

## Carlos Cruz-Diez

(Caracas, Venezuela, 1923 – Paris, 2019)

Recognised today as one of the pioneers of Kinetic and Optical Art, Carlos Cruz-Diez was thirty-seven years old when, in 1960, he decided to leave Caracas and move to Paris together with his family. After his studies at the academy and many years working as an illustrator for magazines and advertising agencies, he realised that only in Europe would he have the chance to maintain a constant dialogue with the new trends, focusing on the investigation of perceptive-sensorial dynamics. His inclusion in the seminal group show *Bewogen Beweging* in Amsterdam in 1961 would show he was right. After putting aside the traditional techniques learnt in school and his early experiments with wooden geometrical modules, in France his research would take eight main lines of action developed along a fairly limited timespan, testifying to an active mind in a constant state of experimentation. These projects, which reappear in various series over the years right up to shortly before the death of the artist, managed to adapt, following the evolution of materials and technologies, above all where the possibilities of the day were not able to entirely satisfy his initial ambitions.

With scientific precision and a solid grasp of theory, Cruz-Diez posed himself a single goal: to free colour from form, from the support and from any symbolic overtones. His investigation led him to work with light and not with pigment, and to admit only a sequence of vertical lines into his work, which he would define “modules of chromatic events.” Focusing on the instability of the perceptive phenomenon, in fact, allowed him to demonstrate how colour is not a concrete and fixed material but an event which is constantly reconfigured through its interaction with the eye of the onlooker. In this sense, the *Physiochromie* series, begun in Venezuela in 1959, reflects right from the name its close link with bodily movement. The dense combination of vertical stripes, produced in keeping with the principles of additive and subtractive synthesis, makes a great variety of colours visible which in actual fact are not present on the support, insofar as they arise from the intensity of the light itself and the minimal movements carried out by the viewer.

One of the highest points of the research into the possibility to materialise colour in space is the work *Chromosaturation*, devised by Cruz-Diez in 1965. It is an artificial environment made up of a succession of three rooms with white walls, each lit with a red, green or blue light. This monochromatic bath creates a disturbance in the retina, which is used to receiving a range of different stimuli at the same time. The longer one remains in the environment, the more one's eyes tend to get used to it, creating unusual colour passages between one room and the next, and the impression of a saturated space yet bereft of physical barriers. The version to be found in the collection was produced by the GAM in Turin in 2017 on the occasion of an exhibition dedicated to the use of colour in art since the nineteenth century.

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