

julio le parc: 1959 - 1970
galeria nara roesler | new york

exhibition
october 7th - december 17th, 2016
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Julio Le Parc A Constant Quest

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This essay was previously published to accompany the exhibition *A Constant Quest*, at Galeria Nara Roesler | São Paulo (oct. 10th - dec. 12th, 2013).

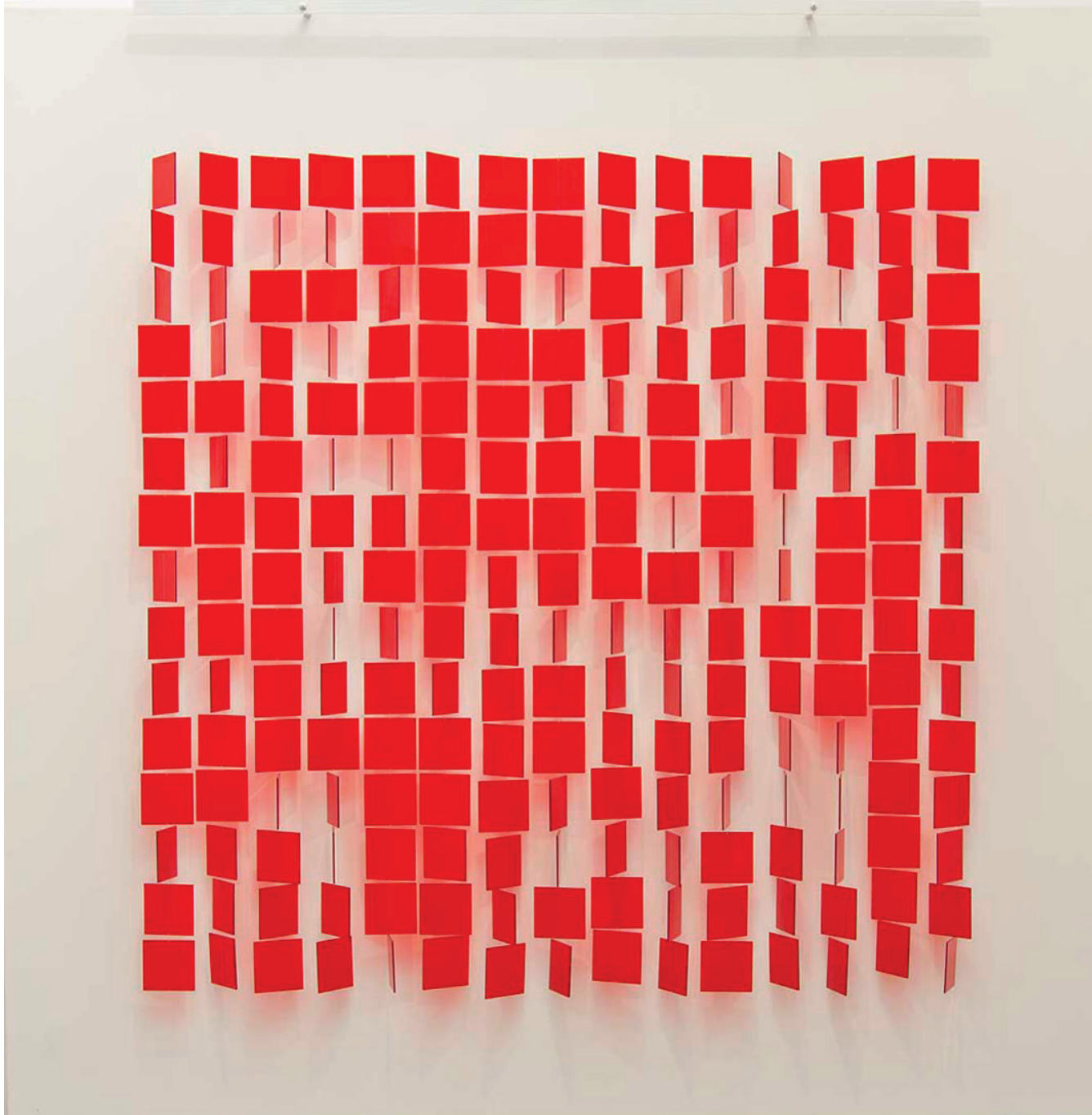
During the course of six decades, Julio Le Parc has consistently sought to redefine the very nature of the art experience, precipitating what he calls 'disturbances in the artistic system'. In so doing, he has played with the viewers' sensory experiences and given spectators an active role. With fellow members of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV)—an artist collective Le Parc established with Horacio García Rossi, Francisco Sobrino, François Morellet, Joël Stein, and Jean-Pierre Vasarely (Yvaral) in Paris in 1960—Le Parc generated direct encounters with the public, while undermining what they considered the artificial constraints of institutional frameworks.¹ As their manifesto *Assez de mystifications* ["Enough Mystifications", Paris, 1961] announced, the group's intention was to find ways to confront the public with artwork outside the museum setting by intervening in urban spaces with subversive games, politically charged flyers, and playful questionnaires.² Through such strategies, Le Parc and GRAV turned spectators into participants with an increased self-awareness, both achieving a form of social leveling and anticipating some of the sociopolitical collaborative and relational strategies that have proliferated over the past two decades.

¹ The GRAV artists, Julio Le Parc, Horacio García Rossi, Francisco Sobrino, François Morellet, Joël Stein and Jean-Pierre Vasarely (known as Yvaral), were members of a larger group known as the Centre de Recherche d'Art Visuel before separating as GRAV in 1960.

² Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, "Assez de mystifications." Flyer distributed during the second Paris Biennale. September 1961. Reproduced in Yves Aupetitallot, ed., *Stratégies de participation: GRAV—Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, 1960-1968*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Charles Penwarden (Paris: Centre d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble, 1998), 71.



gamme a quatre positions, 1959
gouache on plyboard -- 95 x 95 cm



mobile rouge sur blanc, 1960/1995
wood and acrylic -- ed. 9/9 -- 153 x 153 x 15 cm

Since the dissolution of GRAV in 1968, Le Parc has continued to pursue what he terms 'una búsqueda permanente' (a constant quest) for an artistic experience that never presumes to dictate a predetermined effect. Rather, he strives to incite a spontaneous response from the public. Driven by a deeply-rooted utopian ethos, Le Parc uses his interactive or immersive art as a social laboratory, producing unpredictable situations and provocatively eliciting the viewer's engagement in the art-making process. Le Parc expressed his work's dual function of intervention and authoritarian critique in a statement from 1968: "I attempt[ed] to create practical actions to contravene existing values... [to] create situations...[which counter] every tendency towards the stable, the durable, and the definitive." [Julio Le Parc, *Guerilla culturelle*, Paris, March 1968].

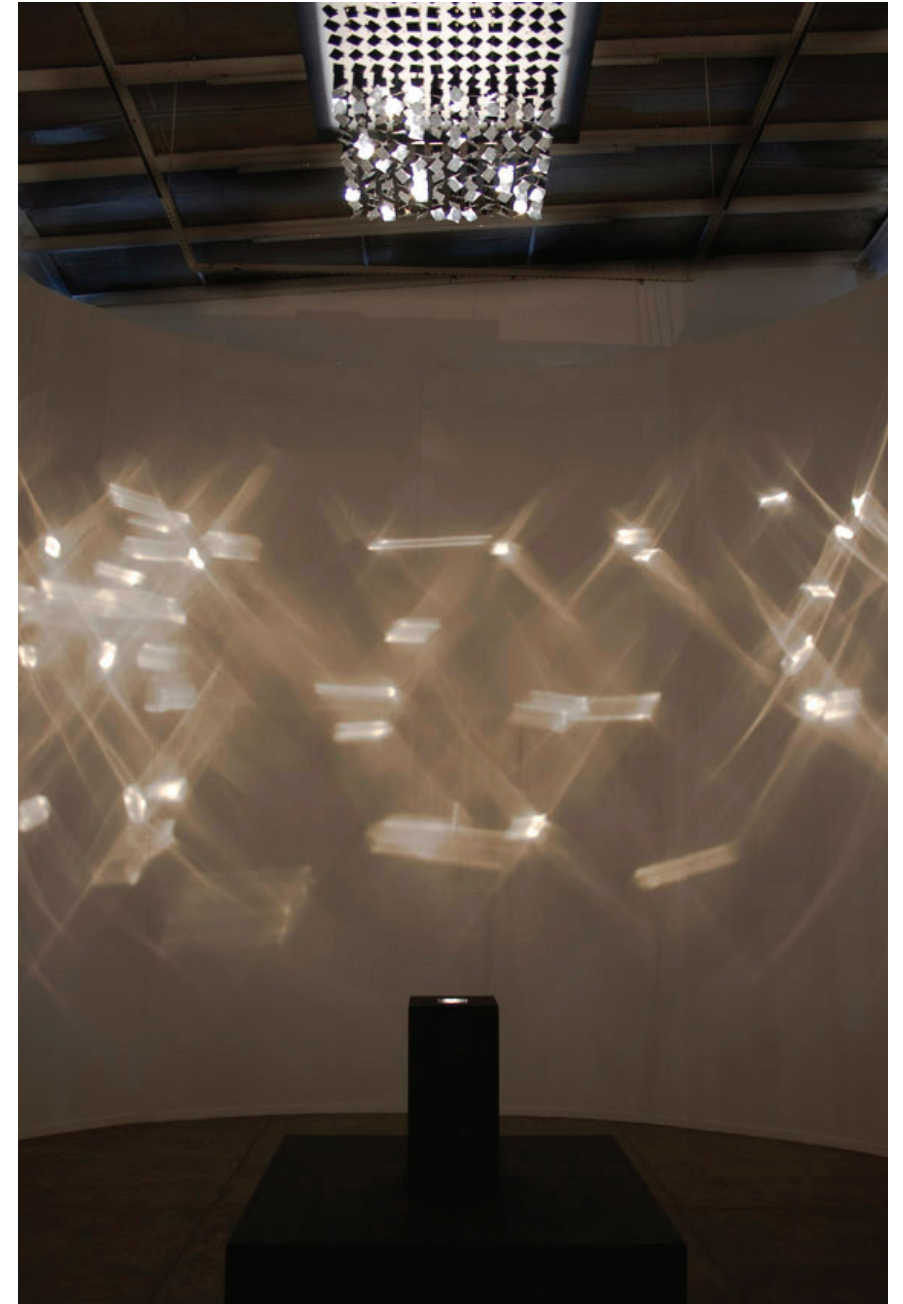
Le Parc's artistic production has evolved from two-dimensional geometric studies, through small light boxes to room-size installations, immersive environments, and public interventions on the streets. Nevertheless, this diverse body of work shares a central destabilizing function: provoking the individual's interaction with his or her environment while at the same time demanding a recognition of that engagement. Le Parc's *Sphère bleue* (Blue sphere, 2001/2013), a monumental globe measuring over four meters in diameter constructed of hanging translucent blue Plexiglas squares, seems to be magically suspended in mid-air. The light refracted off the sphere floods the surrounding space in a vibrant blue. The visitors' perceptual experience of the orb vacillates between being both transparent and impenetrable, fragile and monumental, one that distorts what one sees beyond and makes one aware of watching and being watched in a newly transformed communal space.

The physical components of Le Parc's works—hanging sheets of reflective material, monumental sculptures of transparent Plexiglas, geometric painting, motorized light structures, distorting metal screens—are as strikingly varied as the structures themselves. The general effect, however, is to create a sense-altering, often disorienting environment and impression.

In sculptures, such as *Cellule à pénétrer adaptée* (Adapted penetrable cell, 1963/2012) or *Formes en contorsion* (Forms in contortion, 1971), Le Parc emphasizes the mutability of perception. Fragmentation becomes integral to the apprehension of works in which mirrors, reflected or projected lights, viewing glasses, fun-house games, and physical interactions confuse the senses. Thus, shifting perspectives create an internal dynamism or essential instability through which Le Parc ultimately questions subjective accuracy and traditional modes of display, which, as he wrote in his influential text "Guerrilla culturel", serve only to perpetuate social structures of domination.

Toward similar ends, Le Parc has also conducted research into the phenomenology of structures through two-dimensional painting, animating planar surfaces with seemingly limitless permutations of simple geometric forms. In preparatory studies and paintings, Le Parc reduces and shifts these elements according to a predetermined system to create a plurality of sequential compositions. In his "rotations series," such as *Séquences de rotation* (Rotational sequences, 1959) or *Rotation des carrés* (Rotation of squares, 1959), progressive sequences of a slightly shifting single element of a circle or square in grid-like patterns, evolve into a form of animation, acting less like a static painting than a perpetually transitory state. In another early ink on cardboard study, *Sur reticula* (On a grid, 1958), Le Parc demonstrates how the geometric shapes of circles and rectangles when cut into sections can take on a mobility that invites the viewer to imagine movement beyond the frame in real time, always present yet fleeting.

For Le Parc, the goal is nothing less than the interrogation and restructuring of one's immediate surroundings. He seeks a total complicity that demands of the viewer not only active participation but also selfreflection. In this way, Le Parc's practice moves beyond mere visual spectacle to a physical engagement with the present—an art form as human construct, one that can no longer remain static or absolute.



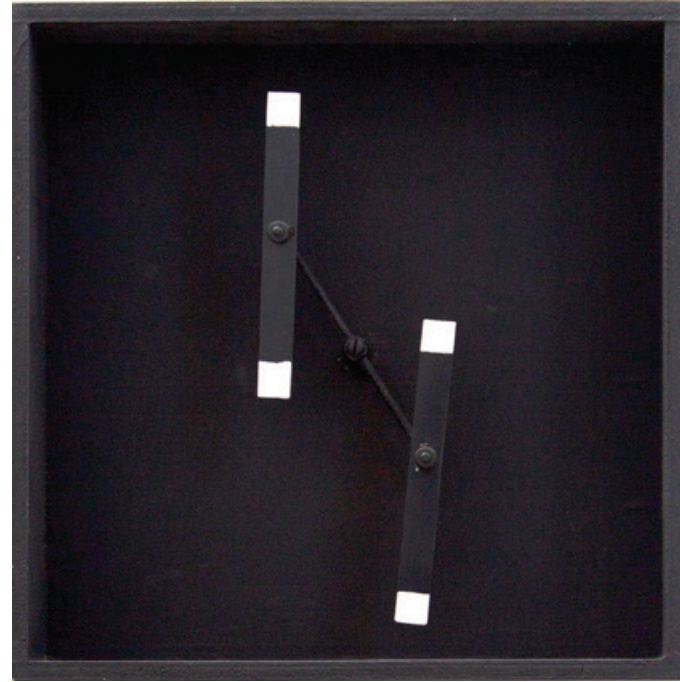
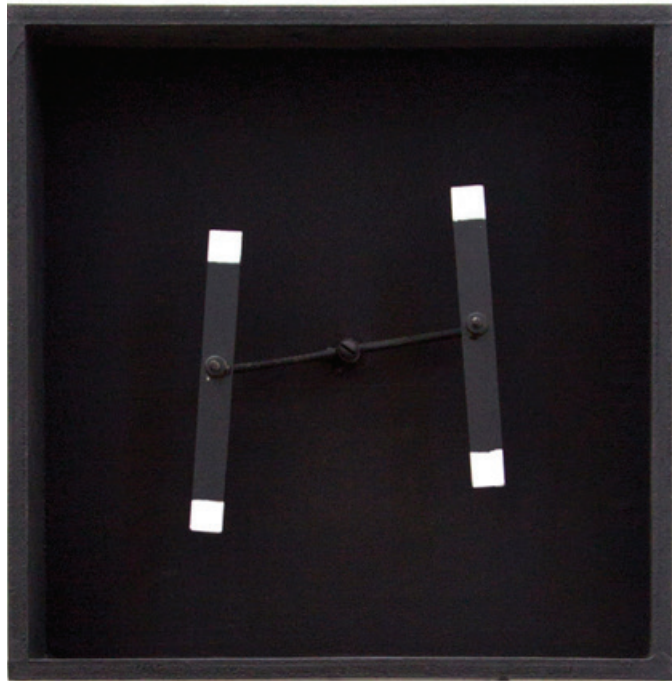
lumière en mouvement, 1962 / 1999
wood, metal, light, engine -- 449 x 600 x 700 cm
exhibition view -- galeria nara roesler | são paulo -- 2007



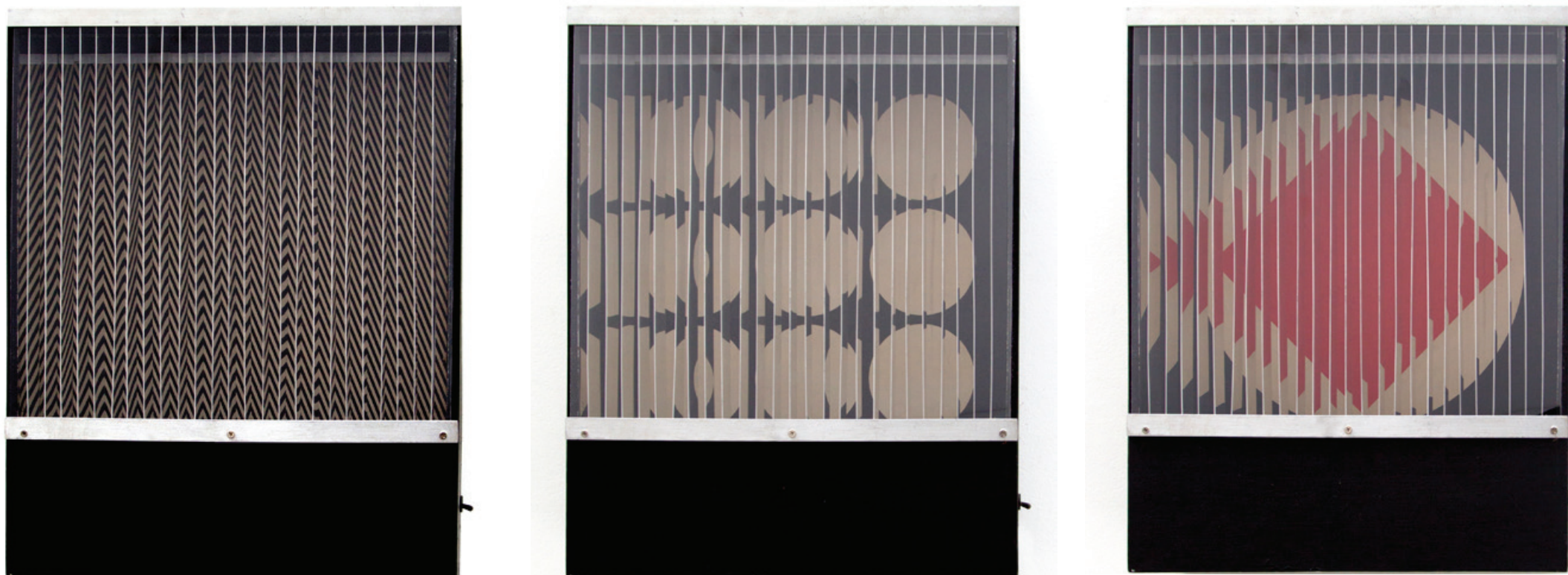
detail of **lumière en mouvement**, 1962 / 1999 -- wood, metal, light, engine -- 449 x 600 x 700 cm
exhibition view -- galeria nara roesler | são paulo -- 2007



jeu visuel , 1966
wood -- ed. 12/100 -- 57 x 57 x 14 cm



mouvement surprise, 1966
wood, plastic, engine -- 30 x 30 x 12 cm



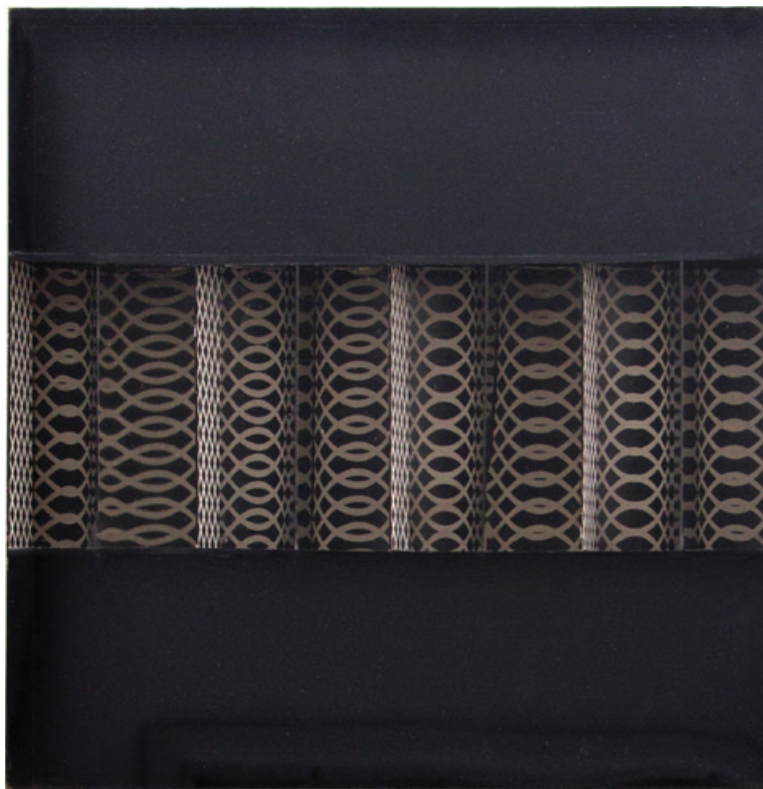
formes virtuelles par déplacement du spectateur , 1966
six transposable backgrounds: mixed media -- 52 x 41 x 20 cm



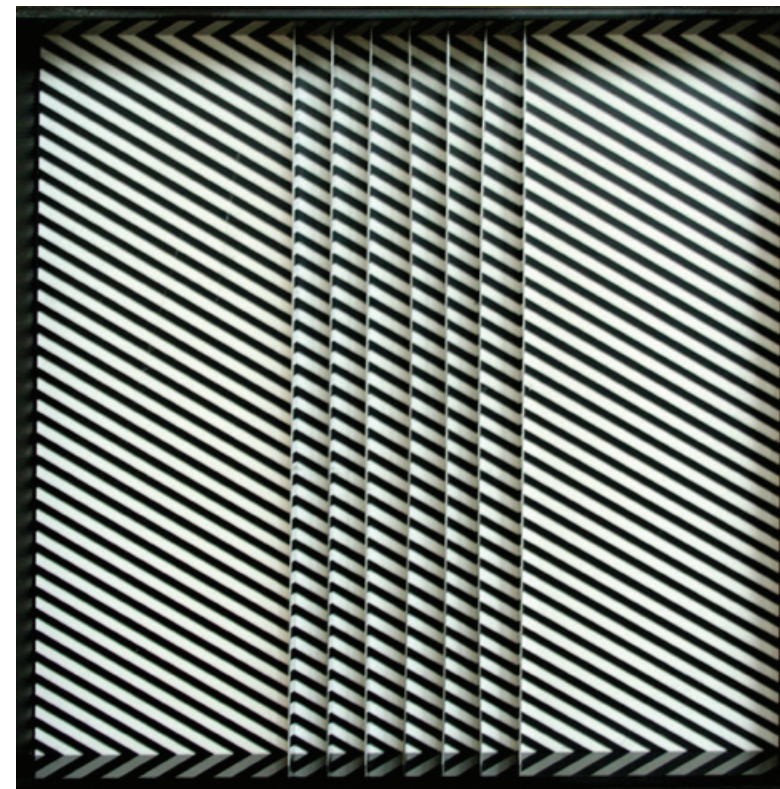
continuel-lumière avec 36 cylindres, 1962 / 1999
wood, stainless steel, engine, light -- ed. 1/9 -- 79 x 62 x 19 cm



formes virtuelles par déplacement du spectateur, 1969
wood, stainless steel, engine, light -- 55/250 -- 23,5 x 44 x 24 cm



relief 27, 1970
metal and acrylic -- ed. e/a -- 41 x 41 x 6 cm



relief 13, 1970
metal -- ed. e/a -- 41 x 41 x 6 cm

about **Julio Le Parc**

Born in 1928 in Mendoza, Argentina, Julio Le Parc attended the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires in 1943. Le Parc rapidly became engaged with the flourishing avant-garde scene and with leftist activist groups. In reaction to the repressive dictatorship of Juan Perón, the artist dropped out of art school returning only after the dictator's fall in 1955. Upon his return, Le Parc took a leadership role as an artist-advocate joining the university students' organization Federación Universitaria Argentina, a major force of militant government opposition.

Victor Vasarely's 1958 exhibition in Buenos Aires became an important catalyst for Le Parc's departure for Paris that year. Awarded a scholarship to study in Paris, Le Parc pursued collaborative work with fellow artist friends of Vasarely and co-founded the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) in 1960. While Le Parc's early geometric paintings were first informed by the Constructivist tradition of Arte-Concreto Invención in Buenos Aires, works produced soon after his arrival in Paris also reflect a growing interest in the work of Mondrian and Vasarely. By early 1960, Le Parc began incorporating movement and light into his research. Interested in the possibilities of movement, and the participation of the viewer, he developed his signature kinetic sculptures and light environments, which would ultimately bring him international recognition as a leading exponent of Kinetic Art.

Representing Argentina at the 1966 Venice Biennale, Le Parc won the Grand International Prize for Painting as an individual artist. Although the group dissolved in 1968, Le Parc continued to work simultaneously as an individual artist and as part of international collectives, particularly those involved in politically denouncing totalitarian regimes. Le Parc's participation in the May 1968 Paris uprising and union rallies led to his expulsion from France for a period of a year. Upon his return to Paris, Le Parc became an important conduit between activist Latin American artists and the Paris art scene, most specifically through the Paris publication ROBHO, for which he covered the events of the artist collaborative Tucumán Arde in Argentina.

Le Parc's works have been the subject of numerous solo shows in Europe and Latin America, including Instituto di Tella (Buenos Aires), Museo de Arte Moderno (Caracas), Palacio de Bellas Artes (Mexico), Casa de las Americas (Havana), Moderna Museet (Stockholm), Daros (Zürich), Städtische Kunsthalle (Düsseldorf). Le Parc's works have also been included in numerous group exhibitions and biennials, including the Museum of Modern Art's controversial exhibition

The Responsive Eye (1965), the Venice Biennale in 1966 (where he was awarded the Prize), and the São Paulo Biennial (1967). As acts of protest against repressive military regime in Brazil, Le Parc joined artists in boycotting the 1969 São Paulo Biennial and published an alternative Contrabienal catalogue in 1971. Le Parc's later collective works included participation in anti-fascist movements in Chile, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

In 2013, Le Parc's work was the subject of a major retrospective, *Soleil froid*, at the Palais de Tokyo, and included in the group exhibition *Dynamo* at the Grand Palais in Paris. In 2016 the Pérez Art Museum Miami will be presenting the first comprehensive US retrospective of Julio Le Parc.

