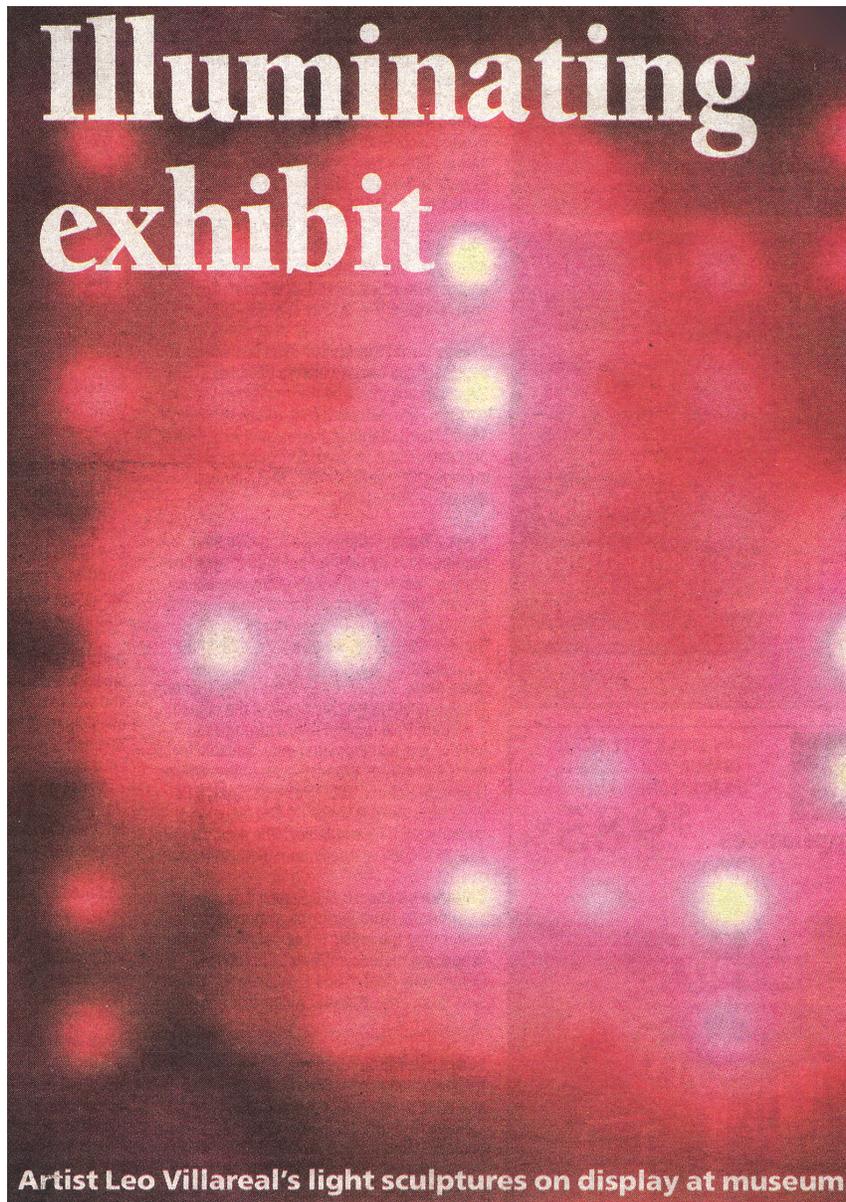


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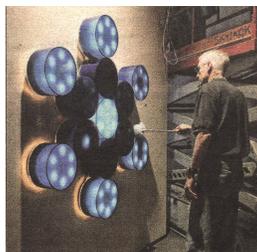
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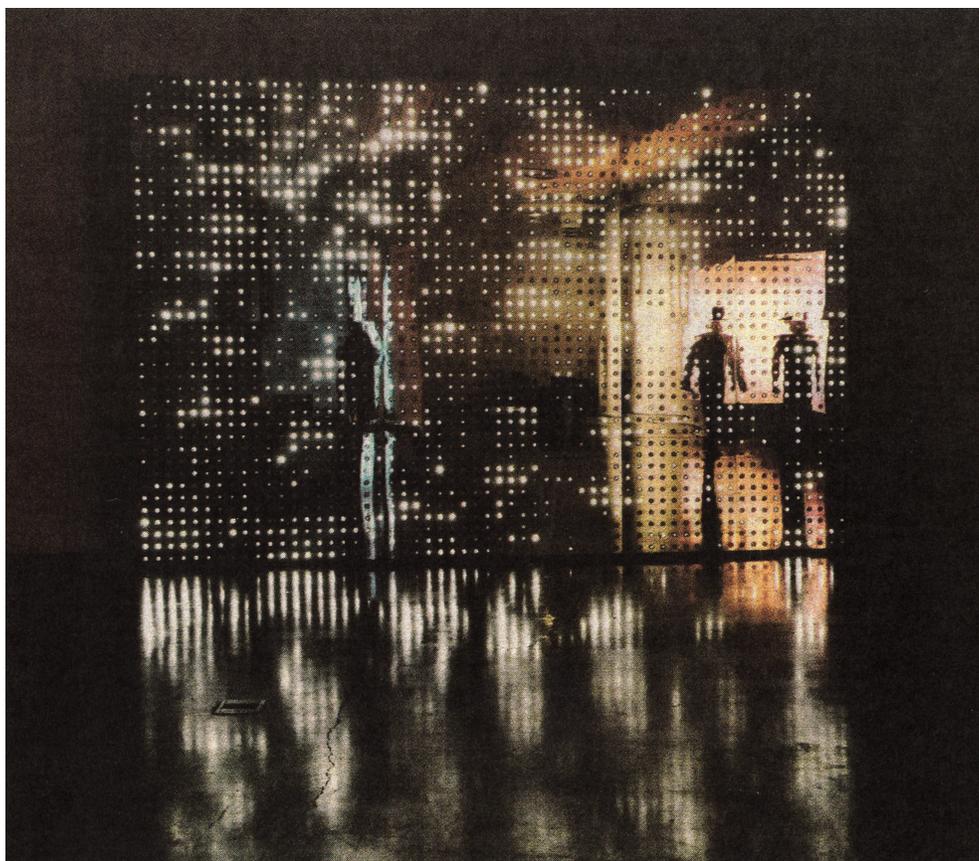
Miller, Geralda. "Luring With Light." *Reno Gazette-Journal*, March 13, 2011.

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Artist Leo Villareal's light sculptures are on display at the Nevada Museum of Art

By **Geralda Miller**
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Stop.
Stare.
Feel.

Sculptor Leo Villareal lures with light.

The 18 pieces on display at the Nevada Museum of Art may represent to art historians the conflation of key 20th-century art movements, including minimalism, pop art and

light and space.

But Villareal, a pioneer in the use of light-emitting diode and computer-driven imagery, is more concerned about the visceral and communal connections that are made when people view his filtered light creations.

One doesn't have to understand code, physics or Newton's laws of motion to enjoy and appreciate his mesmerizing masterpieces. "If you can connect with

something like the way you connect with the sunset, or the way that light is shimmering on the surface of water, and you can see that through software, and I've been able to distill that experience through code, I think that's pretty exciting," Villareal said of his work. "I'd say that's pretty exciting."

With pieces dispersed on three floors, curator Anne Wolfe said she is excited

to showcase the museum's largest exhibition.

Looking at the museum from West Liberty Street, 15 LED tubes form three hexagons that make colorful patterns. Visitors entering the museum see a radial fan of 24 white LED tubes 102 inches in diameter next to the welcome desk.

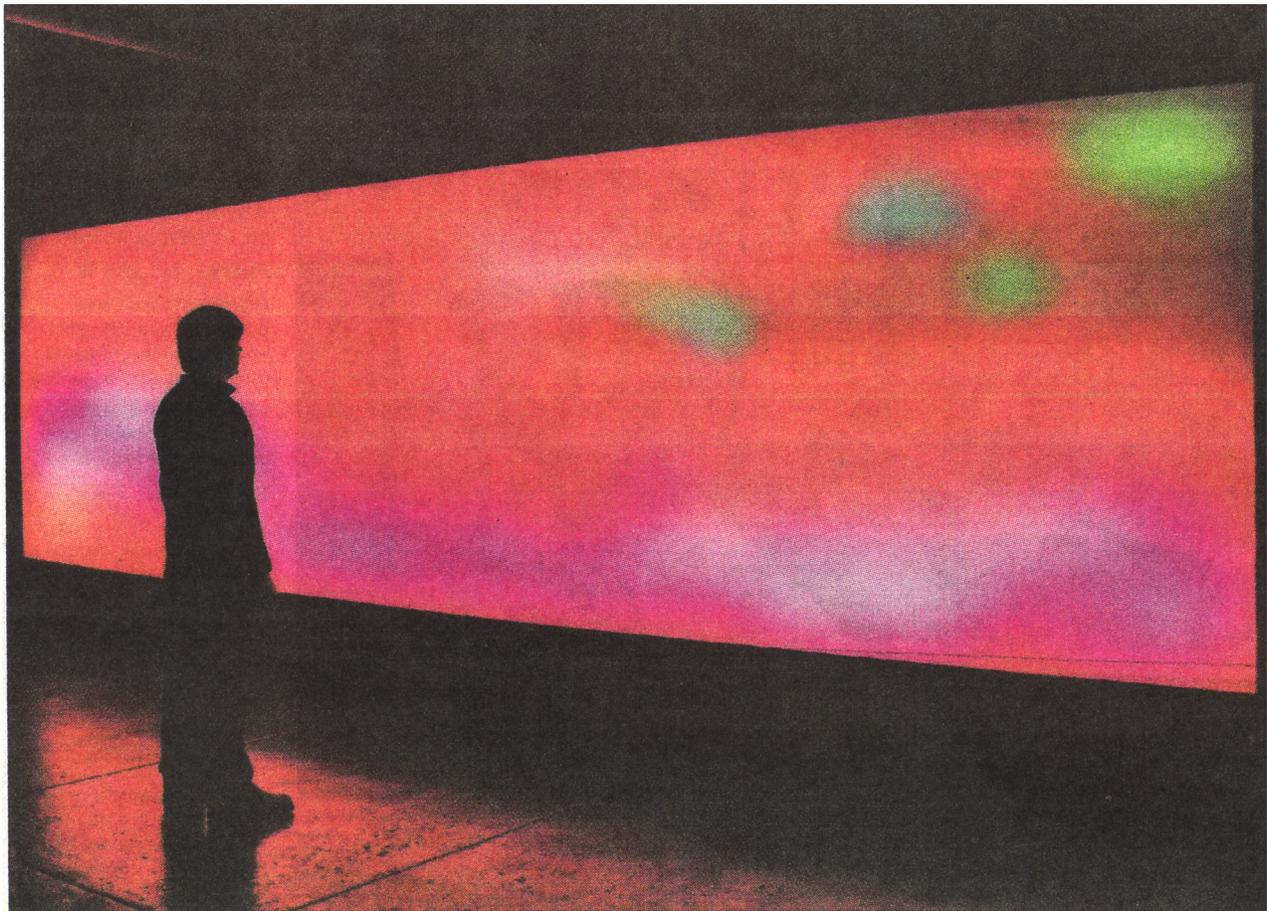
Thirteen horizontal LED tubes move from the obvious to obscure in "Flag, That was Then & This is

Now," a prominent piece when walking up the stairs to the second floor. Sit on a custom-made couch in the Media Gallery on that floor and become entranced in the ceiling-mounted dance of white lights in a piece the artist calls "Firmament."

The rest of the exhibit is in the museum's dimly lit third floor Feature Gallery. Plexiglas covers strobe lights and incandescent light

bulbs that form hypnotic patterns. Color floats in some LED tubes and flits across mirrored stainless steel in others.

"Leo Villareal: Animating Light is the first major technology-based exhibition that has been presented in an arts venue in Northern Nevada," Wolfe said. "That's why it's so exciting for us."



HANDOU

Light sculptor Leo Villareal stands in front of "Amanecer," which is displayed in the Nevada Museum of Art's Feature Gallery. He said this piece is "an exploration of color and time."

A fine balance

The Silver State, from the relentless Black Desert to glitzy Las Vegas, has been an inspiration and laboratory for the artist's work. While working in San Francisco for a technology company in 1997, Villareal went to Burning Man. He affixed a strobe light on top of his mobile home as a navigation device.

"Then I took it back to my studio and I put it in an acrylic box and that's really the moment I realized, 'oh this is a powerful direction, I need to follow this,'" he said. "I didn't really know I was making an artwork when I made my first light piece. It was a utilitarian

object. But then it turned out it was a work of art that got me on this track of exploring light and code and information. So it's been this progression of one thing led to the next in the evolution of the work."

The light sculptures are a fine balance between technology and art, but Villareal says he's always designing his work with and artist's eye. Light and technology are his canvas, his chisel, his lens.

"It's never about just the technology," he said. "I'm not interested in that at all. I need to use technological tools to make my work. I treat it as a tool like any other artist would use paint or whatever material. I just happen to use light and software for my materials."

of light and color also fit with the museum's main focus on the environmental aspects of art.

"His work is how artists are responding to virtual environments — the built environment, the architectural environment," Wolfe said. "Not only is Leo probably the best-known sculptor of his generation, but for the museum it represents a very important part of our Art and Environment programming. It represents that other end of the spectrum to land arts. We want to make sure the people know that our art and environment initiatives represent this really broad spectrum of what's happening in contemporary art. It's not just about land arts and earth arts."

Villareal agrees.

"Diamond Sea" is mirrored stainless steel, with bright white LEDs that appear to be floating in space. Another recent work is "Big Bang,"

He said he continues to attend the yearly Burning Man festival to be around like minds.

"I eventually started moving my work back and forth from New York to the playa, cross-fertilizing what I was doing in my studio and treating Burning Man as a research lab — a place to experiment and try things out," he said. "That's the wonderful thing about the playa; it's this gathering for mad scientists. They're incredible technologists, people who are very tapped into what's happening that I can't draw upon."

The lights of metropolis also are an inspiration for Villareal. While most go to Las Vegas to gamble and party, Villareal said he goes to study the chasing light.

colorful LEDs floating in a randomized pattern against an aluminum base that duplicates Hubble images of outer space's landscape.

"I believe that these pieces aren't just about the pieces," Villareal said. "It's the glow that they cause. There's an immersive quality to them. So I do see them as vehicular, in a way, something that can transport you somewhere."

Although this first traveling museum survey provides a glimpse of Villareal's work and its environmental applications, it is his grander-scale works that fulfill the sculptor's goal to be fully enveloped in his work.

"Multiverse" is his 200-foot-long installation, which connects the east and west wings of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.

"It's immersive and it's about community," Villareal said. "It's unleashed something way bigger than me."

"Why is our brain attracted to these things?" he wondered. "One of my early goals was to take elements, like chasing, which are part of the vocabulary of sequence light, but add more complexity and intelligence to it. How far could I push these simple things that I was seeing? What my work is about is time and sequencing and really pushing that much further than has been explored. There are a couple of artists doing that, but not many."

Technological landscapes

Not only are Villareal's sculptures a commentary on social space, his computerized manipulations

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IF YOU GO

WHAT: "Leo Villareal: Animating Light" is a traveling exhibit on display at the Nevada Museum of Art through May 22.

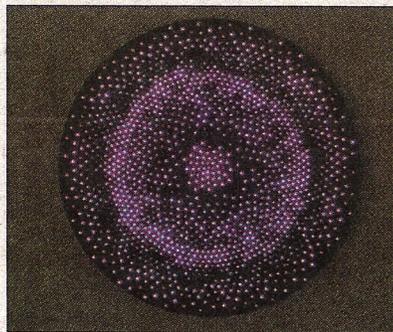
WHERE: Nevada Museum of Art, 160 W. Liberty St.

HOURS: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday and Thursday till 8 p.m. Guided tours are available at 6 p.m. Thursdays and at 1 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

COST: \$10 general, \$8 students and seniors, \$1 ages 6-12 and free to museum members. Visit the museum for free on the second Saturday of each month. Bank of America cardholders can attend free on the first Saturday and Sunday of each month.

PERFORMANCE INTERPRETATIONS: Programs designed to interpret Villareal's work through performances are scheduled. The first is the sounds and music mixed in a deejay set by Terrain, a.k.a David Bobzien, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. March 24.

DETAILS: www.nevadaart.org/exhibitions/index or 775-329-3333.



PHOTOS BY MARILYN NEWTON/RG.

Leo Villareal's "Big Bang"