

PATRICK MILLER
TRIBUTE NIGHT
28/03/12 -29/04/12

Imagine: Light and electricity were separate until James Clerk Maxwell connected them in 1862. Of course, they'd been together in secret for much longer, since before there were eyes to see, but in 1862 they were exposed for what they were. The same. This was back in the day when metaphors for discoveries and their discoverers were grandiose, mythic titles laid like burning crowns upon scientists thought to have stolen the fire from the Gods, or to have toolbelts full of lightning bolts. Light got wired, where before it had been elemental: fire, phosphorous, starlight. This, possibly, was progress.

Trace the trajectory of light - its synonyms, metaphors and derivatives - through Western history and you will also trace this path of progress, although the argument is that those are the same. Any beginning point will do - 'illuminated' manuscripts; the jewel-like red and blue of Abbot Suger's Lux Nova; the alchemists burning volumes of piss in laboratories in search of gold, finding phosphorous instead; Franklin's lightning kite-storm or the World Fair blinding in the outdated darkness. Light came into our homes first as flickering candlelight and then as an even, glowing charge, then later still as a moving image made from electrons and chemicals, until sleep was optional and the stars were dull.

This history lives in our bedrooms and loungerooms, waiting for nightfall on our coffee tables and hanging from our ceilings. Light has worked its way through our eyes and into our language: reflection, imagination, enlightenment. For better or worse, then, we are inevitably indebted to those who have come before us and *Tribute Night* is for them. Patrick Miller's nine works - three tables of ascending height, three shelves of decreasing luminance and a gradient of three lightboxes - are functional shrines, condensed dedications to individuals and moments that, for Miller, represent pivot points in both the Grand and less grand narratives of light and progress. These stories manifest in strange ways, as symbols or as raw materials, as design objects with a heightened sense of their form's history and symbolic significance.

For Hennig Brand, a 17th century alchemist who discovered phosphorous whilst exhausting his wife's fortune in the pursuit of gold, a sheet of glass holds a diffusing smokescreen within the alchemical symbol for the material he found in his own waste. Its matt exterior diffuses, its interior radiates wildly. Albertus Magnus, whose efforts to peacefully unite religion and science have allowed him to be remembered as Albert the Great, receives a glass wave atop triangular trestles that conflates his discovery of arsenic, a key ingredient in the LED bulbs that line its legs, with the red and blue shifts of the Doppler effect.

Christian Doppler reappears in a series of lightboxes, in which a red to blue gradient backdrops reflective chrome symbols. When read left to right, hard geometry loosens into free form line. Whilst the symbols suggest arcane secrets, their origins are worldly: the interlocking triangles are the logo for a festival in the United States based on the Burning Man principles of radical everything, the center symbol combines electrical diagrams and grammar to suggest alternations and switches, the peace sign is universally recognizable, imagined by Miller as a message to *Terminator's* John Connor in an uncertain future, destabilised by the technology designed to help us.

For, as much as Miller points to significant moments in the narrative of progress he also alludes to moments when these advances have fallen short of expectations, of good intentions with less than good outcomes. *Lamp for Oscar Niemeyer* nods to its namesake and his well meant magnum opus, Brasilia - the 'new' capital city of Brazil that didn't quite live up to it's hype. He acknowledges the complexity of the 'progress' discussion; he's inclusive with his interests.

Another shelf, *Lamp for Joseph Knecht* is inset with glass marbles, a literal reference to the title of Hermann Hesse's, *The Glass Bead Game* (1943). The eponymous game (the rules of which are never explained explicitly), is an abstract thought experiment and educational tool used to exercise the minds of young men. The process of the game involves making links and connections amongst phenomena of varied and sometimes illogical provenance in an effort to arrive at a synthesis of information, an enlightened and totalizing world view. In the game, as in *Tribute Night*, progress does not follow a linear narrative towards an absolute End but instead is imagined as a continued series of refractions and reflections, towards illumination.