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Publication
Author
The Brooklyn Rail
Louis Block

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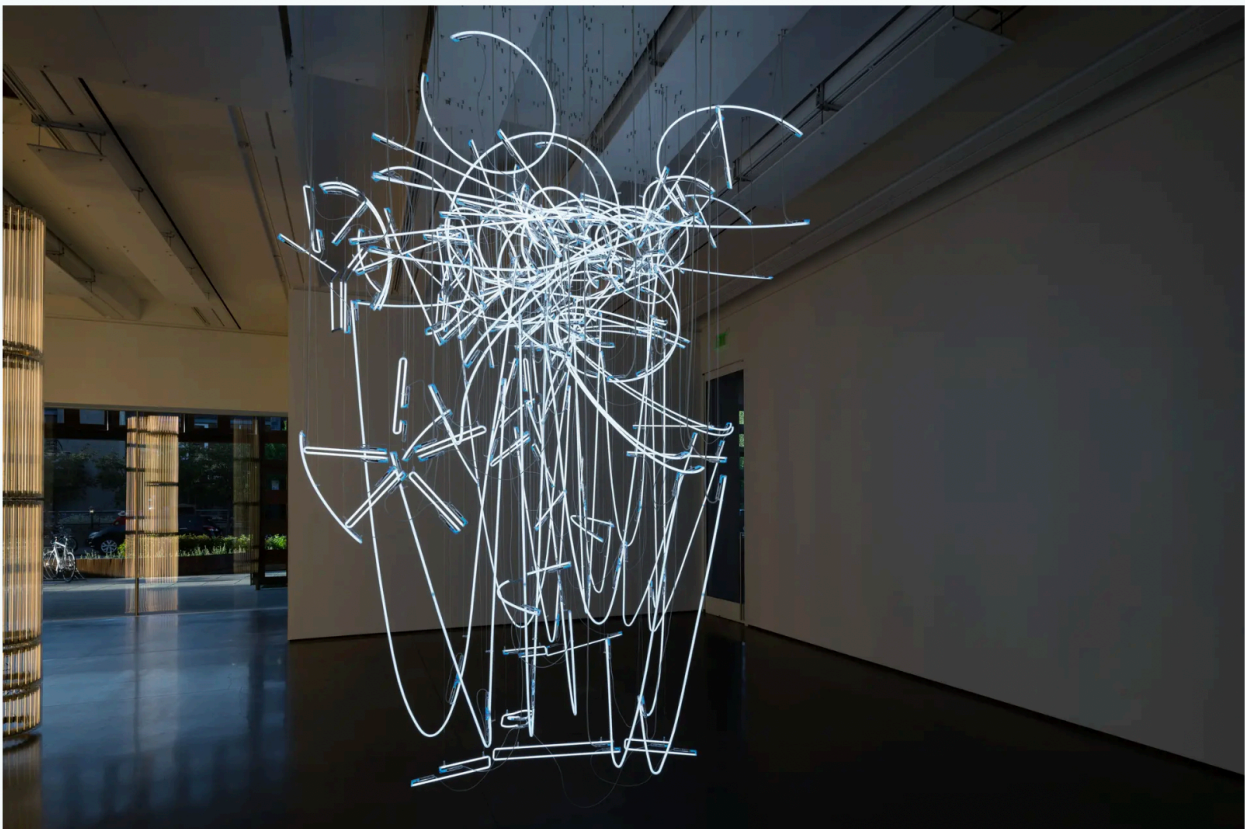
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Cerith Wyn Evans: *Aspen Drift*

By Louis Block



Installation view: *Cerith Wyn Evans: Aspen Drift*, Aspen Art Museum, 2021. Photo: Carter Seddon.

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In this show titled *Aspen Drift*, there is a surprising absence of blur. Cerith Wyn Evans's neon sculptures describe form in such exacting terms as to evoke something diagrammatic, like glowing renderings of discrete movements suspended in the air. So the *drift* here is seen in cross sections, like slow-motion videos of grains of sand buffeted by the wind, offering no hint at the pristine dunes forming in the distance. Two of Wyn Evans's neons here take their titles from Japanese Noh dance, suggesting that the theatrical is distilled into the monumental—durational performance collapsed into line in three dimensions. Though Wyn Evans's sculptures halt motion in this way, they radiate potential energy; there is the sense that movement is coiled into light.

As viewers, we are like the two “Indeterminate paintings” in the show, which remix Barnett Newman's zips in white-on-white acrylic delineated by fields of varnish, such that the paintings' images can only be seen in passing, as light from adjacent sculptures rakes across fields of varying sheen on the canvases. So too does the wandering viewer experience the buzzing display—only through perambulation can the full scope of Wyn Evans's forms be experienced. The effect is a reversal: the concrete rendered ephemeral, and the ephemeral rendered concrete.

ON VIEW
Aspen Art
Museum
June 11 – October
10, 2021



Installation view: Cerith Wyn Evans: *Aspen Drift*, Aspen Art Museum, 2021. Photo: Carter Seddon.

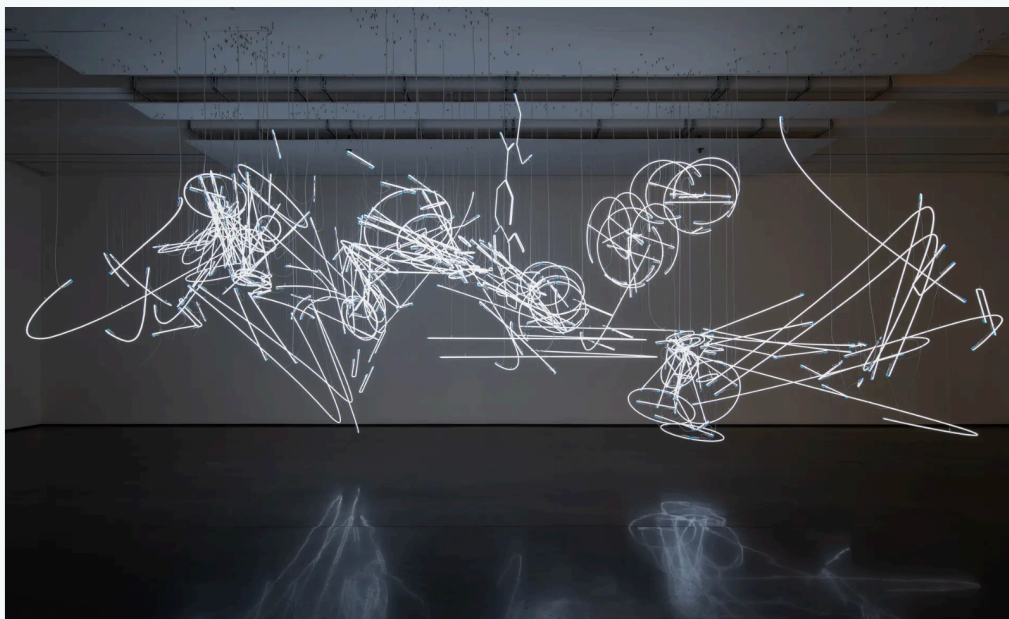
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A side room on the first floor evokes something of a dream sequence, complete with Murano glass chandeliers and houseplants rotating on turntables. Along the walls, redacted book pages filter through Katagami screen stencils, lit by the chandeliers' blinking synced up with Wyn Evans's frantic composition for piano. If the show is to be conceived of as a body, then *Composition for 37 Flutes* (2018) is undeniably the lungs of the operation, made up of a church organ pump attached to glass tubing perforated like flutes to produce a single, evolving note. The "flutes" expand radially from the organ pump, recalling a jellyfish mid-swim. I am reminded of Clarice Lispector's yearning to capture the fourth dimension in her writing in *Água Viva*: "These instants passing through the air I breathe: in fireworks they explode silently in space." Just as the literal meaning of *Água Viva* (living water) becomes subsumed by its associative meaning in Portuguese (jellyfish), Wyn Evans's organ composition embodies a breathy lifeforce: its screeching and evolving note builds a corporeal aura, one that is out of tune, then in tune, then out of tune again.

Placed centrally in the galleries, a set of columns distort the museum's architecture—five of the floor-to-ceiling sculptures on the first floor reemerge as two on the second floor, a move which implies and simultaneously disrupts a sense of continuity. These *StarStarStar/Steer (Transphoton)* (2019) columns employ an algorithm to mimic human breath in the lighting and dimming of their glass-encased LEDs, and the suggestion of diminishing tracheas is less deathly than life-affirming—it focuses incongruities into a single narrative. In many ways, the transition from first floor to second floor can be defined by a funneling of fantasy into reality.



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While the majority of Wyn Evans's pieces here are dominated by vertical or radial forms, the titular sculpture, *Aspen Drift* (2021) spans the width of the upper gallery, conjuring associations of landscape. Walking along its length, the white neon knots and bends, concentrating in nests and loops before darting away laterally. At times, these offshoots are like reaching tendrils or roots, but sometimes they follow the sharper geometry of lighting or fissures in stone. Stepping in closer, there are wisps of blue gas at the joints of the glass tubes, dancing in some rhythm. It feels like the distillation of the discordant currents in the show—the breathing algorithm of the columns, the blinking piano composition, the various on-and-off of other apparatuses. It's tempting to read the piece as a depiction of the now verdant ski slopes that overlook the museum, organic and inorganic forms mirroring the clean-cut lines of forest along the various slopes, loops and curves tracing the acrobatic paths of skiers. In many ways, Wyn Evans's neons require movement to be seen in full. But *Aspen Drift* is like coming upon a vista—it is a buzzing, sprawling composition, embodying the static. Above the sculpture, monofilaments lead to supporting metal studs. They are plotted randomly, hundreds of black dots recalling a distant forest in a mirror image. Movement is distinct from current and rhythm, and Wyn Evans's sculptures remain stationary despite their vibratory energy, much like the aspen groves flicker and tremble silver and green in the wind. Every metaphor here seems dependent on bodies filling the air around the sculptures, as if mere human presence, in Clarice Lispector's words, could capture "the instant hard as crystal and vibrating in the air."

Louis Block is a painter based in Brooklyn.
