

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Laddie John Dill: Contained Radiance Austin

November 16, 2019 – February 1, 2020

Opening reception: Saturday, November 16, 6–8 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Contained Radiance Austin*, an exhibition of work by Laddie John Dill—the artist’s first presentation at the gallery.

Laddie John Dill’s Light Sentences—equal parts drawing, painting, and sculpture—are thin, straight, glass tubes that hang on the wall and glow with segments of colored light. The sections range between two inches and two feet long—each with its own color and intensity—and come to a combined length of about seven feet in a single work. As Ken Johnson wrote for the *New York Times*, “they glow beautifully like strings of illuminated glass beads.”

Dill credits his stepfather—a mathematician, lens designer, and inventor always busy with projects (including the development of night vision)—with inspiring an early love for electric light. Laser beams shot through the hallways of Dill’s home growing up; oscilloscopes and exposed electronics littered the mantle and the dining table. He delighted in the quality of light that came from his stepfather’s toys.

So as an art student studying painting, Dill quickly gravitated away from oil and toward materials like neon and argon. He ended up in Rio Score’s small sign shop in southern California, learning how to weld glass tubing, coat its insides with a fluorescent emulsion, suck air out, pump gas in, and electrify these objects that Score called *signs* but Dill thought of as something else. Captivating. Magical.

After spending the last couple of years of the ’60s learning his craft, Dill made the first Light Sentences in 1970—and their qualities have remained largely consistent since then. The segments in a given piece are not all the same thickness—they step up and down between eight and twelve millimeters in diameter. The welds that connect them are imperfect, a little uneven, decidedly handmade. “Knuckles,” he calls them. Dill coats the inside of some tubes with an opaque emulsion to shift the color the electrified gas creates, other segments are colored but transparent, and he always leaves at least one section of glass in each work entirely clear—so the gas inside can emit its truest, unmodified hue. Argon is purple; when combined with mercury, it turns blue; neon makes red; xenon yields iridescent silver; helium, a pale fleshy pink-orange. Dill can produce a tremendous array of colors by pumping these gases into opaque or transparent colored glass of various diameters (smaller tubes squeeze the gas, intensifying its effects). Five decades later, he is still experimenting, still discovering new combinations that make light he has never seen before.

Dill’s work deals directly with light and color in a way that seems almost otherworldly, but his

feet are planted squarely on the ground. When asked about a review of his work that postulated about his spiritual inclinations, he dismissed the notion with a single, sarcastic word: "Showbiz." He says he is solely interested in the relationships the Light Sentences create between light, color, glass, gas, and an electric charge. And yet there is something undeniably transportive about them. Intentionally or not, Dill's artworks arouse a sense of wonder similar to what he experienced in his childhood home—something like seeing a laser for the first time, but in the early 1950s, well before most of the world had even heard of such a thing.

Laddie John Dill, born in 1943 in Long Beach, lives and works in Venice, California. He has been awarded two National Endowment for the Arts grants and a Guggenheim Fellowship. His work is in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Cincinnati Art Museum, High Museum of Art (Atlanta), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Denmark), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Museo Jumex (Mexico City), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Phillips Collection (Washington DC), Pio Monte della Misericordia (Naples), Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Seattle Art Museum, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Smithsonian Institute (Washington DC).