

# WHITNEY

## Press Release

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## THE WHITNEY PRESENTS LARGE SCALE INSTALLATION BY ROBERT IRWIN



Robert Irwin (b. 1928), *Scrim veil—Black rectangle—Natural light*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1977. Cloth, metal, and wood. Overall: 144 x 1368 x 49 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of the artist. Photograph © Warren Silverman

**NEW YORK, April 15, 2013**—This summer, the Whitney will reinstall *Scrim veil-Black rectangle-Natural light*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, the large-scale work that Robert Irwin (b. 1928) created specifically for the fourth floor of the Museum in 1977. On view from June 27 to September 1, this will be the first presentation of the work since its initial installation more than 35 years ago.

In the work, a semi-translucent white scrim, weighted by a black metal bar, hangs from the ceiling to five and half feet above the floor and runs from east to west across the 117-foot-long room. At the same exact height as the bar, a thin black line is painted around the gallery walls. The gallery's Madison Avenue window is the only light source. Together, the diffused light, scrim, and black lines activate the environment and manipulate viewers' perception of the Museum's Emily Fisher Landau Gallery. Photographs and drawings related to *Scrim veil-Black rectangle-Natural light*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York will be on display in another fourth-floor gallery.

In his biography of Irwin, *Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees*, Lawrence Weschler wrote of his experience viewing the installation, "the room itself seemed to stand up and hum. Things that had always been there—the even modular hive of the ceiling; the dark, rectangular grid of the floor—you noticed as if for the first time."

Irwin has called the Whitney's 1977 exhibition pivotal in his career, as it set the course for his subsequent practice. While preparing for the exhibition, he distilled his aesthetic and philosophical ideas into the essay, "Notes on a Model," which was included in the accompanying catalogue. In the text, he theorized that perception is key to human understanding, proposing that art should be conditional to its surroundings and enhance a viewer's perceptual experience.

"Questions about the act of perceiving are as relevant today as they were when Robert Irwin first presented this exceptional installation at the Whitney. Irwin's work offers something profound that cannot be easily and quickly consumed. Rather, it invites and rewards total and unequivocal immersion," says Whitney Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Programs Donna De Salvo, who will oversee the installation. "The opportunity to see this work in the museum's Breuer building, prior to the Whitney's move downtown in 2015, and in summer light, is not to be missed."

A native of Long Beach, California, Robert Irwin studied at the Otis Art Institute (now the Otis College of Art and Design) and the Chouinard Art Institute, which was later incorporated to form the California Institute of the Arts. In 1958, along with Billy Al Bengston, Craig Kauffman, and Edward Kienholz, among others, Irwin was invited to join the Ferus Gallery, founded by

legendary curator Walter Hopps. At the time, Irwin was creating large, gestural Abstract Expressionist paintings, but soon after he began to experiment with more Minimalist works, consisting of geometric forms. Merging his artistic process with his interests in science, philosophy, and religion, Irwin developed a theory that art ought to be conditional to its environment. These ideas led him to abandon the framed canvas and instead make work in direct response to given surroundings. Light and sensory experience became central to his practice; he is recognized as one of the artists at the forefront of the Light and Space movement, based in Southern California. Since the 1970s, Irwin has continued to make what he calls site-conditioned works, including the design of the grounds at Dia: Beacon Center for the Arts and the central gardens at the Getty Center in Los Angeles. In 1984 he was the first visual artist to be awarded a MacArthur “Genius” Grant.

On the occasion of *Robert Irwin: Scrim veil—Black rectangle—Natural light*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1977), the Whitney will digitize the catalogue that was published in conjunction with the 1977 exhibition and make it available on [whitney.org](http://whitney.org). In addition to “Notes on a Model,” the catalogue also includes images and project plans, as well as biographical and exhibition information compiled by the 1977 exhibition’s curator, Richard Marshall. The updated online version will feature a new introduction by Donna De Salvo.

### **About the Whitney**

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the world’s leading museum of twentieth-century and contemporary art of the United States. Focusing particularly on works by living artists, the Whitney is celebrated for presenting important exhibitions and for its renowned collection, which comprises over 19,000 works by more than 2,900 artists. With a history of exhibiting the most promising and influential artists and provoking intense debate, the Whitney Biennial, the Museum’s signature exhibition, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in the United States. In addition to its landmark exhibitions, the Museum is known internationally for events and educational programs of exceptional significance and as a center for research, scholarship, and conservation.

Founded by sculptor and arts patron Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930, the Whitney was first housed on West 8th Street in Greenwich Village. The Museum relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and, in 1966, inaugurated its present home, designed by Marcel Breuer, at 945 Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side. While its vibrant program of exhibitions and events continues uptown, the Whitney is constructing a new building, designed by Renzo Piano, in downtown Manhattan. Located at the corner of Gansevoort and Washington Streets in the Meatpacking District, at the southern entrance to the High Line, the new building, which has generated immense momentum and support, will enable the Whitney to vastly increase the size and scope of its exhibition and programming space. Ground was broken on the new building in May 2011, and it is projected to open to the public in 2015.

## Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

<b>...as apple pie</b>	Through June 9, 2013
<b>American Legends</b>	Through November 2013
<b>Blues for Smoke</b>	Through April 28, 2013
<b>Jay DeFeo: A Retrospective</b>	Through June 2, 2013
<b>The White Rose</b>	April 25-May 12, 2013
<b>I, YOU, WE</b>	Opens April 25, 2013
<b>Stewart Uoo and Jana Euler</b>	Opens May 10, 2013
<b>David Hockney: The Jugglers</b>	Opens May 23, 2013
<b>Hopper Drawing</b>	May 23-Oct 6, 2013
<b>Robert Irwin: Scrim Veil—Black Rectangle—Natural Light (1977)</b>	June 27-Sept 1, 2013
<b>Robert Indiana: Beyond Love</b>	Sept 26-Jan 2014
<b>Rituals of Rented Island:</b>	
<b>Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama—Manhattan, 1970–1982</b>	Oct 31-Jan 2014

*The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. General admission: \$18. Full-time students and visitors ages 19–25 and 62 & over: \$14. Visitors 18 & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org).*