

<http://blog.sculpture.org/2014/06/11/ivan-navarro/> June 11, 2014 tags: [electricity](#), [Jan Garden Castro](#), [light](#)

In the Studio: Iván Navarro Lights Dark Issues By [Jan Garden Castro](#)



Photo by Thelma Garcia

Iván Navarro, (detail) Red and Blue Electric Chair, 2003.

Eureka! Before we get to Iván Navarro's work at the Guggenheim, in Korea, and in Madison Square Park, his new Rizzoli/Skira book, along with his need to cancel his exhibition in Ukraine, let me share my Iván Navarro moment. It came six months *after* walking past his *memorable* red and blue electric chair in Miami. As I was passing a Gerit Reitveld chair in St. Louis, Eureka! Navarro's electrification of that modernist gem illuminated its many connections/contradictions = modernism + leisure + electricity + electric chairs/death. Navarro reverses our expectations by merging an inviting classic object with the shock of a literal electric chair. The neon chair is so cool, so engineered, so colorful – some come in pink and blue – so memorable!



Iván Navarro, Red and Blue Electric Chair, 2003. Fluorescent light, color sleeves, metal fixtures and electric energy
45 x 31 1/2 x 44 1/2 inches. 114.3 x 80 x 113 cm. Photo by Thelma Garcia

What a studio! Unlike any other, this modest space in Greenpoint, Brooklyn behind a nondescript door & its hand-painted number seems like a *carved-out* cave. The small opening room, middle rooms, and back room hold basic work tools, materials, some storage. Probably there is more free space than usual here since Gallery Hyundai in Seoul is showing three floors of work – the size of a museum show. Two low-ceilinged upstairs cubby holes serve as office, with a series of black loose-leaf notebooks detailing past and present projects and a loaded bookcase. The studio is like the insides of a body: fully functional and organized but not pretty.

Iván Navarro, the new Skira/Rizzoli book just out, details the artist's early awareness of the connection between light and power. Following his birth in Santiago, Chile in 1972, Pinochet, who came to power in 1973, would shut off the city's electricity almost every night "in order to keep people in their houses and under control."^[1] For his thesis project, as a student in Chile, he decided to create work using only what he found in the exhibition space. Voila: he removed the gallery's track lighting to create a string of lights for *Camping Day*, suggesting the use of improvised light when the power grid is down. Today Navarro's art combines sculpture, music, performance, and, especially, light. He uses neon, incandescent, fluorescent, LED, and fire.



Iván Navarro, *Homeless Lamp, The Juice Sucker (+ Video)*, 2004-2005. Fluorescent light, metal fixtures, wheels and electric energy from a streetlamp post and video (4:16 mins). 40 x 52 x 30 inches. 101.6 x 132.1 x 76.2 cm. Photo by Thelma Garcia

Navarro's project at The Guggenheim Museum, opening June 13, is *Homeless Lamp, The Juice Sucker* (See Skira book, pages 142-3). This shopping cart is made from fluorescent light, metal fixtures, wheels, and electric energy. The accompanying film shows the artist and a friend wheeling the cart down an industrial street, and searching for and finding an electric outlet (that can be easily jimmied open) in the base of a street lamp. Who knew the homeless can suck juice (electricity) from public fixtures? Navarro helps us to see how unavailable things we take for granted, like light, can be. This also highlights a central theme: who controls light? Another epiphany: the shopping cart symbolizes 'home' for the homeless.

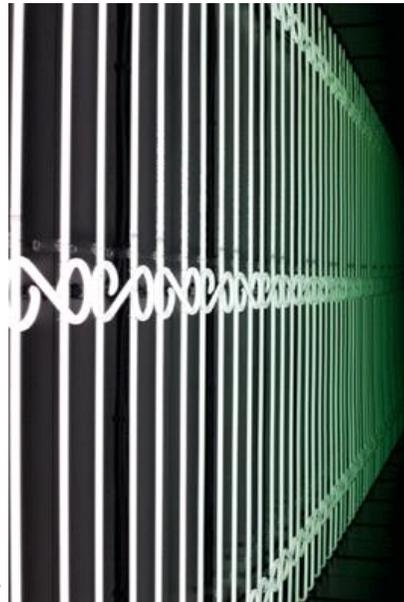
Navarro's *This Land is Your Land* exhibit at Madison Square Park features three seven-foot diameter water towers on eight-foot-tall supports that "function as vessels for a vocabulary of the political and personal experience of immigration."^[2] Inside each of the three towers are neon signs – the words BED, ME/WE, and a ladder image. Each seems mirrored to infinity, showing three signs of an immigrant's experiences and illusions as she/he struggles to belong. The artist confided, "Architecture was the first problem I approached when I was planning this show... I

saw the water tanks around the Park. For me, to build a new water tower... the size of a tree house... is like building a house... Language is where the optical illusion comes in. Language and architecture connect and contradict each other.”^[3] To create the illusion of endless space, Navarro sandwiches light between one regular mirror and a one-way mirror. This fictional space is reflexive as well as reflective. *This Land is Your Land* next travels to the Nasher Foundation in Dallas.



Installation view, Iván Navarro's *This Land Is Your Land* in Madison Square Park (2014). Photo by James Ewing Photography, New York. Courtesy of Madison Square Park Conservancy.

Navarro's childhood in war-torn Chile has given him an emotional awareness of complicated social and political situations faced by other individuals and countries. Three months ago, he cancelled a planned show in Ukraine partly because: “I didn't feel comfortable having a show in



the middle of a civil war.”

Iván Navarro, *Post*, 2012. Neon light, aluminum and electric energy. 84 x 24 x 12 inches. 213.4 x 61 x 30.5 cm
Photo by Thelma Garcia

For his Gallery Hyundai show in Seoul, Navarro created a huge diagonal fence on one floor, making entry into either side of the space difficult. This work challenges the Robert Frost truism, “Good fences make good neighbors.” and suggests, instead, that fences are materialist weapons. As with the electric chair series, the electric fence *looks* charming as the notion ‘electric fence’ suggests control and even death. The other two floors include work illustrated in the new Skira book. The show’s title – *299 792 458 m/s* – alludes to the speed of light.

Navarro uses music and performance as a way to interact with sculpture and to illustrate his interactive concepts. His show with Courtney Smith and his band, Oido, at Hotel Particulier, a Tribeca gallery, featured more electrified objects, including his band’s drum set. On opening night, the light show included a huge projection of a magnified real ear bubbling with peroxide. With the performer’s face and body blacked out, the bubbling ear was eerily in tune with the lively crowd and illuminated art.

Check out: www.ivan-navarro.com and www.paulkasmingallery.com/artists/ivn-navarro

OIDO, an experiment in sound and sculpture. Featuring Tunde Adebimpe, Bart Higgins, Courtney Smith, Ivan Navarro. Huseo Records HR-20, 2013.

“The Dark Side of Light,” Navarro’s “Death Row” at the Venice Biennale: <http://db-artmag.com/en/60/feature/ivan-navarros-emotionally-charged-minimalism/>

Navarro as part of “Under the Same Sun,” Guggenheim, opening June 13th:
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/10/guggenheim-ubs-map-idUSnPnLvtbN+51+PRN20140410>

[1] Iván Navarro, New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2014: p. 114.

[2] Press release from Madison Square Park.

[3] This and all quotes from an interview with Navarro in his studio on April 9, 2014. Thank you to Iván, Patty, Margaret Chace, Jennifer Isakowitz, Nicole Rumore, and all who facilitated this essay.

Plunder (Doha Towers, Dubai), 2011. Neon, wood, paint, plexiglass mirror, one-way mirror, electric energy. Photos Thelma Garcia. Camping Day; art + photo Ivan Navarro.



Ecco (Brick), 2012 Neon light, mirror, one-way mirror, bricks and electric energy Photo by Thelma Garcia.