

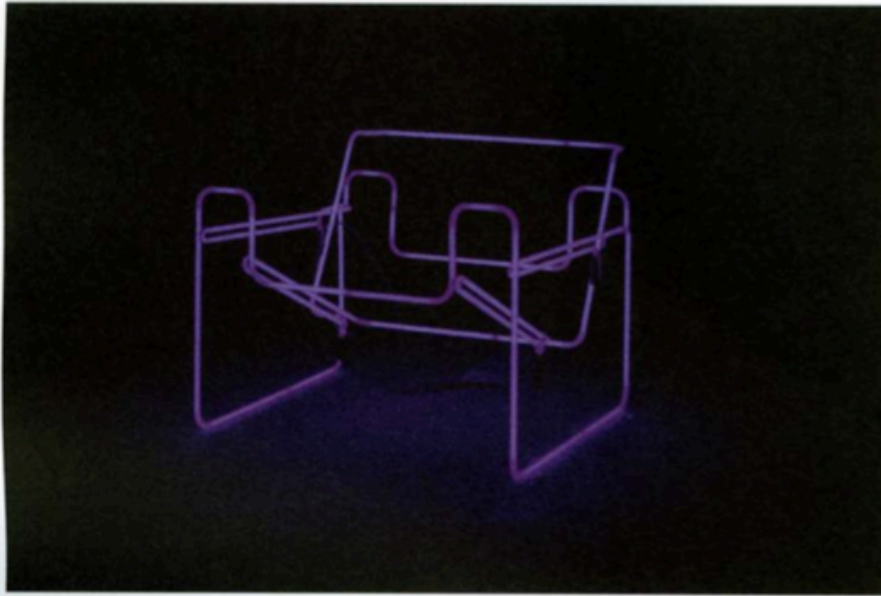
TEMPLON

II

IVAN NAVARRO

ART REVIEW, mars 2008

REVIEWS IVAN NAVARRO



Black Electric Chair, 2006, black neon light and electric energy, 76 x 77 x 72 cm. Photo: S. Buet / Tutti. Courtesy Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris.

IVAN NAVARRO: ANTIFURNITURE

DANIEL TEMPLON GALLERY, PARIS
1 MARCH - 9 APRIL

Standing at a crossroads that provocatively connects the most self-referential Minimalism and the most utopian Modernism with autocratic landscapes – for they all express obsessive regulation and determination – Chilean artist Iván Navarro has gained increasing critical attention over the past few years with his sculptures made of neon lights and mirrors. The installations exhibited at Daniel Templon Gallery constitute an ensemble of 'antifurniture', whose functionality has been displaced to confront the viewer with contradictions, optical illusions and dramas. The first piece on display at the entrance sets the tone of the show: a ladder shaped with white neon tubes leans against the wall, reaching nothing, leading nowhere, seemingly illuminating its own uselessness. Echoing the minimalist, yet mystical, work of Dan Flavin, Navarro appropriates formalist features and modernist and mass design icons, and opens them up to a disturbing political dimension that seems to return only to infinity, void, impasse and death.

In *Negative Progression* (2008), mirrors fixed in the back of four IKEA closets infinitely reflect arrangements of neon lights that have been set on movable shelves, creating a vertiginous illusion of depth. If the regular multiplication of shelves along the closets reminds us of Donald Judd's minimalist and mathematical progressions, the endless corridors that are drawn by the repetition of the luminous patterns point to indeterminacy, all the more so because the viewer is left out of these reflecting circuits. The two-way mirrors that shut up the closets obstruct self-projection. A stronger feeling of impotence occurs in front of *No Dunking* (2006), an unusable basketball net made with orange neon lights, the aborted promise of a goal that is prohibited. In *Eternal Contraction* (2008), the viewer bends over an illusory well that endlessly flips a single, luminous word, 'ME', into 'WE' and back again, endlessly, like a wish that cannot be granted.

Record (2007) – a locked cabinet in which horizontal red neon lights are endlessly mirrored – is a metaphor for the countless secret records of General Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, which remain classified to this day. Next to it, *In Between Walls* (2007) creates an illusory chasm inside the wall – an impenetrable, yet disclosed space of secrecy. *Assembly Line* (2007), a tool case containing a single white neon light that unfolds itself onto the floor like a rope ladder, through infinite repetition, evokes questions of mass production. In the last room, which is plunged in darkness, *Black Electric Chair* (2006), a to-scale replica of designer Marcel Breuer's Wassily Chair built with black neon tubes, opposes the reality of capital punishment with the utopia of purely aesthetic functionality. As we get back to the entrance, *Skyline* (2006) catches our eyes in an infinite constellation of lightbulbs. Against this claustrophobic display of dead-end holes, a possible reversal finally presents itself – like a way out. What if *White Ladder* (2005) reaches finitely towards us? We would be the endings of all these alienating circuits. Perhaps a certain optimism remains. *Violaine Boutet de Monvel*