shows between 2006 and 2010. The lyrics, more appropriate to the protagonists in the videos *Flashlight: I'm Not From Here, I'm Not From There* and *Resistance*, do not seem to express the essence of the Olympic sculptures of the same name.

<sup>64</sup> In writing about these sculptures, Katie Kitamura referred to Navarro's "two separate and seemingly irreconcilable perspectives" as parallax gaps. See "Nowhere Man," *Iván Navarro: Nowhere Man* (Eastbourne, England: Towner, 2009), p. 11.



**Nowhere Man II, 2009**  
 Technical drawing Pedro Pulido  
 71½ x 93 inches



*Nowhere Man III*, 2009

Cool white fluorescent lights and electric energy

73½ x 70½ inches

Installation view Litvak Gallery in 2012, Tel Aviv, Israel

Courtesy Litvak Gallery and Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France





*Nowhere Man IV*, 2009  
Cool white fluorescent lights and electric energy  
95 x 88½ inches



*Nowhere Man V*, 2009

Cool white fluorescent lights and electric energy

78½ x 72½ inches

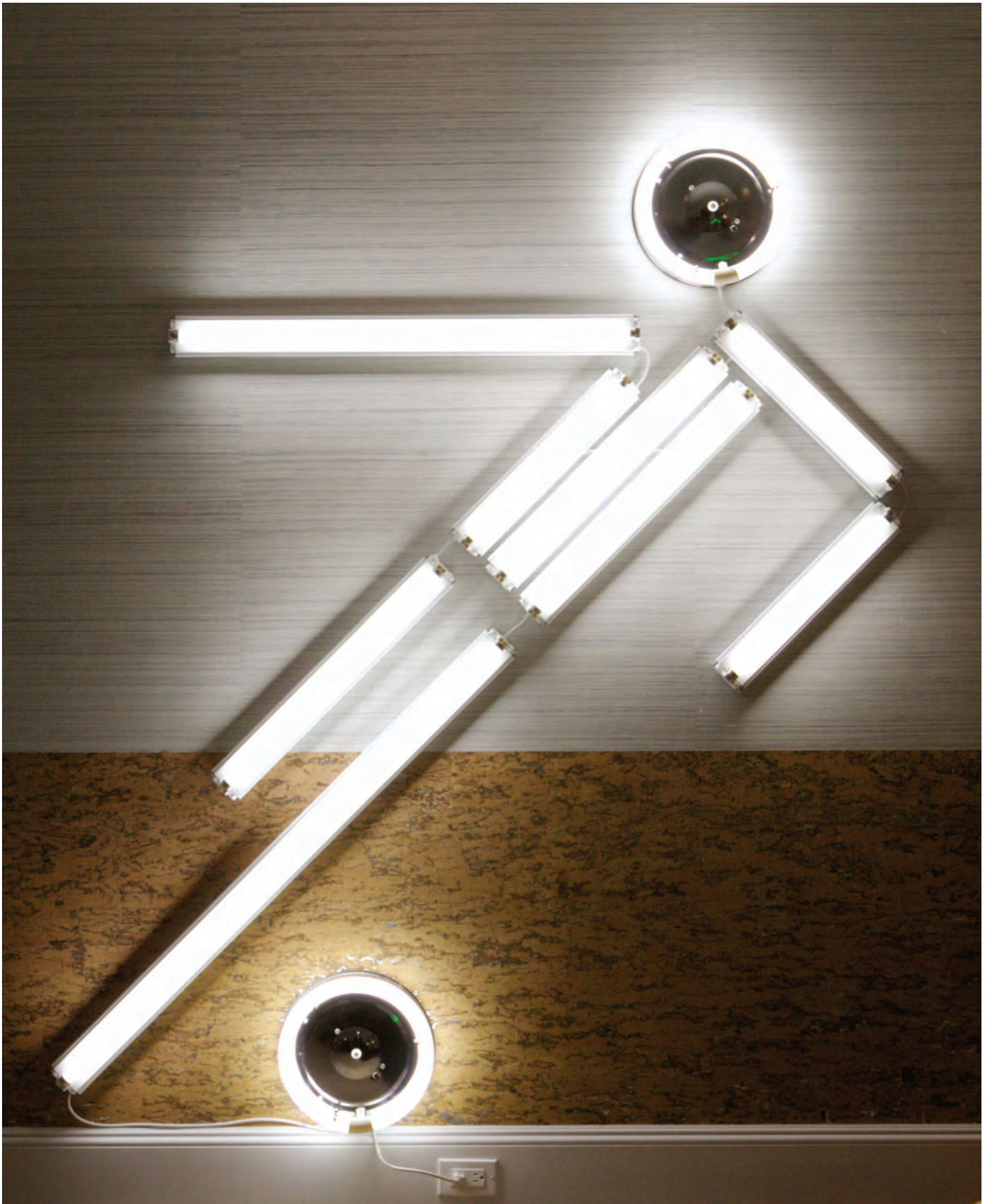
Installation view Litvak Gallery in 2012, Tel Aviv, Israel

Courtesy Litvak Gallery and Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France



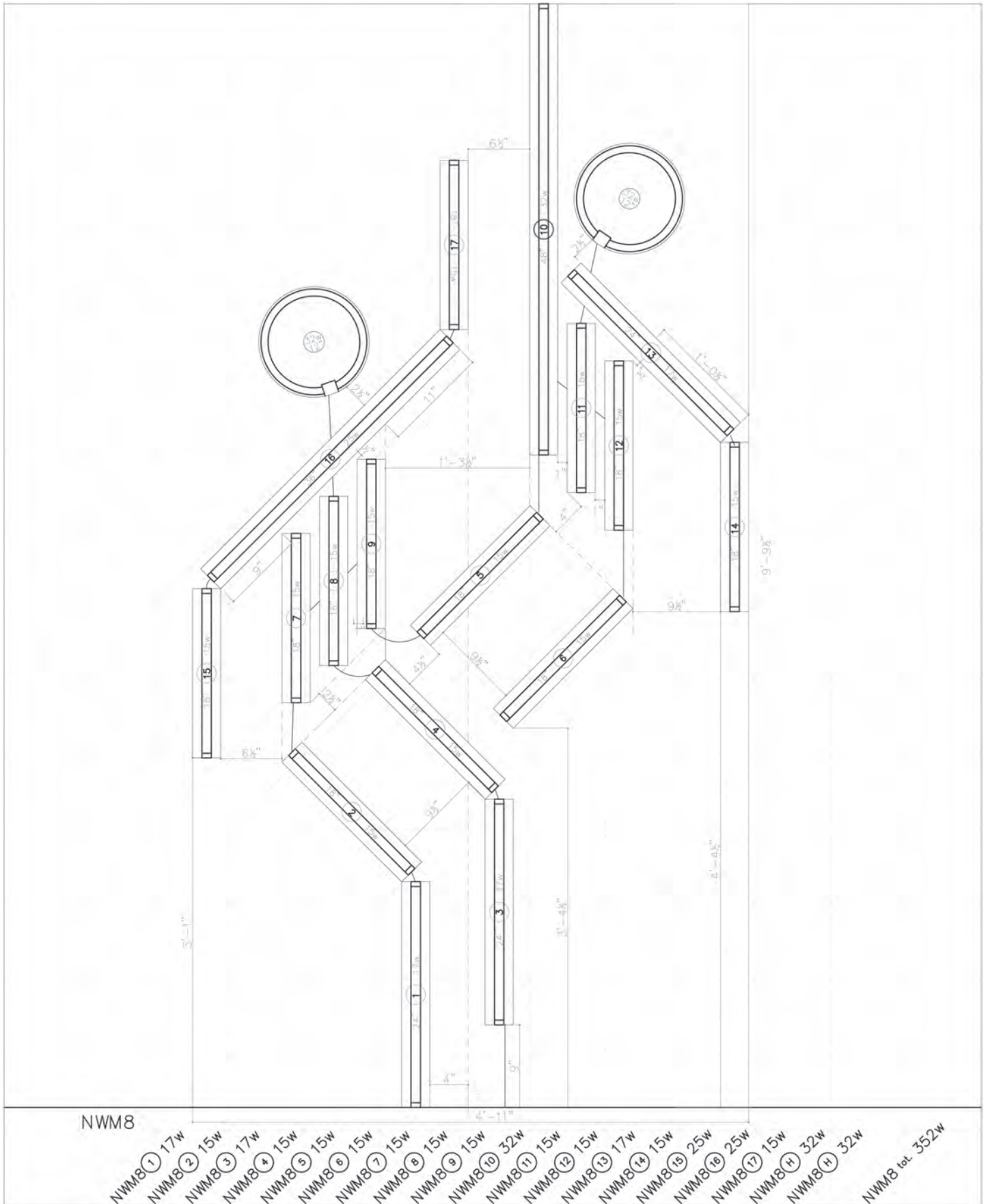
*Nowhere Man VI*, 2009  
Cool white fluorescent lights and electric energy  
64½ x 118 inches



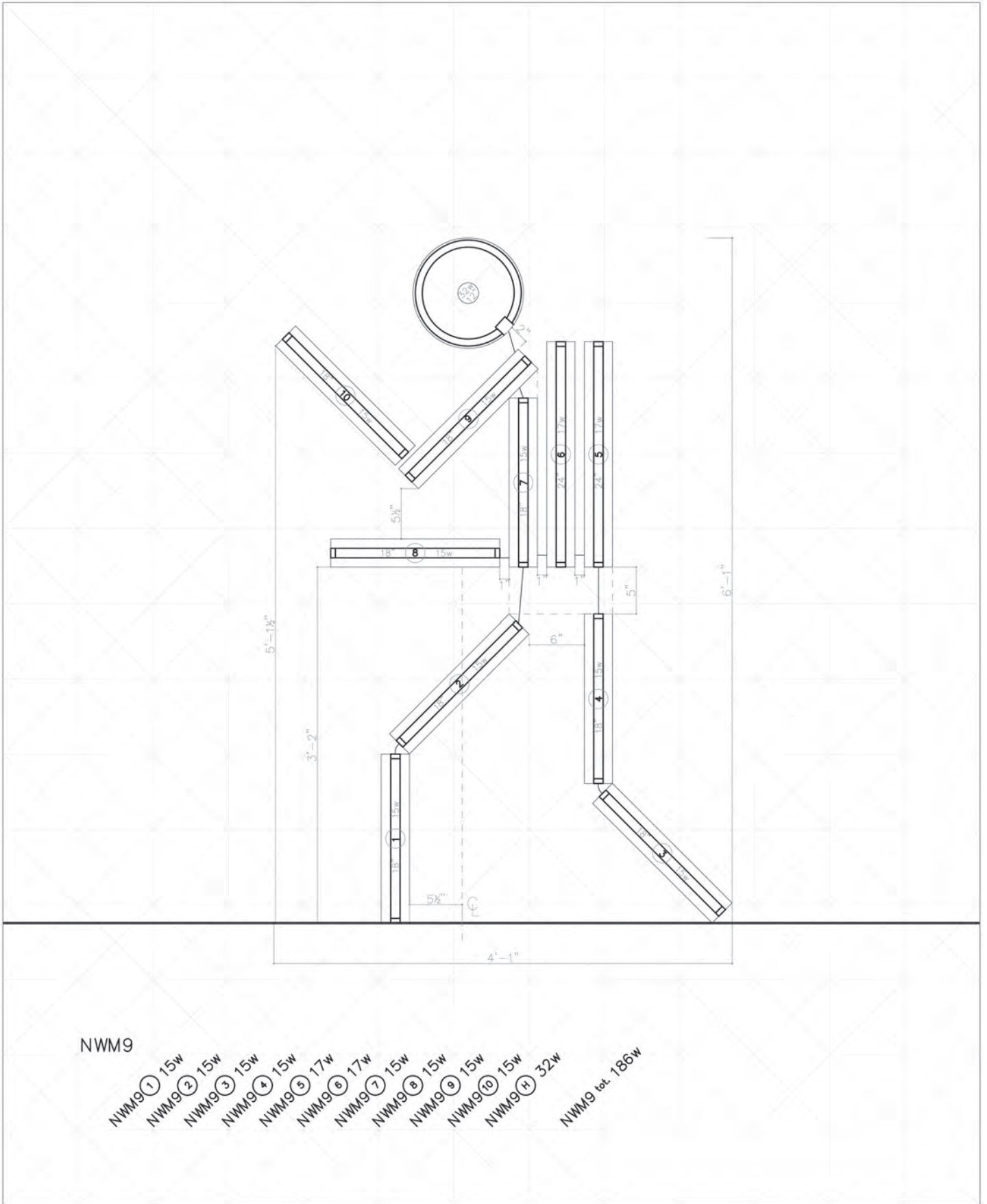


*Nowhere Man VII*, 2009  
Cool white fluorescent lights and electric energy  
77½ x 65 inches

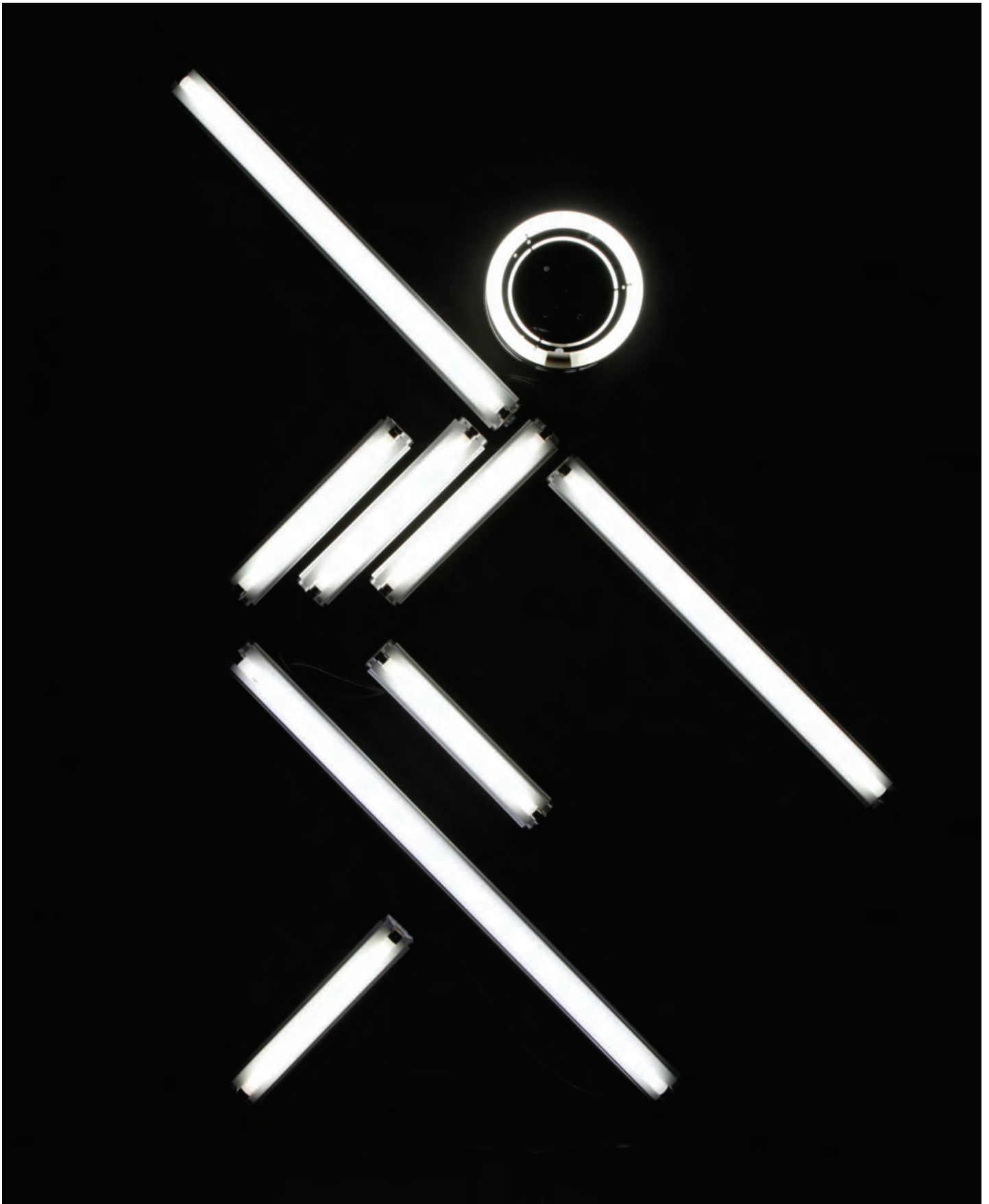




**Nowhere Man VIII, 2009**  
 Technical drawing Pedro Pulido  
 117½ x 59 inches



**Nowhere Man IX, 2009**  
 Technical drawing Pedro Pulido  
 73 x 49 inches



*Nowhere Man X*, 2009

Cool white fluorescent lights and electric energy

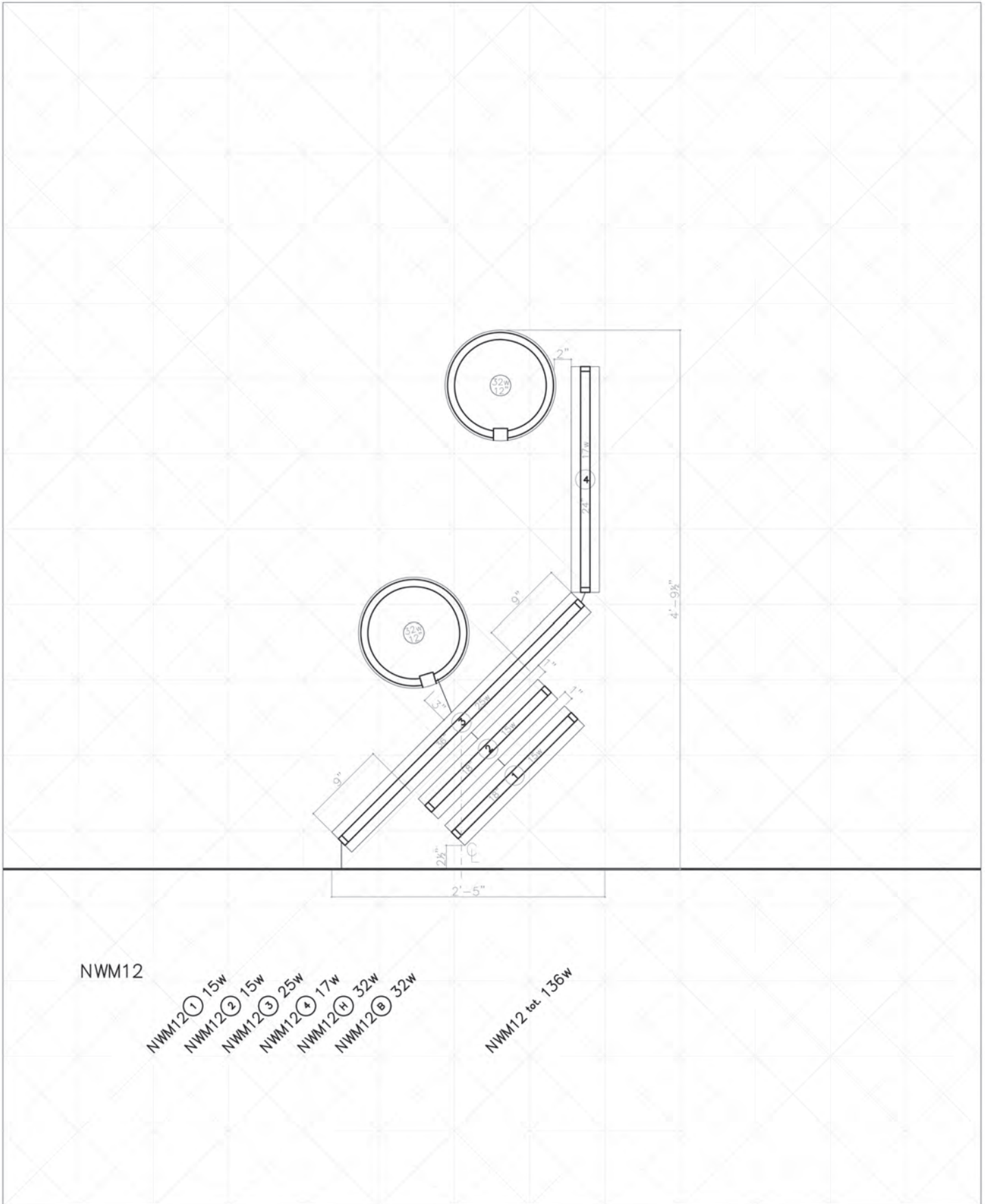
79½ x 56½ inches

Installation view Litvak Gallery in 2012, Tel Aviv, Israel

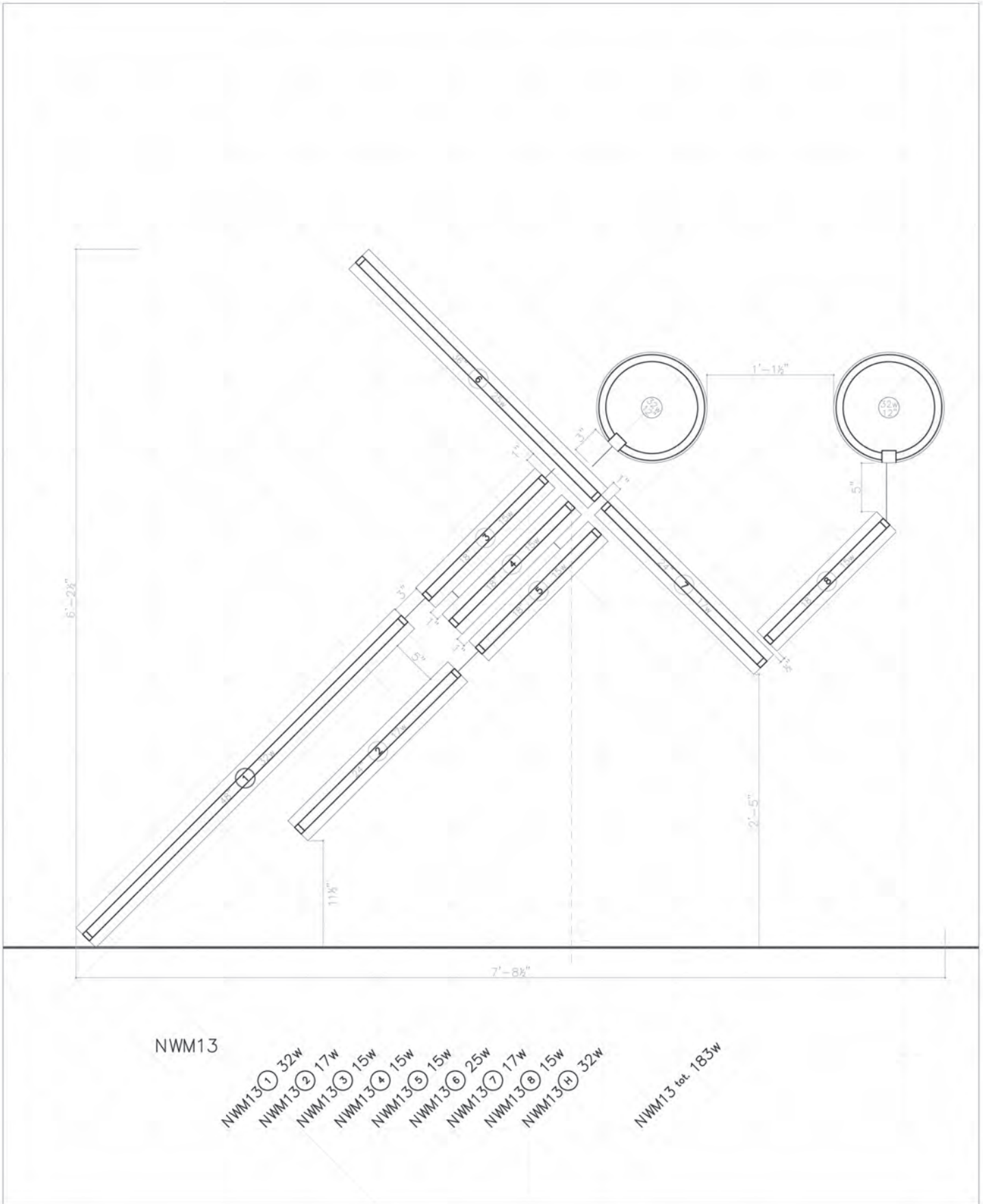
Courtesy Litvak Gallery and Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France







**Nowhere Man XII, 2009**  
 Technical drawing Pedro Pulido  
 57½ x 29 inches



*Nowhere Man XIII*, 2009  
 Technical drawing Pedro Pulido  
 74 1/2 x 92 1/2 inches



***Nowhere Man XIV and Nowhere Man XI, 2009***  
Cool white fluorescent lights and electric energy  
19 x 69 inches and 88 x 37 inches  
Installation view Galerie Templon in 2010, Paris, France  
Courtesy Galerie Templon

# Conversation with Iván Navarro

Julia P. Herzberg, 2004

Iván Navarro's *Blade Runner II* (2003) is a further exploration of an earlier wall and floor installation that the artist did during a residency at Gasworks in London. In contrast to the London piece, this work, in the form of the Olympic rings, appears to refer to a utopian vision of five continents in movement. Navarro has based the structure of this sculptural composition on Pierre de Coubertin's five rings and juxtaposed the theme of the work with the title "Blade Runner," a science-fiction film that dealt with extreme alienation and pessimism regarding the possibility of genetic control over mankind.

It is interesting to observe how two existential poles of human creativity can be so subtly encased in a kinetic sculpture composed of inexpensive materials that can be found in any run-of-the-mill hardware store. Navarro makes this proposal at the start of a new century, at the time when Chile has been accepted as an associate member of the European Union. The artist directs our attention to the possibilities for a relatively small country as it becomes more connected to the rings of global movement. The concept emerges in this work in the form of energy and its by-products, heat and light.

The installation is composed of 112 lamps, each with a handmade paper lampshade and a light bulb. Sheets of aluminum are cut into the shape of blades and secured at the top of each shade. As a result of the heat generated by the electric light bulb, the surrounding air is heated, causing the aluminum blades to rotate, producing the movement of the handmade paper lampshades.

**JPH:** At what point did you begin to envision this piece as the bearer of an Olympic message? I assume the notion occurred to you after you had finished *Blade Runner I*.

**Iván Navarro:** I had been waiting for five years to be able to work with the image of the Olympic Rings, which I feel are a fictitious representation of the world unity the Olympics seek to promote through its symbol.

In the case of *Blade Runner I*, I made a terrestrial globe adapted to the dimensions of the space I was assigned to at Gasworks in London, where I placed the lamps in the shape of each continent. *Blade Runner II* seemed to be the natural continuation of its predecessor, since it minimized a geographical representation of the world through the symbolic image of rings that are delineated by the lamps themselves. Both kinetic works are composed of very simple and fragile scientific components, similar to those used in a school laboratory.





1

*Blade Runner II*, 2003

40 watt light bulbs, aluminum plates, paper shades, wood,  
thermodynamic energy, and electric energy

8 x 240 x 120 inches

Studio view

*Blade Runner II* functions like a self-sufficient energy-producing machine. A minimal transformer of energy (the heat produced by a 40-watt light bulb) is enough to set the rings in slow motion. The Olympic message of this work is an ironic poke at the purported global brotherhood that the symbol of the Olympic Rings attempts to promote.

**JPH:** You have taken great pains to handcraft each lampshade and cut each aluminum plate. At the same time, you seem to have left the electric wiring at the base of the handmade wooden lamps exposed. There is an interesting contrast between the materials you chose and the methods you employed to set the sculpture in motion, technically as well as metaphorically. What thoughts were you working through?

**IN:** It was tiring to make this work, having to repeat the same form 112 times. The work process in itself was quite alienating. Nevertheless, in contrast to the alienation



2

***La Gran Lámpara (The Great Lamp), 1996***

Incandescent light bulbs, electric conduit,  
and electric energy

117<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 428<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches

Installation view

Galería Gabriela Mistral, Santiago, Chile

that a factory worker experiences, with a pre-established work plan to follow, I was able to vary my initial plan. There were details that I discovered as I built each component, especially when I installed it at Gasworks. The final artwork was the result of experimentation.

*Blade Runner II* was built by basic manual skills and know-how. While I was working on the piece, I thought about handcrafting as a model for the production of household objects. I was looking for something that was aesthetically precarious, something reduced to the minimum needed to make the mechanism I produced capable of functioning by thermodynamic energy.

The fragile construction of the sculpture, materially as well as thermodynamically, metaphorically alludes to how I perceive this ephemeral and unstable image that is, in effect, a representation of the world.

**JPH:** You have been making kinetic sculpture using electricity since 1996, first exhibiting the results at the Galería Gabriela Mistral in Santiago. How did your interest in electricity evolve?

**IN:** I am interested in the uses and abuses of electricity. Electric energy enables an individual to carry out a large part of his daily activities, but at the same time it can generate political abuses, especially when used as an instrument of torture as during the military dictatorship in Chile, as well as in some parts of the United States where the electric chair is the ultimate punishment for those given the death sentence.

I began to analyze these types of associations with electricity, reinventing them to produce something different from what they customarily had been made to do, in a manner similar to that used by others artists, such as Matilde Pérez, Francisco Brugnoli, and Gonzalo Díaz. I was interested in finding new meanings for the use of electricity, especially because of its notorious relationship with torture in Chile.

The work that I exhibited at the Galería Gabriel Mistral in 1996, called *La Gran Lámpara (The Large Lamp)*, gave visitors access to a space in which the illumination was controlled by the work itself. Generally, light switches are not within the reach of spectators in an exhibition space. But at *La Gran Lámpara*, visitors were given the opportunity to vary the intensity of the light, since each light bulb had its own easily accessible switch, which permitted viewers to alter the lighting in the space.

**JPH:** You have also developed an aesthetic proposal using ordinary, if not poor, materials. I am thinking about works like *Cocktail Molotov Nostalgia* (2001). What are some of the motivating factors behind these choices?

**IN:** *Cocktail Molotov Nostalgia* was born out of a specific event. There was an anti-globalization demonstration against the G8 in Genoa, in July 2001, at which a young man was shot by the police. The event moved me so much that I began to consider ideas related to globalization and the reality of my own country. By the time the dictatorship had ended in 1990, Chile had been transformed into one of the most economically stable countries in Latin America, a condition that attracted foreign investment in the energy and telecommunications sectors. That phenomenon, among others, produced a colonized cultural atmosphere, fascinated with the vision of technology as a representation of cultural and economic globalization. If I use poor materials, it is because I wish to emphasize the contrast with this idea of pseudo-development, and its fictitious and exploitative character, especially in regions that are in the process of developing.

When I made *Cocktail Molotov Nostalgia*, I was at Art Omi, the international artists' colony in New York State, where I was experimenting with inflammable liquids. It was there that I adopted the idea of the Molotov bomb, which was so common at the anti-G8 protests in Genoa, as well as during the Chilean military dictatorship, for the simplicity of its construction: you just need a glass bottle, gasoline, and a sock for the wick.

My intention was to make a sculpture that would be my memorial to that dead youth. The heat that the work produced set several aluminum discs in rotation, similar to the *Blade Runner I* and *II* projects, which, in this case, would bump into each other at different intervals. The elements were very light and created an ephemeral atmosphere, but the work itself appeared to be powerful, full of energy. The cooler air surrounding the work neutralized the heat that arose from the flame of each of the bottles.

**JPH:** What are the different historical currents that run through your work?

**IN:** I have studied Chilean art thoroughly, but I am more concerned now with the work of international artists of the caliber of Victor Grippo from Argentina, Dan Flavin from the United States, and Mario Merz from Italy, for the way they use light and electricity in their work. I have never looked for such references in painting because I find that medium so different from sculpture. I am interested in the work of artists that have already investigated light in sculptures, mainly so that I can make my own discoveries that are more related to three-dimensional objects. In general I find the historical movements of Conceptual Art, Minimalism, and other geometric movements worthy of consideration.



3

***Molotov Cocktail Nostalgia, 2001***

Glass bottles, aluminum plates, fire, gasoline, metal sticks,  
and thermodynamic energy

67 x 39½ x 39½ inches

Installation view Art OMI, International Artists' Residency,  
Ghent, New York



## Checklist of Works in the Exhibition

*Nowhere Man* (series), 2009–2012

Cool white fluorescent light, fixtures on the wall, and electric energy

*Nowhere Man I*, 65 x 77 inches

*Nowhere Man II*, 71½ x 93 inches

*Nowhere Man III*, 73½ x 70½ inches

*Nowhere Man IV*, 95 x 88½ inches

*Nowhere Man V*, 78½ x 72½ inches

*Nowhere Man VI*, 64½ x 118 inches

*Nowhere Man VII*, 77½ x 65 inches

*Nowhere Man VIII*, 117½ x 59 inches

*Nowhere Man IX*, 73 x 49 inches

*Nowhere Man X*, 79½ x 56½ inches

*Nowhere Man XI*, 88 x 37 inches

*Nowhere Man XII*, 57½ x 29 inches

*Nowhere Man XIII*, 74½ x 92½ inches

*Nowhere Man XIV*, 19 x 69 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, New York

*Red and Blue Electric Chair, 2003*

Fluorescent light tubes, color sleeves, metal fixtures, and electric energy

45 x 31½ x 44½ inches

Collection Martin Z. Margulies, Miami, Florida

*Red Ladder (Backstage), 2005*

Fluorescent light tubes, color sleeves, metal fixtures, and electric energy

96 x 29 x 7 inches

Cricket Taplin Collection, Miami, Florida

*Man Hole (Icon), 2012*

Fluorescent light bulbs, mirror, one-way mirror, glass, plywood, and electric energy

9½ x 30 (diameter) inches

Courtesy of the artist and Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, New York

*Homeless Lamp, The Juice Sucker, 2005*

Video with music, 4:16

Song interpreted by Nutria NN

(Original song *Juan sin tierra* by Jorge Saldaña, 1910)

*Flashlight: I'm Not From Here, I'm Not From There, 2006*

Video with music, 8:08

Song interpreted by Nutria NN

(Original song *No soy de aquí, no soy de allá* by Facundo Cabral, 1970)

*Resistance, 2009*

Video with music, 6:17

Poem and song interpreted by Courtney Smith

(Original poem untitled found in LP *Umbral* by Quilapayún, 1979.

Original song *No Necesitamos Banderas* by Jorge Gonzalez, 1984)

## Selected Biography

1972 Born in Santiago, Chile; lives and works in New York City

## Grants and Residencies

2009 Altazor, National Prize for Visual Arts, Chile  
2007 Fondart, Grant Ministry of Culture, Santiago, Chile  
2006 Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant, New York  
2002 Gasworks, Residency Gasworks Cultural Exchange Program, London, England  
2002 Fondart, Grant Ministry of Education, Santiago, Chile  
2001 Art Omi, International Artists' Residency, Ghent, New York  
2001 Fondart, Grant Ministry of Education, Santiago, Chile  
1999 Fondart, Grant Ministry of Education, Santiago, Chile

## Selected Solo Exhibitions

2012 *Iván Navarro: Fluorescent Light Sculptures*, Frost Art Museum, Miami, Florida  
2012 *Nacht und Nebel*, Fondazione VOLUME1, Rome, Italy  
2011 *The UNO Fence*, Prospect.2 at UNO Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana  
2011 *Heaven or Las Vegas*, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York  
2010 *Tener dolor en el cuerpo de otro*, Galería Distrito 4, Madrid, Spain  
2010 *Tierra de nadie*, Caja de Burgos, Burgos, Spain  
2009 *Threshold*, 53rd Biennale di Venezia, Chilean Pavilion, Venice, Italy  
2009 *Nowhere Man*, Towner, Eastbourne, England  
2009 *Homeless Lamp*, The Juice Sucker, Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
2008 *Antifurniture*, Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France  
2008 *Backstage*, Greenaway Gallery - Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts, Adelaide, Australia  
2008 *No Man's Land*, Koppelman Gallery, Tufts University Art Gallery, Medford, Massachusetts  
2007 *¿Dónde están?*, Centro Cultural Matucana 100, Santiago, Chile  
2007 *Large Wall Hole* (project wall), Jersey City Museum, New Jersey  
2006 *Concentration Camp*, Roebing Hall, New York  
2006 *Pachamama*, Galería Metropolitana, Santiago, Chile  
2005 *Spyglass*, Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France  
2005 *Shortcuts*, Art Rock, Rockefeller Plaza, New York  
2004 *Monuments for D. Flavin*, Roebing Hall, New York  
1996 *Un día de camping*, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile

## Selected Joint Exhibitions

2011 *The Construction of Volumetric Interrelationships* (Courtney Smith and Iván Navarro), Baró Galería, São Paulo, Brazil  
2010 *Chile: Behind the Scenes* (Mario Navarro et Iván Navarro), Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton, Paris, France  
2008 *Remake* (Courtney Smith and Iván Navarro), G Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.  
2006 *Contra-golpe* (Instituto Divorciado), Karl Marx alle 87, Berlin, Germany  
2004 *Illegal Carnival*, 173 North 7th Street, Brooklyn, New York  
1996 *Las cosas y sus atributos* (Mario Navarro and Iván Navarro), Galería Gabriela Mistral, Santiago, Chile

## Selected Group Exhibitions

2012 *Neon—Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue?*, MACRO, Rome, Italy  
2012 *Eleventh Havana Biennial*, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam, Havana, Cuba  
2012 *Every Exit is an Entrance: 30 Years of Exit Art*, Exit Art, New York  
2012 *Neon—Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?* La Maison Rouge, Paris, France  
2011 *Motion of a Nation*, V.M.21 Arte Contemporánea Gallery, Rome, Italy  
2011 *Lúmens*, Festes Decennals de la Candela, Valls, Spain  
2010 *Bicentenario: Diez miradas latinoamericanas*, Museo Mural Diego Rivera, Mexico City, Mexico  
2010 *Cairo*, International Biennale, Cairo, Egypt  
2010 *HomeLessHome*, Museum on the Seam, Jerusalem, Israel  
2010 *Chile: Behind the Scenes*, Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton, Paris, France  
2009 *In the Between*, Tabanlıoğlu Architects, Istanbul, Turkey  
2009 *Pete and Repeat*, 176 / Zabudowicz Collection, London, England  
2009 *Trienal de Chile*, Santiago, Chile  
2009 *Prague Contemporary Art Festival*, Tina B, Prague, Czech Republic  
2009 *Bienal de Canarias*, Tenerife, Spain  
2008 *A Political Exhibition*, Tirana Institute for Contemporary Art, Tirana, Albania  
2007 *Aquí y ahora: Transcultural*, Centro Cultural de España, San Salvador, El Salvador

- 2007 *Reality Undone*, University of Essex Gallery, Essex, England
- 2007 *When We Build, Let Us Think That We Build Forever*, BALTIC The Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, England
- 2007 *Refract, Reflect, Project: Light Works from The Collection*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
- 2007 *Petrolina*, Moscow Museum of Modern Art at Petrovka and *We are your future*, Art Center Winzavod, Special Projects for the 2nd Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia
- 2006 *Artificial Light* (traveling exhibition): Virginia Commonwealth University Anderson Gallery, Richmond, Virginia; MOCA at Goldman Warehouse, Miami, Florida
- 2006 *Trace*, The Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, New York
- 2006 *Arquivar tormentas*, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain
- 2006 *Don Quijote*, Witte de Witt, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
- 2006 *Other than Art*, G Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.
- 2005 *Poles Apart / Poles Together*, White Box and the International Artists Museum for the 51st Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
- 2005 *Next Next Art*, Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York
- 2005 *Sept. 11, 1973*, Orchard, New York
- 2005–2009 *The Disappeared* (traveling exhibition): North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks; Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales, Montevideo, Uruguay; El Museo del Barrio, New York; Museo de Arte de San Marco, Lima, Peru; SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico; Centro Cultural Matucana 100, Santiago, Chile; Museo de Arte Moderno, Bogotá, Colombia; Art Museum of the Americas, Organization of American States, Washington, D.C.; University of Wyoming Art Museum, Laramie; Weisman Museum of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- 2005 *Acción Directa: Latin American Social Sphere*, Prague Biennale 2, Prague, Czech Republic
- 2005 *Transformer*, Centro Cultural Matucana 100, Santiago, Chile
- 2004 *Produciendo Realidad, Arte e Resistenza Latinoamericana*, Prometeo Associazione, Lucca, Italy
- 2004 *Terrorvision*, Exit Art, New York
- 2004 *Cile-Italia*, Instituto Italo Latino Americano, Rome, Italy
- 2004 *Biennale Adriatica di Arti Nuovo*, San Benedetto del Tronto, Italy
- 2003 *Ricos y famosos*, Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende, Santiago, Chile
- 2003 *Frankenstein (or, it's all fun and games until someone loses an eye)*, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York
- 2002 *Overt Operation*, Joseph Helman Gallery, New York
- 2002 *Viology, Violence of Culture & Culture of Violence*, Galería de la Raza, San Francisco, California
- 2001–2000 *The Place Without Limit*, Contemporary Art From Chile (traveling exhibition): Museo de Arte Moderno de Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Mexico; Museo Nacional de Arte, Lima, Peru; Museo Rubén Blades, Montevideo, Uruguay; Museo del Barro, Asunción, Paraguay
- 2000 *Circulation a Public Mapping Project of Repohistory*, Exit Art, New York
- 2000 *Magnética*, Fundación Telefónica, Santiago, Chile
- 1999–2000 *Chile – Austria* (traveling exhibition): Landesgalerie-Oberoesterreich, Linz, Austria; Kärntner Landesgalerie, Innsbruck, Austria; Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, Chile
- 1999 *The Selected Files*, El Museo del Barrio, New York
- 1999 *Doméstico*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Valdivia, Valdivia, Chile
- 1997 *Arte joven en Chile (1986–1996)*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, Chile

### Selected Public and Private Collections

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.  
 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia  
 San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, Texas  
 Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris, France  
 Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago de Compostela, Spain  
 Towner, Eastbourne, England  
 Galeria Gabriela Mistral, Santiago, Chile  
 Vanhaerents Art Collection, Brussels, Belgium  
 Zabudowicz Collection, London, England  
 LVMH Collection, Paris, France  
 Saatchi Collection, London, England  
 Borusan Contemporary, Istanbul, Turkey  
 Martin Z. Margulies Warehouse, Miami, Florida  
 Sagamore Collection, Miami, Florida  
 21c Museum Hotel, Louisville, Kentucky  
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