

## Leo Villareal

Nov 22, 2019 – Jan 18, 2020

6 Burlington Gardens

London

Opening Reception:

Thursday, Nov 21

6–8 PM



Above: Leo Villareal, *Detector*, 2019, LEDs, custom software, electrical hardware, steel 10' 6" × 37' 10" × 3" (320 cm × 1,153.2 cm × 7.6 cm) © Leo Villareal

London—Pace Gallery is delighted to present the first solo exhibition of works by American artist Leo Villareal at Pace in London. The exhibition will be on view at 6 Burlington Gardens from 22 November 2019 to 18 January 2020, and coincides with the recent launch of Villareal's *Illuminated River*, a major public artwork that, upon completion, will illuminate 14 bridges along the Thames. Launched in July 2019, four bridges, London, Cannon Street, Southwark and Millennium, are now lit up in unison with sequenced LED patterns subtly unfolding across each unique structure.

Firmly rooted in abstraction, Villareal's works utilize LED lights and custom software to translate the layered and sequential logic of systems into beguiling visual experiences. The works in the exhibition exist at the vanguard of digital technology while drawing on a history of practices engaged with mass imagery, mechanical reproduction, and the materiality of light. For his exhibition at Pace, Villareal expands these legacies across a body of new and recent work, which include three new LED works of varying scales alongside six single-panel pieces from the *Instance* series (2018). The works expand upon the artist's fascination with visualizing systems, both their operation and disruption, through the phenomenal properties of light.

At the center of the exhibition is *Detector* (2019), a monumental work that spans over ten metres and features undulating fields of patterned luminescence, suggesting the sifting of stars, galaxies, and other astral phenomena. Signals penetrate through fields of noise as clusters of particles expand and collide, conjuring antipodal forms from the cosmic to the atomic. Two works flank *Detector*, titled *Optical Machine I & II*, and serve as portals into the visual manifestation of Villareal's rule-based software, which engages chance through the concepts and computational techniques of artificial life and emergent behaviour. Employing a highly synthetic process, Villareal's works nevertheless echo the ubiquitous systems that produce organic behaviors found throughout nature.

The six pieces from Villareal's Instance series function both as individual artworks and as part of an orchestrated whole. For the exhibition, the artist has networked together two groups of three works from the series, allowing the individual panels to act alone while at times performing in synchronicity with interconnected works. Existing simultaneously as both standalone objects and nodes in a larger system, the works convey the interdependence between their digital and physical forms while incorporating new levels of complexity in their visual behavior. Linked together, they produce malleable synchronies wherein the possibility of order, however fleeting and subtle, flashes briefly into existence before gradually dissipating into a state of entropy.

Villareal's use of the triptych underscores the importance of art-historical precedent in his work, alluding to a format originally associated with Renaissance altarpieces, but which recurs throughout the history of painting. *Instance 14, 15 and 16* explore how the traditional form of the triptych takes on new meaning in contemporary digital age, in which screens proliferate around us in increasingly immersive configurations. The swiftly moving particles of Villareal's work inspire a more embodied mode of contemplation, opening outward toward the sublime vastness of the universe, the enigmatic world of subatomic particles, and the fundamental properties of living systems.

The range of Villareal's formats spans the possibilities of current technology. By embracing a technology with reduced visual complexity, Villareal emphasizes the actual binary unit of each light-emitting diode, rooting the works in the materiality of mechanical reproduction and the discrete visual marks that comprise the substrate of printmaking. The pixellation of Villareal's LED works finds antecedent in sources as varied as Gustave Doré's etchings after Dante's *Inferno* and the paintings of Roy Lichtenstein, whose Explosion series directly informs the artist's pulsating nebulas of artificial light.

Following Villareal's exhibition at Pace in London, the artist will be the subject of a solo exhibition at Pace in Palo Alto, opening on 2 April 2020. To coincide with Art Basel Miami Beach, large-scale LED installation *Optical Machine I* will be installed at The Edition in Miami Beach in collaboration with Ballroom Marfa, an arts space supporting local and international artists working across media in Marfa, Texas.

**Leo Villareal** (b. 1967, Albuquerque, New Mexico) works with LED lights to create complex, rhythmic artworks for both gallery and public settings. He focuses on identifying the governing structures of systems and is interested in base units such as pixels and binary code. His installations are based on custom, artist-created code, which operates in real-time to constantly alter the frequency, intensity, and patterning of light. Villareal has created temporary and permanent lightworks and sculptures for public spaces and museums including the Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge.

Launched in July 2019, Villareal's winning artwork for the 2016 Illuminated River International Design Competition uses light and colour in an integrated site-specific composition to enliven the bridges of the River Thames in London. Recent monographic exhibitions include a mid-career survey at the San Jose Museum of Art, California in 2010, which travelled to the Nevada Museum of Art, Reno; Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, Kansas;

and Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, before closing at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Wisconsin, in 2012; *Buckyball* at the Exploratorium, San Francisco in 2016; and *Particle Chamber* at Moody Center for the Arts, Rice University, Houston, in 2018.

**Pace** is a leading contemporary art gallery representing many of the most significant international artists and estates of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Under the leadership of President and CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace is a vital force within the art world and plays a critical role in shaping the history, creation, and engagement with modern and contemporary art. Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy for vibrant and dedicated relationships with renowned artists. As the gallery approaches the start of its seventh decade, Pace's mission continues to be inspired by our drive to support the world's most influential and innovative artists and to share their visionary work with people around the world.

Pace advances this mission through its dynamic global program, comprising ambitious exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, and curatorial research and writing. Today, Pace has seven locations worldwide: two galleries in New York, including its newly opened headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft exhibition space at 508/510 West 25th Street, as well as galleries in Palo Alto, London, Geneva, Hong Kong, and Seoul.

**Illuminated River** has an unprecedented reach – phase one will be viewed 60 million a year, the entire 14 bridges will be seen 137 million times a year, so over its minimum 10-year life span over a billion viewers will experience this joyful and poetic artwork – for free. For more details, please visit the Illuminated River website: <https://illuminatedriver.london/whatson>

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## Press Inquiries

Nicolas Smirnoff

[nicolas@pacegallery.com](mailto:nicolas@pacegallery.com)

## Sales Inquiries

Pace Gallery

[londoninfo@pacegallery.com](mailto:londoninfo@pacegallery.com)