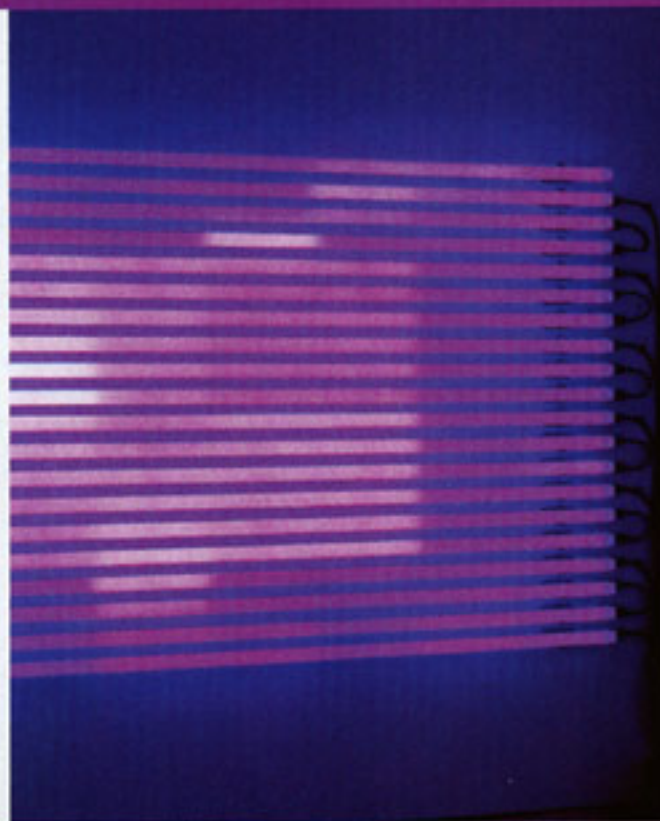


Bands on the run: Leo Villareal's *Chasing Rainbows*, 2004, comprises 60 glowing tubes of light made up of red, green, and blue LEDs. Below left: the artist appears in front of his *Horizons* installation

Electric Light Orchestra

✦ The other-worldliness of Leo Villareal's light sculptures creates a *Close Encounters*-style experience. Their dazzling multi-colored sequences mesmerizes viewers — prepare to be transported



surveillance

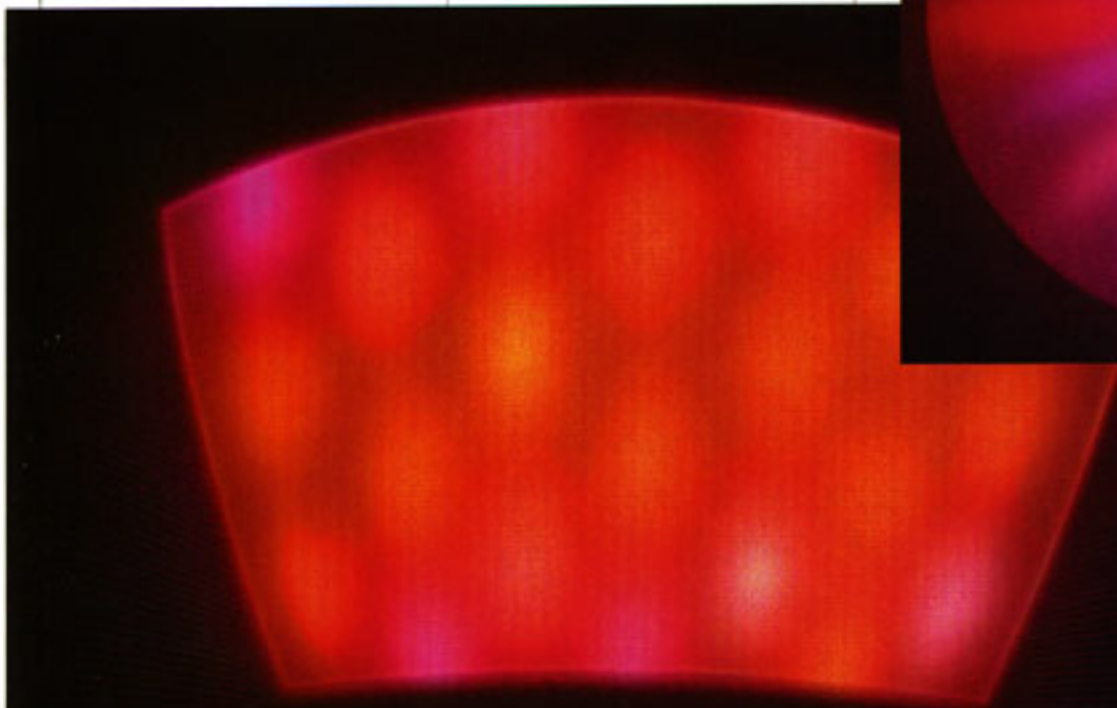
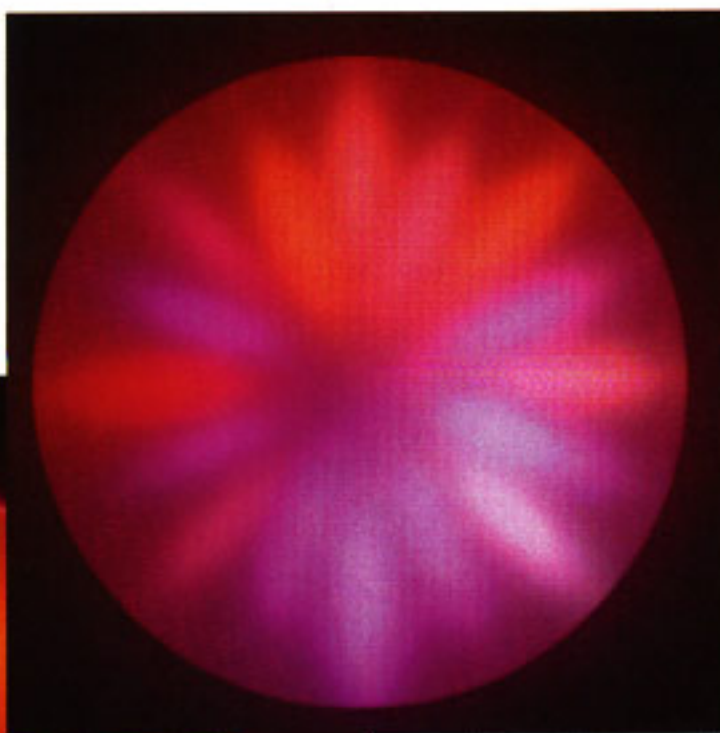
"I'm inspired by what I see around me — the headlights of cars streaking by on a rainy night, chaser lights strung up outside a bodega, the spectacles of Times Square and Las Vegas," says Leo Villareal, a New York-based artist who builds electric compositions

with the most intangible of media: light. The sculptures he creates with LEDs, homemade interfaces, and precisely orchestrated sequencers achieve a vibe more ethereal than electric. "I use a highly artificial means to achieve a very organic look and feel." >>

> Villareal explains.

Working in the often garish medium of urban light, he abstracts everyday experience by removing easy references like logos and text — essentially forcing the light to speak for itself. A Villareal piece displays a certain degree of unexpect-

ed humanness: The sculpture grows and shrinks, mopes, breathes, retreats, pauses, and then surges ahead with renewed life. His work is experienced in subtle vignettes, each dark moment functioning as both an end and a beginning, as a sequenced part of a



whole. Slow, pulsing color fields move with Atari-like simplicity before giving way to muted kaleidoscopic fades, all of which are executed with a delicacy that is both gentle and severely precise. Patterns jump from wall to wall, wrapping the space with an electric

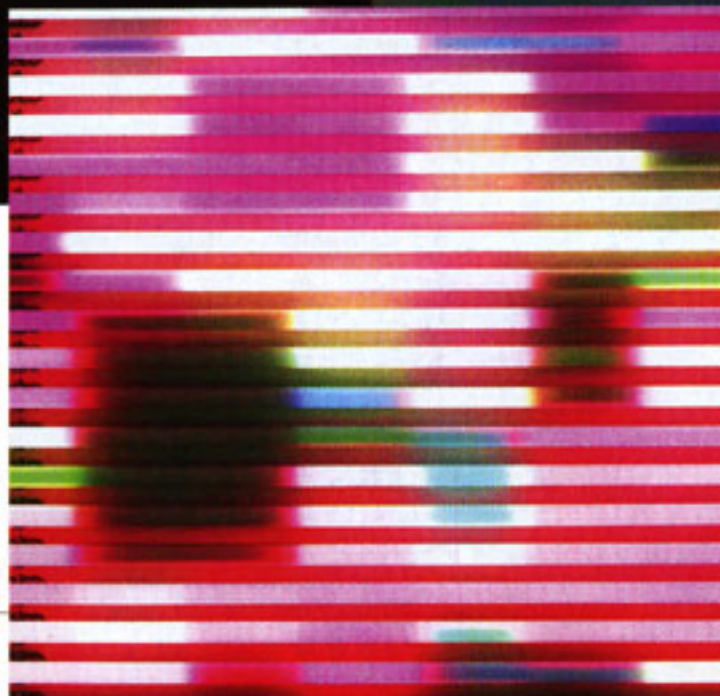
boundary line of color, enveloping the viewer.

His temporary installations — including such venues as Mexico City's Museo de Arte Moderno, the ceiling of Grand Central Station in Manhattan, and PS1 Contemporary Art Center in Queens — have offered glowing examples. Looking to feel the LED-love? Plug in to Villareal's Lightscape project at the Visual Music show at MOCA LA in February 2005 or the Hirshorn in Washington, D.C., the following June and trip the light fantastic. SARAH LIDGUS

The vibe is more ethereal than electric. "I use a highly artificial means to achieve a very organic look and feel."



surveillance



Flick the switch: Villareal combines LEDs and Plexiglas tubes to create pulsing color fields and moving patterns. Clockwise from top: Blossom, 2003; Horizon (24), 2004; a detail from Chasing Rainbows; and Lightscape, 2003