

NEON SIGNS FOR ANNENBERG SPACE



Pat Lanza, the Annenberg's talent and content director, commissioned me to create two neon signs for the "Digital Darkroom" exhibition.

**DIGITAL
DARKROOM**
DEC. 17 - MAY 28

Link to the Annenberg Space for Photography:
<http://www.annenberg.spaceforphotography.org/>

Right: While this aluminum, plexi, neon and LED sign appears to be very 3-dimensional, it's actually only 6.5 inches deep. Reflected in the polished aluminum glass frame is a photo on the opposite wall.



THE NEW ANNENBERG Space for Photography continues to have some of the best exhibitions in Los Angeles, and I am pleased to have been commissioned to create two neon signs for the current "Digital Darkroom" show.

While I find most photography to be run-of-the-mill or derivative, this exhibition goes beyond photography—into the realm of ART.

Exploring the intersections of art and technology, the exhibit features the visions of 17 artists from around the world: Josef Astor, Pierre Beteille, Joel Grimes, Ted Grudowski, Claudia Kunin, Chris Levine, Bonny Pierce Lhotka, Khuong Nguyen, Mike Pucher, Jean-François Rauzier, Martine Roch, Christopher Schneberger, Brooke Shaden, Stanley Smith, Maggie Taylor, Jerry Uelsmann and Jean-Marie Vives.

Each artist is a master of different types of digital techniques—compositing highly layered imagery, working in 3D and lenticular imaging, meticulously stitching together images, or using lighting in highly inventive ways.

The show presents a fantastic juxtaposition of young artists immersed in digital work against Uelsmann, a master of analog darkroom compositing techniques and a creator of some of the most beautiful and haunting images I've ever seen.

Coming from a range of backgrounds, each artist specializes in fine art, commercial art, portraiture, still life, fashion, architectural, or other types of photographic and illustrative expression. Many of the artists cross genres and combine multiple techniques to create their unique work.

Included also are two fabulous films that interview the artists and show them at work. I rate the show a "WOW!" Don't miss it.

A NEON RESPONSE TO OBAMA SPEECH

by DARRYL A. SMITH

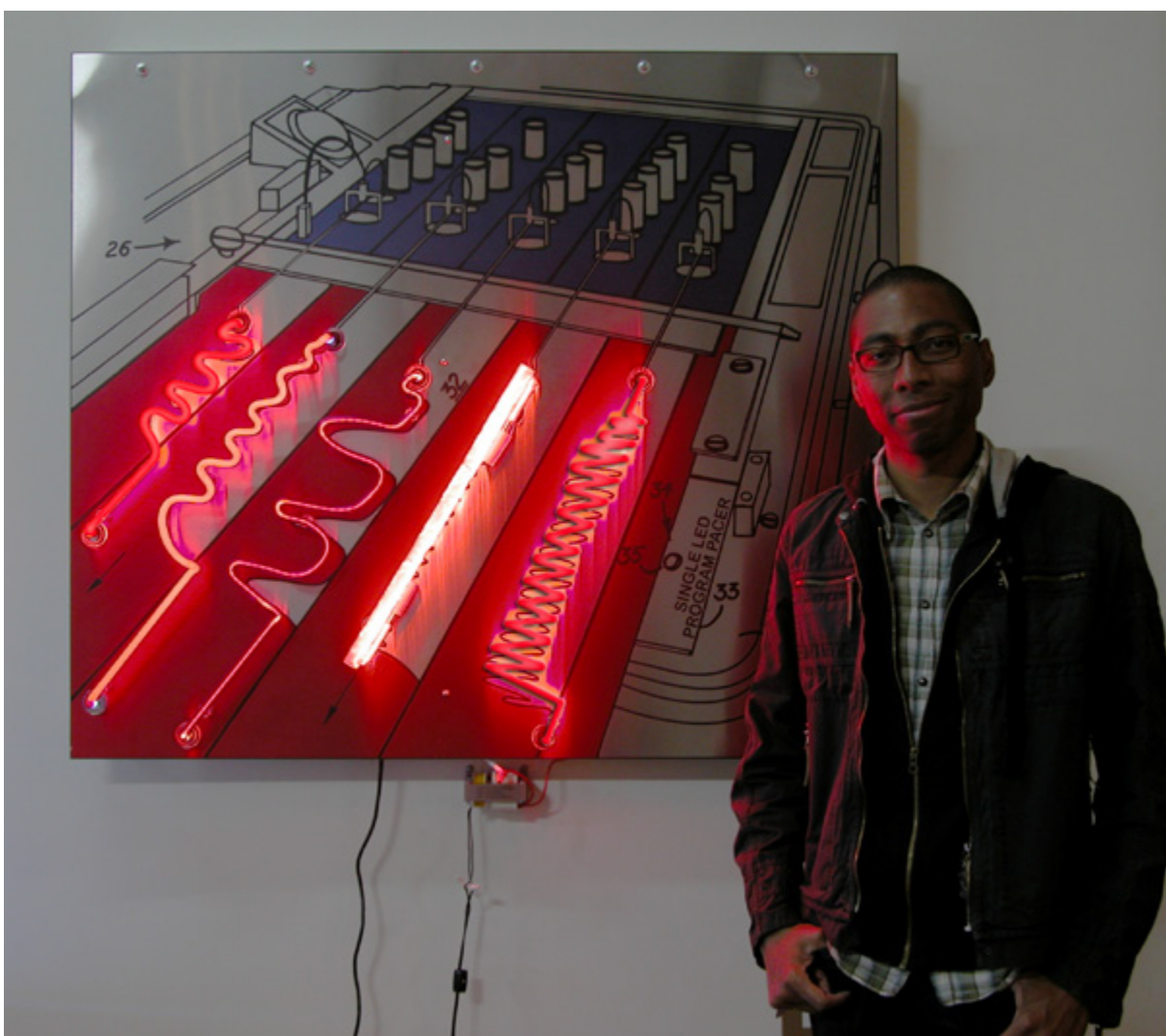
IN JANUARY, 2001, I WAS IN Washington, D.C. on that cold, rainy day to protest George W. Bush's installation as president. The lie of his election was something to which I felt I had to bear direct witness. Later, in 2004, not long before his second (and no less dubious) inauguration, Ron Suskind, a reporter challenging the Bush administration's policy decisions as being fantastically misaligned with the principles of a free and fair society, quoted a Bush aide's response to him:

"That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality — judiciously, as you will — we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

Well, as an ethicist that looks at darkness and light — in religion, in politics, in art — I do, in fact, study what they do. In 2009, when President Obama spoke at West Point in order to justify the imminent build-up of troops in Afghanistan — a misadventure already over 8 years old at that point — it seemed that Obama had taken the words of Bush's spokesperson to heart. In that speech Obama, facing those cadets, the nation, and the world, gave them all an astonishing rhetorical make-over:

"For unlike the great powers of old, we have not sought world domination. Our union was founded in resistance to oppression. We do not seek to occupy other nations. We will not claim another's resources or target other peoples because their faith or ethnicity is different from ours."

SOMETIMES LIES ARE SO PATENT in the face of history and present-day reality that I think art becomes especially equipped to call it out as such. I think neon is such a fine artistic medium for responding to lies of this magnitude. It has this pure, kitschy impishness that operates rather like the most serious kind of satirical comedy. And it does this with a powerful straightforwardness. It can help us to go with our gut in the face of big lies. Because these are the kinds of lies that do threaten, in fact, if they are not checked by our validated intuition, to make us live



Luminous Lessons Learned: From the Fall Neon Workshop, Darryl A. Smith and his project of protest, *Put the Needles On the Record*. A lie detector colored like an American flag is printed on stainless steel with various shades of red neon and crackle tube.

out those lies in the service of liars. This is something that the Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels understood so well when he said that if you tell a big enough lie and repeat it over and over that people will come to believe it. I feel we have to challenge these big lies no matter who tells them.

This piece, which I call, *Put the Needles On the Record*, is a lie detector whose needles put lies on the record for all to see. It is Part I of a 3-piece series called *Glossolumina: Masheens Speaking in Tongues*, that looks first at the "war," then at election fraud and, finally, at Wall Street.

Darryl A. Smith is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Pomona College. He works in the fields of ethics and the philosophy of religion, specializing in American pragmatism, African American letters and theology, as well as the problem of evil. He is currently tracking the affinity between blues religion and historical conceptions of sacred marriage in relation to the art of living. He lives in Claremont, CA.

Vacancy/No Vacancy featured in October ARTnews.

Of all the thousands of artworks in the 60+ Pacific Standard Time exhibitions, my 1972 animated neon sculpture *Vacancy/No Vacancy* was chosen to represent the 10 million dollar Getty-sponsored event in the October 2012 issue of ARTnews.

I originally created the work as a commission for Marion Rothman, a Hollywood film editor. I photographed her nude torso and drew the cobalt blue neon lines from the photo. The "NO VACANCY" words were stylistically similar to the neon signs that are seen on motels. The tubes are mounted on stainless steel and set into a 1-inch thick plexiglass cabinet. Two switches control the tubes—one controls the body and "VACANCY." The other switch turns on the word "NO" which flashes. Rothman could signal a vacancy in her love life—or not.

But when she had the sculpture installed over the toilet in her guest bathroom, I got angry and vowed never to consider an artwork one-of-a-kind as one could never control what a collector might do with it.

Since 1972, I have made and sold six other copies of the sculpture in cobalt, ruby red and lavender argon. Two are in the collection of the Touko Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, one is in Paris, and the others are in Sacramento, San Diego and Los Angeles. The version that is in the "Do In It Public" show at Otis College of Art and Design belongs to Joan Currie. And I have another one in my studio.

Link to Lili Lakich Studio at: <http://www.Lakich.com>

