

# ACE GALLERY LOS ANGELES

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## HEATHER CARSON *LIGHT ACTION: light/ALBERS*

OCTOBER 3 - 31, 2009

OPENING RECEPTION: OCTOBER 3, 7.30 – 9 PM

Heather Carson's formal and conceptual investigations into the properties of light draw together the historic strands of East Coast Minimalism and West Coast Light and Space. Throughout her international career as a lighting designer for thirty years in theatre, opera, video, dance and concert – Carson has wielded light in a muscular fashion exploring its color temperatures and physical properties. Long fascinated by high intensity discharge sources such as sodium vapor and metal halide, as well as fluorescent tubes, her aesthetic is determined by the specificity of the choice of materials. Drawing inspiration from contemporary physics, deconstructivist architecture and minimalism in sculpture – rather than strictly narrative - to consider structures for light in her theatre work, she says "I have sought to create light as a visceral, active presence that has its own logic and structure, co-existing with the action – often in conflict – not there simply to better "see" what is happening onstage." Her investigations in the theatre have radically informed her installation work, and her installation work has in turn refined her theatre work. For her they have been inseparable.

Renowned theatre director Richard Foreman says that "she is the one American designer who uses the lights as well as the light produced to physically build with light." Since creating her first installation with light in 1995, she has been exploring the grid; sequencing on and off the warm point source of sodium vapor light and the cool diffuse light of daylight fluorescents. That body of work, entitled *light/GRIDS*, culminated in a series of wall pieces, taking over a decade to refine it to its essential components. This new series, *light/ALBERS*, marks a radical departure from her mainstay vocabulary. The work hews more closely to the formal properties of painting than installation; uses only white light in fluorescent and discharge sources and is static. Rather than using the site or the materials as a departure point, these pieces mine the architectural underpinnings of Josef Albers' paintings. While this series has an immediate pictorial reference, it actually delves more deeply into his methodology and philosophy. The series was inspired by a visit to the Tate Modern's 2006 exhibition, *Albers & Moholy-Nagy: From the Bauhaus to the New World*. Seeing Albers' *Study for Homage to the Square: Dimly Reflected* (1963) and his use of shades of grey triggered the idea of exploring the use of shades of white light and shadow instead of color as the "carrier of the pictorial action," creating an updated tribute to the "meditation panels" that Albers sought.

“The fluorescent bulb, undimmable and untamable, means a lot to her – maybe because it’s so constitutionally opposed to the softness, roundness, and “humanness” of conventional theater lighting.”<sup>1</sup>

For Carson, each light piece is not a direct reference to an individual Albers painting but to the oeuvre at large. Albers carefully noted on the reverse side the type and shades of color that he used as a record of the work’s specific formal experiment. Mirroring the foregrounding of the electrical systems in her work, bringing the 'background' information forward rather than hiding it, each piece lists the colors of the fluorescent tubes in the title, i.e. *light/ALBERS: Cool White/DESIGN 50/ADV850*, using the manufacturer’s name for the color temperature of the tube. Albers himself used different types of fluorescent lighting in his studio (some that cast warm tones, and some cool tones) that allowed him to assess the color interactions in different lighting environments. Historically, fluorescent works have tended to use the fixture itself as the carrier of the electrical wires. In the new *Light Action* wall sculptures on view, the heavy industrial aesthetic of her armatures and their joints may seem unfamiliar as part of an artwork. But Carson has developed a highly refined aesthetic over the years encompassing conduit and the use of indoor and outdoor electrical fittings. The use of aluminum pipe and Speed-Rail enables her to place lights in space; adjacent to each other but maintaining their individual structural integrity.

Heather Carson has designed lighting in the US and internationally for over 150 productions in theatre, opera, dance, concert and video primarily in New York theatre and European avant-garde opera. Highlights include twenty years with Richard Foreman; 15 years with Elizabeth Streb Ringside; and recently, a 2 1/2 year eight play History Cycle (*Richard II, Henry IV Parts 1&2, Henry V, Henry VI Parts 1,2 &3 and Richard III*) for the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon and The West End which won the 2009 Olivier Award for Best Revival and Best Performance and *La Fanciulla del West* for Opera Malmö in Sweden. Upcoming, the new Richard Foreman play starring Willem Dafoe at The Public in New York and *La Bohème* for Scottish Opera. She was head of the lighting programs at Penn State and Cal Arts and has taught at NYU, Smith College, Bard College, Sci-Arc, UCSD and UCLA. She is a recipient of the 1998/99 Rome Prize, a 1997 Fellowship from the Skowhegan Art Program, a 1998 and 2004 New York Foundation for the Arts Artists Fellowship in Architecture/Environmental Structures, a 1999 Graham Foundation for the Advancement of the Fine Arts grant and a 2006 Durfee Foundation Grant. Born in 1960 and raised in L.A., she spent 25 years in New York and now lives and works in Los Angeles.

For further information and visuals please contact Ace Gallery Los Angeles at 323.935.4411  
or email [acegallery@acegallery.net](mailto:acegallery@acegallery.net)  
Gallery Hours: Tuesday through Saturday 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Wilder, *Artforum* critic’s picks, May 2007.