



## Will Brown

MATRIX 259 JUNE 12–SEPTEMBER 13, 2015

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY ART MUSEUM & PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

In 1978, BAM/PFA (known then as the University Art Museum) mounted the exhibition *Dan Flavin: Drawings, Diagrams, Prints and Installations in Fluorescent Light*. A majority of the exhibition was organized by the Fort Worth Art Museum, but BAM/PFA's presentation included the addition of two site-specific light works that were made by the artist to interact with the unique spatial and aesthetic properties of Mario Ciampi's Brutalist architecture. One such piece was *untitled (for Gretchen, a colorful and fond match)* (1977–78), conceived for the main stairwell that connects the lobby to the lower level galleries and administrative offices.<sup>1</sup> Flavin dedicated the piece to his friend Gretchen Glicksman, who at the time worked as a registrar at the museum.<sup>2</sup> To make it, the artist mounted twenty-eight, green fluorescent bulbs (each measuring four feet in length) vertically on the west side of an interior light well in the stairway, commingling natural and artificial light, both inside and outside of the building; the green glow of the lamps spilled out into the lobby, in addition to emanating through the skylight above, so that a column of light was visible on the building's front facade. According to past BAM/PFA employees, this light sometimes wafted on a plume of steam emitted from an air tunnel that runs through the center of the building, heightening the air of mystery.<sup>3</sup>

At some unknown point, Flavin's fluorescent work was deinstalled. The reason for its removal remains unclear. It may be because the glass skylights in the stairwell needed to be replaced, or the light became too intense for those working in the building, or the green glow conflicted with Brian Rush's neon piece installed on the roof in 1982. It is also not clear why a single, horizontal bulb remained in the light well as a vestige of the installation, which many people came to believe was the complete work.<sup>4</sup> According to the agreement made between BAM/PFA and Flavin, once *untitled (for Gretchen, a colorful and fond match)* was removed it would cease to exist unless the museum purchased it. Now that BAM/PFA is leaving the Ciampi building to move to its new home under construction in downtown Berkeley, it is unlikely that this site-specific work will ever be seen again. This turn of events, the questions that surround the history of *untitled (for Gretchen, a colorful and fond match)*, and the present itinerant state of the museum are points of departure for **Will Brown / MATRIX 259**—presumably the last MATRIX exhibition to take place at BAM/PFA's current Bancroft Way location.

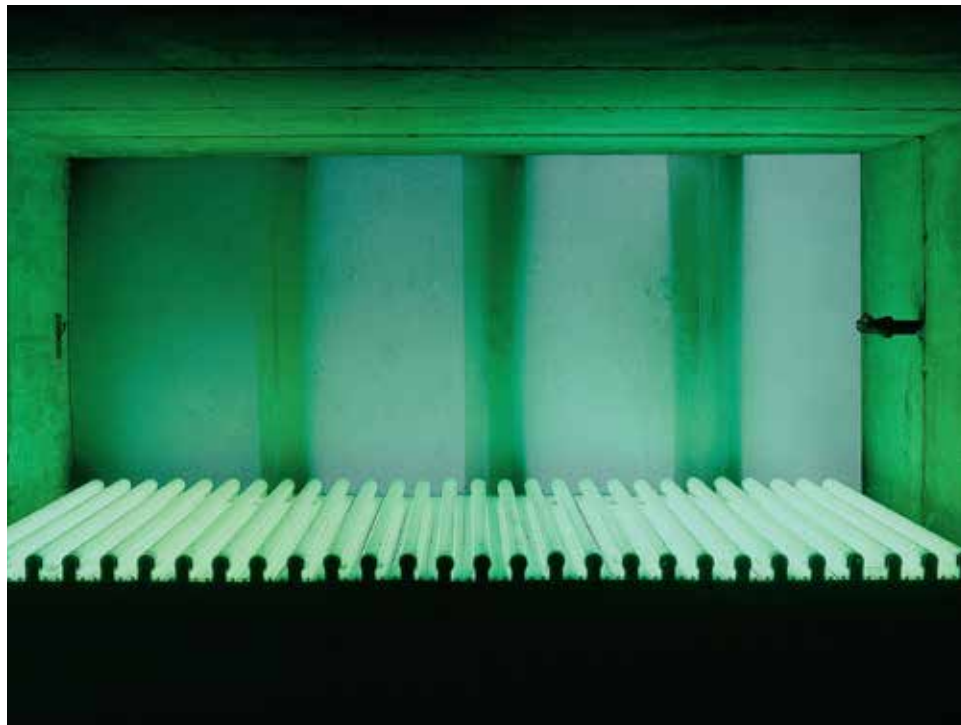
Will Brown, formerly the name of an alternative space located on 24th Street in San Francisco's Mission District, now functions as the moniker under which David Kasprzak, Jordan Stein, and Lindsey White operate. According to Will Brown—named after an intern who used to work at the gallery that occupied the storefront they took over—the group opened the gallery in 2012 out of a desire to create a place “for exhibitions and events that could not, would not, or should not, fit within the operating structures of other venues for contemporary art.”<sup>5</sup> Will Brown's principal interests lie in expanding the discursive space surrounding art and exhibition practices. The collective adopts an approach that at its core is curious and critical in order to explore “what it means for artists to build exhibitions, and for curators to take on a role of creative production with the hope that it provides the audience with a new model and experience.”<sup>6</sup> In almost all Will Brown projects, the exhibition itself becomes the medium for its members to interrogate and reimagine.

Categories become slippery in the hands of Will Brown. Take for instance the category of “art”: already difficult to define, it becomes even murkier in the group's realm. Will Brown's first exhibition, *Illegitimate Business*, staged in early 2012, upended the concept by presenting works that had been obtained by questionable means: an ejected Martin Kippenberger work that the artist gave to someone to smuggle out of a museum during an installation; remnants from a Kara Walker exhibition; a rejected print from Catherine Opie's dark room; an unauthorized copy of a Jeremy Blake video. Similarly, they problematize the definition of curator and artist as each of the members can act as either, depending on the context. Moreover, Will Brown's projects are neither art, nor exhibitions in a traditional sense. One has to develop new categories when discussing the collective's work—an enterprise that explores art's knotty terrains (its peaks and fissures alike) with the intention of probing conventions and narratives nested under the rubric of art.

Just as Will Brown is interested in prying apart categories of art, so too is it motivated by discovering historical anomalies, or things that have been forgotten or misunderstood over time. For the exhibition *Manitoba Museum of Finds Art*, it presented a little-known project developed by Alberta Mayo between 1975 and 1978, in which she assembled objects (art and non-art alike) on the shelves outside the office of her former boss, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Director Henry Hopkins, in addition to maintaining a rotating exhibition schedule. This project, a historical curiosity, encapsulated many of Will Brown's concerns. “We're interested in the overlooked, forgotten, abandoned, uncompromising, artistically and curatorial radical, darkly humorous, local, archival, and ahead-of-its-time,” the collective has stated.<sup>7</sup>

For **MATRIX 259**, Will Brown homes in on the uncertain narratives and subsequent myths that circumscribe Dan Flavin's forgotten *untitled (for Gretchen, a fond and colorful match)*, as well as the nomadic state of BAM/PFA itself. The group re-creates the effect of Flavin's green glow with a light and fog installation on the building's facade and have also constructed a mis-en-scène comprising an old, seemingly abandoned car placed in front of the now-closed main entrance. Filled with archival materials, the car is conceived as a metaphor for the museum, meant to signify its storied history and its present mutable state. “It's a paper trail both personally and institutionally,” Will Brown explains.<sup>8</sup> *A New Light on Riboflavin*, an outdoor play commissioned from Bay Area poet and writer Kevin Killian (performed at the exhibition's opening), amplifies the sense of myth now embedded in Flavin's lost work. The exhibition also includes an artists' book that functions as a “living archive” of the project, which is on display in UC Berkeley's Morrison Library throughout the duration of the exhibition.<sup>9</sup>

The unifying motif of each of these elements of **MATRIX 259** is Flavin's enigmatic green glow, which now lives on in the memories of those who once saw it, and those who encounter Will Brown's conjuring of it. For Will Brown, each of these scenarios (not to be confused with works of art) speak to the indeterminate and transient state of the Bay Area's current contemporary art landscape: two of its major art institutions (SFMOMA and BAM/PFA) are now closed as they move into new buildings,



and many local neighborhoods face uncertain futures as astronomical rent increases caused by the tech boom continue to displace many Bay Area artists, galleries, and longtime residents. While conducting research for this project Will Brown spoke to several current and former BAM/PFA staff members about their memories of Flavin's work. "It was in these moments of discussion and research that the piece became properly fictionalized for us. The space between fact and fiction, and how that middle ground is mediated by individual memory, is what excites and inspires Will Brown."<sup>10</sup>

Apsara DiQuinzio

CURATOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART AND PHYLLIS C. WATTIS MATRIX CURATOR

1. There are conflicting dates for *untitled (for Gretchen, a colorful and fond match)* in BAM/PFA's records; in some places it is cited as 1977 and in others 1978. Flavin initially planned for the piece to be made with yellow and pink fluorescent lights, yet at some point (most likely during its installation in 1978) the color was changed to green. For this reason, most of the exhibition materials, printed before the installation, erroneously describe the work as pink and yellow, adding to the confusion surrounding the work. Thus, I have chosen to date the work 1977–78. Flavin's catalogue raisonnée, however, gives the date as 1977; see Tiffany Bell, *Dan Flavin: The Complete Lights, 1961–1996* (New York: Dia Art Foundation in association with Yale University Press, 2004): 343–44.

2. This was not unusual for Flavin, who often dedicated his work to poets, artists, teachers, and friends.

3. Barney Bailey, BAM/PFA's former chief preparator and exhibition designer, worked on the installation of the exhibition and recalls seeing the column of steam at night during the period that the work was on view. Conversation with the author and Will Brown, October 31, 2014.

4. These are some of the reasons that were cited by several past and current BAM/PFA staff members. No documentation exists in our records to indicate when this happened and for what reason.

5. Interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Email message to the author, April 13, 2015.

9. Ibid.

10. Interview with the author, April 8, 2015.

#### FRONT

Interior view of stairway at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, c. 1978, with Dan Flavin, *untitled (for Gretchen, a colorful and fond match)*, 1977–78, and Frank Stella, *Rozdol*, 1973. Photo: Colin McRae.

#### FROM LEFT

Dan Flavin: *untitled (for Gretchen, a colorful and fond match)*, 1977–78; green fluorescent light; 48 in. high; CL no. 415. © 2015 Stephen Flavin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London.

Gretchen Glicksman under *untitled (for Gretchen, a colorful and fond match)*, 1977–78, at the opening of *Dan Flavin: Drawings, Diagrams, Prints, and Installation in Fluorescent Light*, University Art Museum, Berkeley, January 25, 1978. Photo: Colin McRae.



## Biography

Will Brown is a collaborative project formed by David Kasprzak, Jordan Stein, and Lindsey White in January 2012. The group began when they took over the lease of a storefront located at 3041 24th Street, in San Francisco's Mission District. During the nearly three years that the storefront space remained open the group presented dozens of innovative events and a wide range of exhibitions that explored and called into question the structures that underlie exhibition practices. Some of these included *Illegitimate Business*; *Daren Wilson: After Morandi*; *Untitled (Black Painting)*; *The Ghost of James Lee Byars*; and *Supreme Condominium Exhibition*. Will Brown has also been invited to develop various off-site projects and exhibitions at the Headlands Center for the Arts, Marin County, California; the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco; the Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Kansas; and di Rosa, Napa. In 2012, Will Brown received an Alternative Exposure Award from Southern Exposure. Since the closing of the 24th Street gallery in 2014, Will Brown has continued to develop projects collectively.

## Artist Book Display

Morrison Library  
101 Doe Library, UC Berkeley  
Free and open to the public

Morrison Library hours  
June 12–August 19: M-F, 12–5 p.m.  
(closed Friday, July 3)

August 20–September 11:  
M–F, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.  
(closed Monday, September 7)

Check calendar as hours are subject to change, [lib.berkeley.edu/libraries](http://lib.berkeley.edu/libraries)

WILL BROWN / MATRIX 259 IS ORGANIZED BY APSARA DIQUINZIO, CURATOR OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART AND PHYLLIS C. WATTIS MATRIX CURATOR, WITH LAUREN R. O'CONNELL, CURATORIAL ASSISTANT. THE MATRIX PROGRAM IS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GENEROUS ENDOWMENT GIFT FROM PHYLLIS C. WATTIS AND THE SUPPORT OF THE BAM/PFA TRUSTEES.