

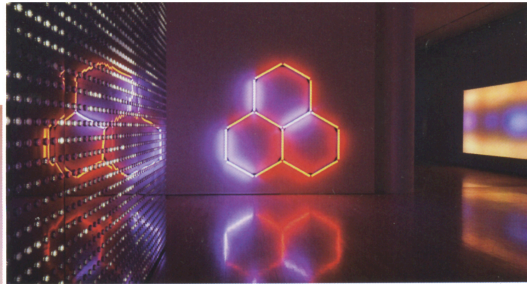
GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

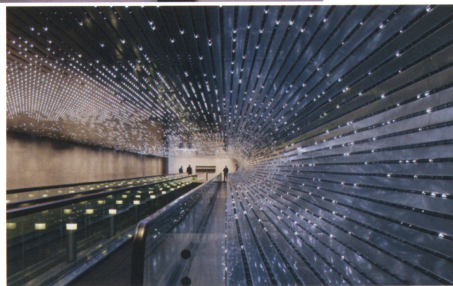
THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AUTHORITY

MAY 2011

AD art scene



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Leo Villareal at home in Manhattan with one of his sculptures. Works on view at the San Jose Museum of Art. *Multiverse* (2008), a permanent installation at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. For details see Sources.



BEDAZZLED

New York-based artist Leo Villareal excites the imagination with his glittering light works

LIKE ANIMATED RORSCHACH TESTS, the sculptures and site-specific installations of Leo Villareal spark free associations. The abstract patterns of light they emit, whether shifting slowly or blinking hypnotically, evoke everything from celestial bodies to medical imaging. Yet as the artist explains, they all just boil down to “cold, hard sets of numbers.”

“Their essence is the code,” says Villareal, whose new work appears this month at Manhattan’s Gering & López Gallery. (A traveling retrospective is also on view at the Nevada Museum of Art.) The code to which he refers is the software he designs to manipulate the individual lights, altering their intensity and, at times, colors to create sequences of imagery. “There is no beginning, middle, or end,” he says of the dazzling displays, which unfold in random order. “You’ll never see the exact same progression twice.”

Of course, there would be little to look at without the fixtures themselves. Whereas Villareal’s first light sculpture—a beacon made for the 1997 Burning Man festival—consisted of 16 strobe lamps, his recent pieces are composed primarily of LEDs. In some works they protrude through perforated sheets of mirror-finished steel; in others they’re diffused by translucent panels of fabric or glass.

For an upcoming installation, the artist will outfit a New York subway station with a hexagonal grid of LED tubes. It’s the latest of his public projects, which have transformed, among other sites, the National Gallery of Art and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. “These are devices that can take you places with a group of people in an open-ended way,” notes Villareal, who studied computer programming and virtual reality as a graduate student at New York University.

His work is no less transporting in private. At the West SoHo loft he shares with his family, for instance, a floor-to-ceiling sculpture serves as a night-light for his six-year-old son, Cuatro, who refers to it as one of “Daddy’s blinkies.” What sweet dreams it must inspire. —SAMUEL COCHRAN

PORTRAIT BY CHRISTOPHER STURMAN, ARTWORK COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Cochran, Samuel. “Bedazzled.” *Architectural Digest*, May 2011.

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