

# Keith Sonnier's Art Featured in Two Museums in The Hamptons

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by Pat Rogers

Keith Sonnier's work is featured in two museum shows opening in July 2018 in The Hamptons. Each exhibition opens to the public on Sunday, July 1, 2018, just in time for the Hamptons summer season. Both shows are on extended view allowing time to see plenty of Sonnier's art.

The Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, NY opens a comprehensive survey featuring art selected from five decades of art. The show includes sculpture, installation and sound/process works. At Dia Foundation's Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton, NY, the museum focuses on Sonnier's sound and media work with a centerpiece environmental installation that was first exhibited in New York in 1970.

Both shows are on extended view. The Parrish's "Keith Sonnier: Until Today" opens on July 1, 2018 and continues on view through January 27, 2019. Dan Flavin Art Institute's "Keith Sonnier: Dis-Play II" opens July 1, 2018 and remains on view through May 26, 2019.

## **"Keith Sonnier: Dis-Play II"**

Sonnier's environmental installation *Dis-Play II, 1970*, forms the centerpiece of Sonnier's exhibition at Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton, NY. The work reflects Sonnier's ongoing interest in film, light and experimental art environments, according to Dia. *Dis-Play II* is composed of foam rubber, fluorescent powder, strobe light, black light, neon, plywood, and glass.

The installation was first exhibited at the Castelli Warehouse in New York in 1970. *Dis-Play II* is exhibited at Dan Flavin with "Film and Videos 1968-1977," a selection of works that reflect Sonnier's decade-long exploration of sound and media work, according to the museum.

Sonnier is known for his use of nontraditional and ephemeral materials in his art practice, alongside those of his contemporaries that included Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, and Jackie Winsor.

"We made art that was defined by its defiance of the traditional idea of what could be considered art," Sonnier remarked in the announcement.



“Dis-Play II” by Keith Sonnier, 1970. Installation view at Sadie Coles HQ, London, 2008. ©Artists Rights Society (ARS). Foam rubber, fluorescent powder, strobe light, black light, neon, glass. Size varies. Courtesy of the artist, Sadie Coles HQ, London, and Dan Flavin Art Institute.

## **“Keith Sonnier: Until Today”**

A comprehensive survey, “Keith Sonnier: Until Today” is the first solo exhibition in 35 years in an American museum of work by Sonnier, a pioneering figure in the fields of conceptual, post-minimal, video, and performance art who radically reframed the function of sculpture. The exhibition considers the full extent of Sonnier’s achievement and presents over 30 works that reveal his diverse output from 1967 to the present.

The show features the artist’s neon sculptures, sound pieces, a site-specific neon installation in the Museum’s spine along with work rarely shown in the U.S. The exhibition, organized for the Parrish Art Museum by guest curator Jeffrey Grove and Museum Director Terrie Sultan, will travel to the New Orleans Museum of Art following the Parrish presentation.

“Keith Sonnier has forged a singular sculptural language that defies easy categorization,” Grove stated in the announcement. “With a sensitive and idiosyncratic understanding of materiality and physicality, he has consistently produced work that is at once surprising in its originality and generous in spirit.”



“Shmoo - O.G.V.” by Keith Sonnier, 2013. Neon, acrylic, aluminum, electrical wire, transformer, 131 x 92 1/2 x 4 inches. Courtesy Pace Gallery, New York. Photo © Caterina Verde.

*Keith Sonnier: Until Today* begins with two early works that establish the tenets of Sonnier’s process of exploring non-traditional materials and rejecting conventional sculptural norms. *Rat Tail Exercise* (1968), created from simple string, latex, rubber, and flocking, presents a dynamic shape through minimal use of line; *Untitled* (1967), a 22-section sewn-satin object, rests low on the floor yet takes command of the surrounding architecture of the room. Sonnier’s use of tactile, sensual materials such as felt, satin, rubber, and flocking at this period places him apart from the emphatically heavy industrial materials and rigid geometries of his more austere Minimalist peers.

During the same period, Sonnier began his lifelong exploration of the structural and gestural aspects of neon. Several series represented in the exhibition, such as *Ba-O-Ba* (1969), examines the effect of light as a tangible structural element, with tubes of colored neon traversing large geometric planes of glass. *Neon Wrapping Neon V* (1969) and *Neon Wrapping Incandescent II* (1970) reveal the expressive and emotive possibilities of the material. While highlighting the seeming delicacy of glass neon (a surprisingly durable material), Sonnier also exposed the mechanics and technology that enabled it: transformers, wires, and plugs are featured rather than obscured elements in his sculpture.

Sonnier’s interest in new materials and technologies expanded in the 1970s through ground-

breaking work in sound and video transmission, experimental film, and surveillance works such as *Quad Scan* (1975), a sound/process piece created from a scanner, telephone speaker, and radios. Later works, such as *Propeller Spinner* (1990) from his *Antenna* series, commented on how those once new technologies ultimately become irrelevant. -

By the 1980s, Sonnier embraced a new artistic direction inspired by journeys to India, Japan, and Brazil that profoundly shaped his view of art, creating several series of sculptures made from natural and indigenous materials. *Sarasvati* (1981) from the India series is a colorfully painted wall work made of thick stalks of bamboo, alluding to the ubiquitous scaffolds and cages made by local craftsmen, according to the Parrish. Other works in the show rest on two, three, and four legs, introducing an anthropomorphic quality into his work.

In the 1990s, Sonnier began to combine his signature neon with found objects and other unexpected materials including detritus from his family home in Louisiana. *Los La Butte* (1990), from the “Tidewater” series, combines looping segments of vibrant yellow neon with empty plastic bottles and other found materials. This assemblage is presented like a classic portrait bust, placed on a pedestal—Sonnier’s emphatic reclamation of a traditional sculptural trope that he had deliberately avoided.

While Sonnier’s sculptures convey a lively sense of immediacy, they are carefully thought out constructions that begin with drawing, relayed the Parrish. A bold example of this relationship can be found in his 2004 series incorporating the word “Blatt” (“leaf”) in its title. *Palm: Saw Tooth Blatt* and *Zahidi Palm Blatt*, executed after studies Sonnier made of palmetto and saw tooth leaves in a New Orleans garden, are drawings in light that bring gesture to the fore.

The exhibition concludes with large-scale neon constructions and an immersive neon installation. This includes *Mastadon*, 2008, a nearly 12-foot tall free-standing sculpture from the “Herd” series inspired by Sonnier’s interest in Africa, anthropology, and animals, *Schmoo—O.G.V.* (2013) and *Passage Azur* (2018), a variation of a work presented at Sonnier’s solo exhibition at MAMAC, Nice, in 2015.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated, 160-page book, with essays by Grove, architecture critic Martin Filler, Katie Pfohl, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the New Orleans Museum of Art, and an in-depth interview between Sonnier and Sultan.

## **Keith Sonnier**

Keith Sonnier (b. 1941) was born in Grand Mamou, a rural, bilingual town in Louisiana. He graduated with a B.A. from the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette in 1963 and received an MFA from Rutgers University in 1966.

Sonnier has been the subject of more than 140 solo exhibitions and has participated in more than 360 group exhibitions held nationally and internationally throughout his career. They include shows at Documenta 5, Kassel (1972); the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington, D.C.); Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris); Museum of Modern Art

(New York); the Venice Biennale (1972, 1982); the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York) and at Fondazione Prada (Venice) as part of “When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013,” a remaking of the radical “Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information,” curated by Harald Szeemann in 1969.

The artist has shown recently with Castelli Gallery, Pace Gallery, Mary Boone Gallery, The National Exemplar in New York; MacCarone in New York and Los Angeles; Häusler Contemporary in Munich and Zurich; Galerie Forsblom in Helsinki; Jürgen Becker in Hamburg; Galerie Mitterend in Paris; the Whitechapel Gallery in London; the Hall Foundation in Vermont and the Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain (MAMAC) in Nice and others.

Sonnier’s work can be found in public and private collections worldwide including collections held by the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi; Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz; Kunstverein St. Gallen, Switzerland; Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Sonnier lives and works in Bridgehampton, New York.

## Curator Jeffrey Grove

Jeffrey D. Grove, Ph.D. is an internationally recognized curator and scholar and Director, Museums and Publications at Sean Kelly Gallery. Grove previously held senior curatorial positions at the Cleveland Museum of Art, The High Museum of Art, Atlanta, and the Dallas Museum of Art, where he most recently served as The Hoffman Family Senior Curator of Contemporary Art. Grove has been published widely and organized the first US museum exhibitions of then-emerging artists Matt Connors and Karla Black.

Recent exhibitions include *Michaël Borremans: As Sweet as it Gets*; *Isa Genzken: Retrospective*; and *Jim Hodges: Give More Than You Take*. Grove received his doctorate in Art History from Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland an M.A. in Art History & Archaeology from the University of Missouri, Columbia, and B.F.A. in Industrial Design from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

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**BASIC FACTS: “Keith Sonnier: Until Today”** is on view from July 1, 2018 through January 27, 2019 at the Parrish Art Museum. The show open to the public on Sunday, July 1, 2018 at 2 p.m. with the first public tour taking place at 2 p.m. Two Artist Talks accompany the exhibition. The Artist Talk “[Keith Sonnier, Adam McEwen, and Nate Lowman](#)” takes place on Friday, July 20, 2018 at 6 p.m. The Talk “[Artist to Artist with Maz Blagg on Keith Sonnier](#)” takes place on Friday, July 27, 2018 at 6 p.m.

The Parrish Art Museum is located at 279 Montuak Highway, Water Mill, NY 11976. [www.parrishart.org](http://www.parrishart.org).

**“Keith Sonnier: Dis-Play II”** is on view July 1, 2018 through May 26, 2019 at Dan Flavin Art Institute. The show opens to the public on Sunday, July 1, 2018 at noon. They co-present the talk on July 20, 2018 with the Parrish Art Museum, where the talk will be presented. Dan Flavin Art Institute is located at 23 Corwith Avenue, Bridgehampton, NY. [www.diaart.org](http://www.diaart.org).

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