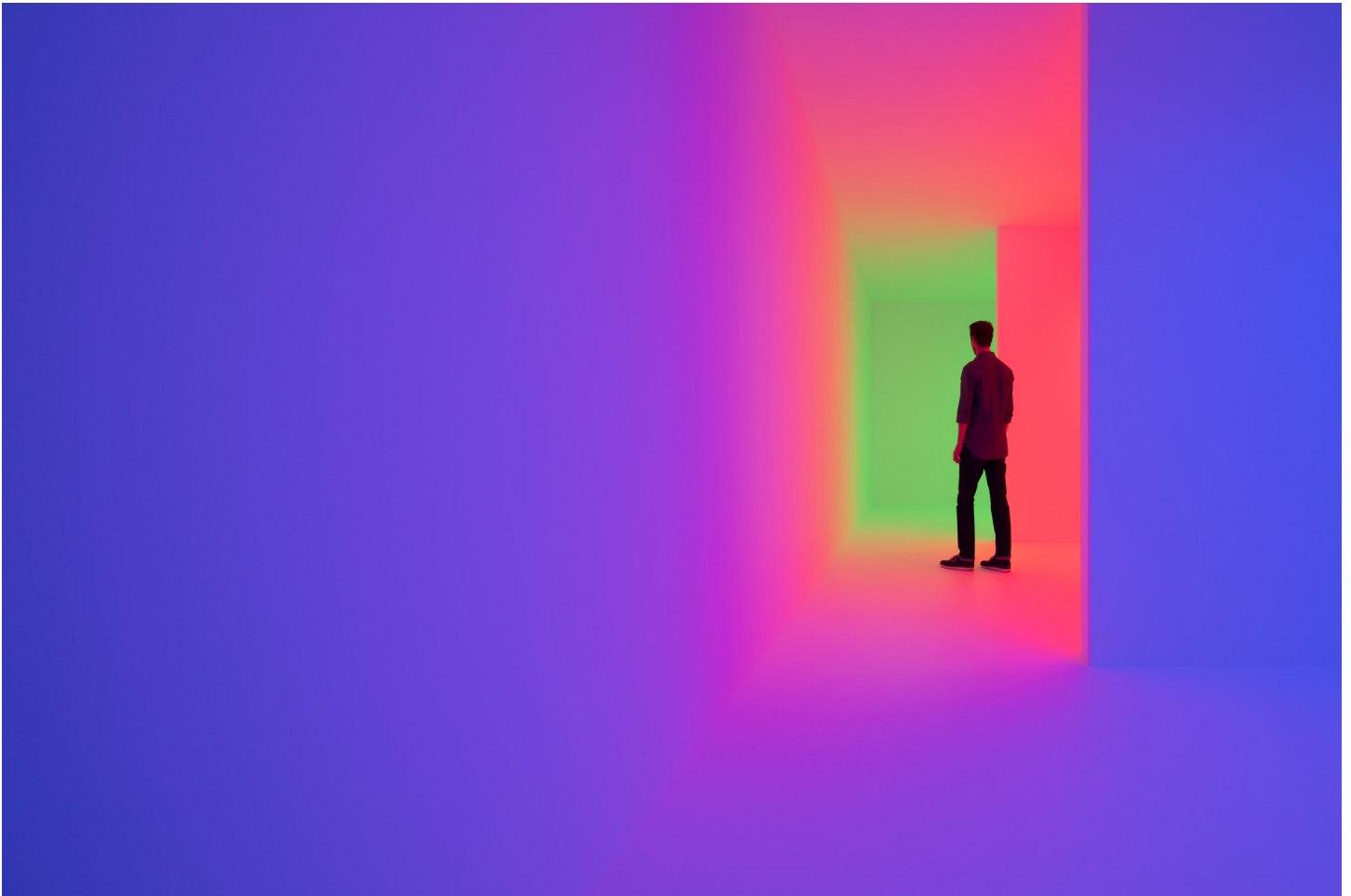


Carlos Cruz-Diez

English



Carlos Cruz-Diez: Chromosaturation



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For over seven decades, Carlos Cruz-Diez (b. 1923, Caracas; d. 2019, Paris) developed a distinctive visual language based on color and viewer participation. Driven by the need to renew the seemingly exhausted field of painting, Cruz-Diez aimed at liberating color from its material support to generate a chromatic experience that would go beyond the mere act of passive contemplation. His groundbreaking pictorial concepts pushed the boundaries of painting, highlighting color not as pigment fixed on the surface of a canvas, but as a dynamic, unstable phenomenon in continuous transformation.

Through the experimental use of light, movement, space, and viewer interactivity, Cruz-Diez explored the perception of color as an autonomous reality evolving in space and time. His extensive body of work considers color as an experience in itself, a “chromatic event” occurring in the present, free from preconceived meanings. Cruz-Diez’s systematic explorations into the ever-changing and ephemeral nature of color would establish him as one of the key pioneers of Kinetic and Optical art – two international art movements that emerged in the mid-twentieth century with a focus on visual perception and the spectator’s active engagement with the work of art.

Initially conceived in 1965 and presented for the first time in 1968, *Chromosaturation* marks a turning point in Cruz-Diez’s career, representing the moment when he first fully transposed his pictorial investigations into three-dimensional space. This artwork exemplifies Cruz-Diez’s most accomplished effort at projecting color into space as a participatory event. The installation consists of three connected chambers infused

with intensely saturated red, green, and blue – the primary colors of light. The uncanniness of the experience is related to the fact that one is immersed in a single color. This absolute monochrome situation overloads the retina, which is normally accustomed to perceiving a wide range of colors simultaneously. As the visitor moves through the installation, the color that dominates each chamber blends seamlessly with the next, producing a sublime gradient at each threshold. The suspended cubes – each side bathed in reflected color – heighten the viewer’s experience and showcase the vibrancy of an environment entirely free of form and meaning. Emphasizing color as an inherent property of light, the artwork transitions from a visual experience into a bodily one, underscoring the notion of color as a material, physical phenomenon that unfolds continuously in time and space.

Chromosaturation is one of eight lines of research comprising Cruz-Diez’s visual discourse on color.¹ The earliest mock-up of the work created in the mid-1960s consisted of a tunnel or walkway made with transparent red, blue, and green plexiglass walls. Its location in the public space permitted a view of the surrounding environment, prompting a dialogue between spectators inside the artwork and those who observed it from the outside. Since then, different configurations of *Chromosaturation* have been exhibited all over the world in both interior and exterior spaces. Despite their slight variations, every solution devised by the artist has the same goal: to employ pure color as the spatial infrastructure to elicit an intense sensorial as well as emotional response in viewers. *Chromosaturation* reimagines color as an embodied experience

¹ In addition to *Chromosaturation*, the other lines of research that form the basis of Cruz-Diez’s chromatic discourse are additive color, psychchromies, chromatic induction, chromointerference, transchromie, chromoscope, and couleur à l’espace. For more information, see: *Cruz-Diez: Reflection on Color* (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2009).



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in which visitors become active participants, rather than merely looking at the work of art. Cruz-Diez's explorations into the potential of audience interaction through the integration of color into the architectural environment can be traced back to the mural designs he created in the early 1950s. These outdoor murals, which included colored geometric pieces that could be manipulated by viewers, would change depending on the passing of daylight; this would produce a visual interplay between the shadows and bright reflections of color on the wall, subject to time and movement.

Cruz-Diez's *Chromosaturación* can be understood as an open artwork, or in the words of art historian Ariel Jiménez, a "penetrable painting" that is completed only by the viewer's engagement. Cruz-Diez's explorations of this important concept represent early manifestations of a lineage that would prove highly influential for contemporary art and culture, involving the dematerialization of the self-contained object in favor of immersive, experiential installations. While this lineage of participatory situations that engage the viewer's body, senses, and subjectivity emerged transnationally – appearing in the work of roughly contemporaneous artists such as Allan Kaprow and

Yayoi Kusama – the contribution of artists from Latin America is strikingly notable. This can be seen, for example, in Jesús Rafael Soto's large-scale interactive penetrable sculpture *Penetrable BBL Blue* (1999), displayed outdoors on PAMM's west portico, and in Hélio Oiticica's *Penetrável Macaléia* (1978), currently on view in one of PAMM's permanent collection galleries. Cruz-Diez's *Chromosaturación* – particularly its early versions – has also been considered as a precursor to the initial experimental light installations of artists such as Robert Irwin and James Turrell, associated with the Light and Space movement. Immersive, multisensory installations such as these have, since then, become a regular part of the arsenal that contemporary artists deploy to generate new experiences that disrupt everyday reality. In this way, they prompt us to try to envision the world otherwise.

Carlos Cruz-Diez: Chromosaturation
June 9, 2022

Carlos Cruz-Diez

b. 1923, Caracas; d. 2019, Paris

Chromosaturation, 1965/2007

Installation with colored lights

Dimensions variable

Collection Pérez Art Museum Miami, museum purchase with funds provided by Jorge M. Pérez

Carlos Cruz-Diez: Chromosaturation is organized by PAMM's Andrew W. Mellon Caribbean Cultural Institute Coordinator Iberia Pérez González with PAMM's former Director of Curatorial Affairs and Chief Curator René Morales. This exhibition is presented with support from Patricia and William Kleh.

Biography

Carlos Cruz-Diez graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1945. Since then, his paintings, chromatic environments, large-scale public art projects, and architectural interventions have been exhibited worldwide. Solo exhibitions of his work have been presented at Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, Venezuela; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Museum of Contemporary Art Panamá, Panamá City; Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museum für Konkrete Kunst, Ingolstadt; Palais de l'Éna, Paris; Americas Society, New York; and the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Beijing. Cruz-Diez has participated in numerous group exhibitions,

including at the Cleveland Museum of Art; Denver Art Museum; Fundación Juan March, Madrid; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Stedelijk Museum Schiedam; Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow; Venice Biennale; and El Museo del Barrio, New York, among others. Cruz-Diez has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards, and his work can be found in major public collections such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and Pérez Art Museum Miami.

Images

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2 Carlos Cruz-Diez. *Chromosaturation Labryinth and Chromatic Walk for a Public Place*, 1965-69. Photo. © Atelier Cruz-Diez, Paris / Bridgeman Images

3 Carlos Cruz-Diez in *Chromosaturation*. Installation view: Carlos Cruz-Diez; *Chroma*, SCAD, Savannah, Georgia, 2017. © Estate of Carlos Cruz-Diez. All rights reserved 2022 / Bridgeman Images



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