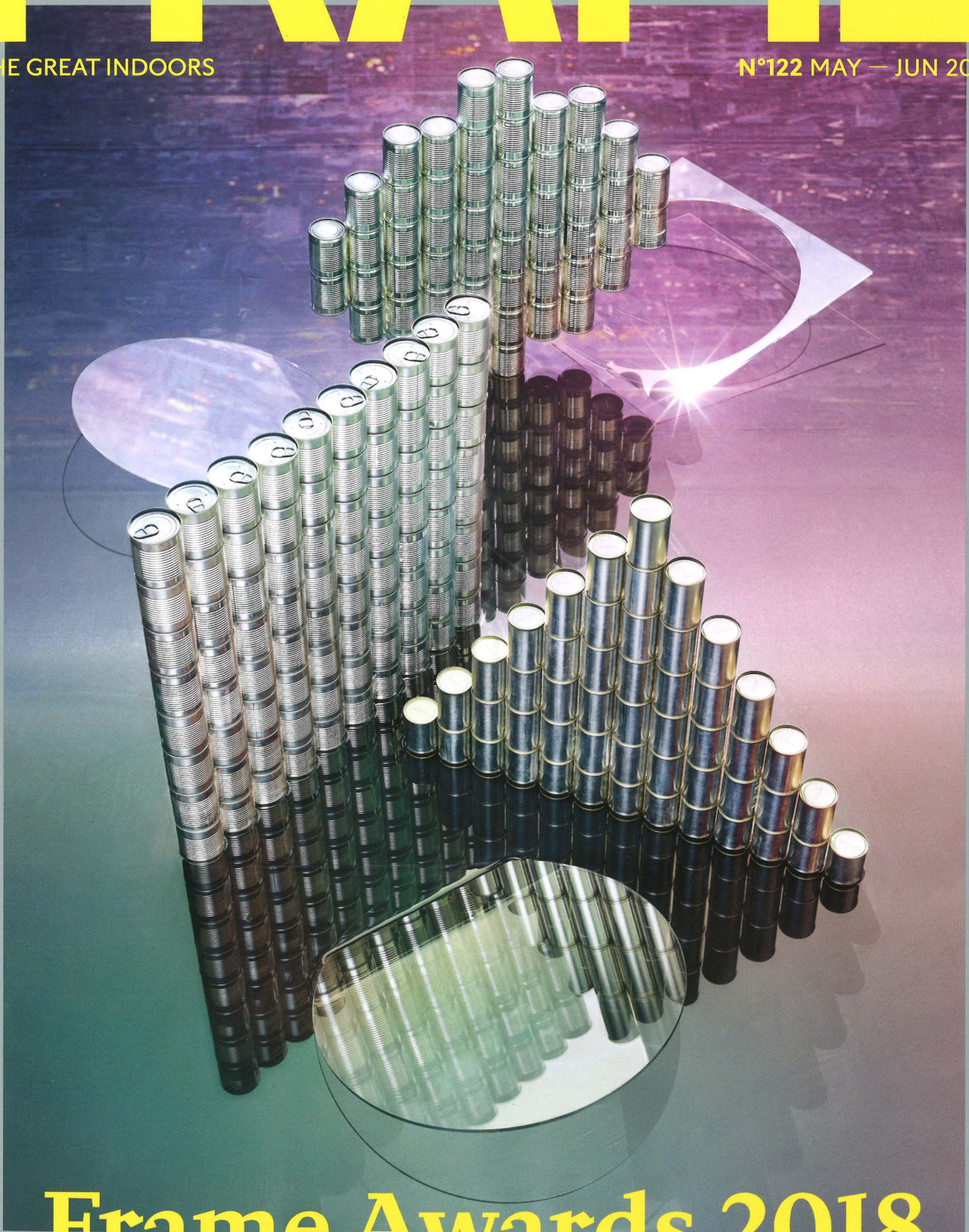


FRAME

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N°122 MAY — JUN 2018



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At the age of 94, CARLOS CRUZ-DIEZ is still using the ephemeral nature of light to transform colour into an event.

Words
ANNA SANSOM

Portraits
VALENTIN FOUGERAY

Do
You
See
What
I See?





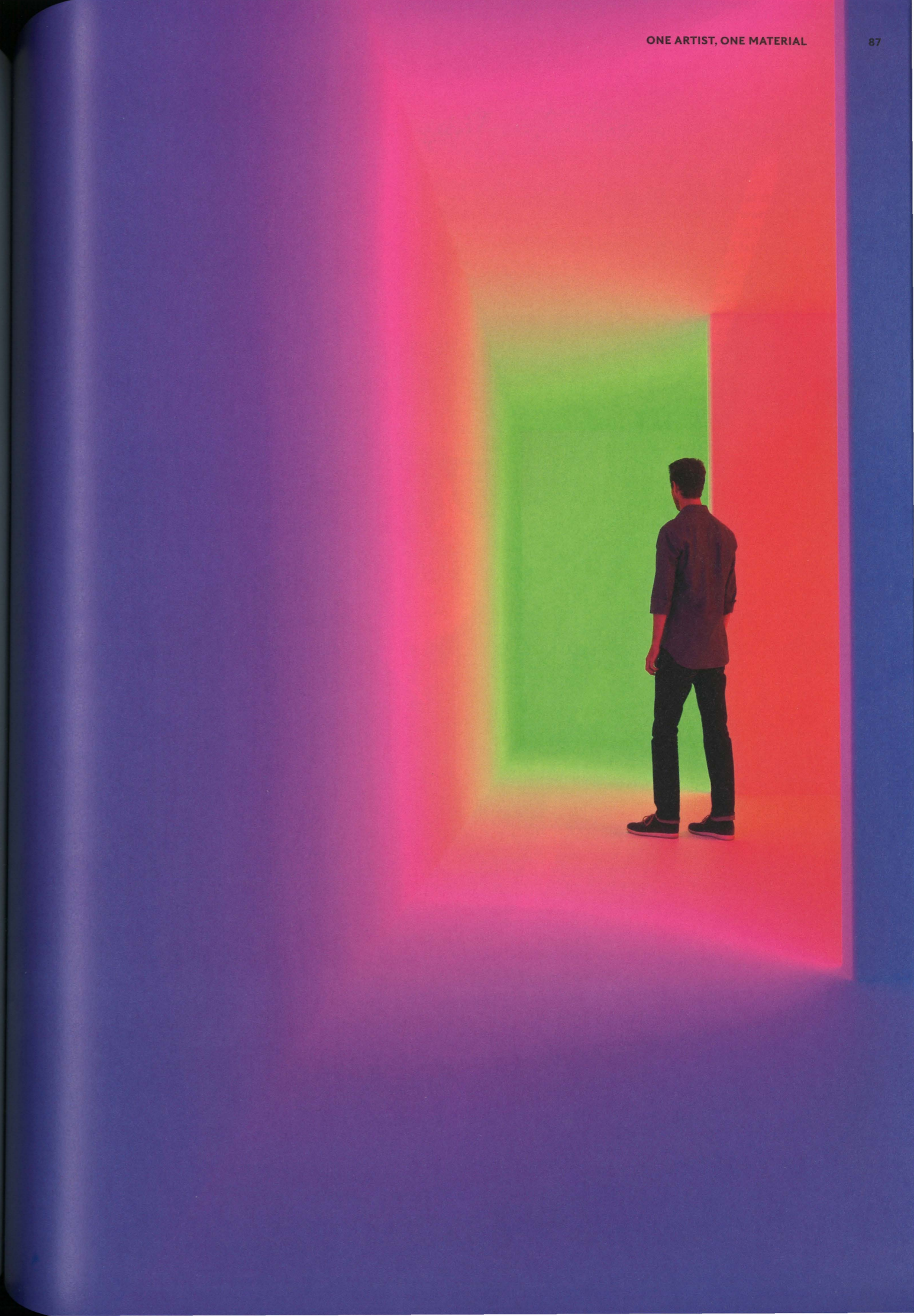
Chromosaturación, 1965/2017 was part of both *All is Motion*, an exhibition at Museo Würth La Rioja in Agoncillo, Spain, that closed in April 2018 (above) and *Kinesthesia: Latin American Kinetic Art, 1954-1969*, a 2017 exhibition at Palm Springs Art Museum (right).

CARLOS

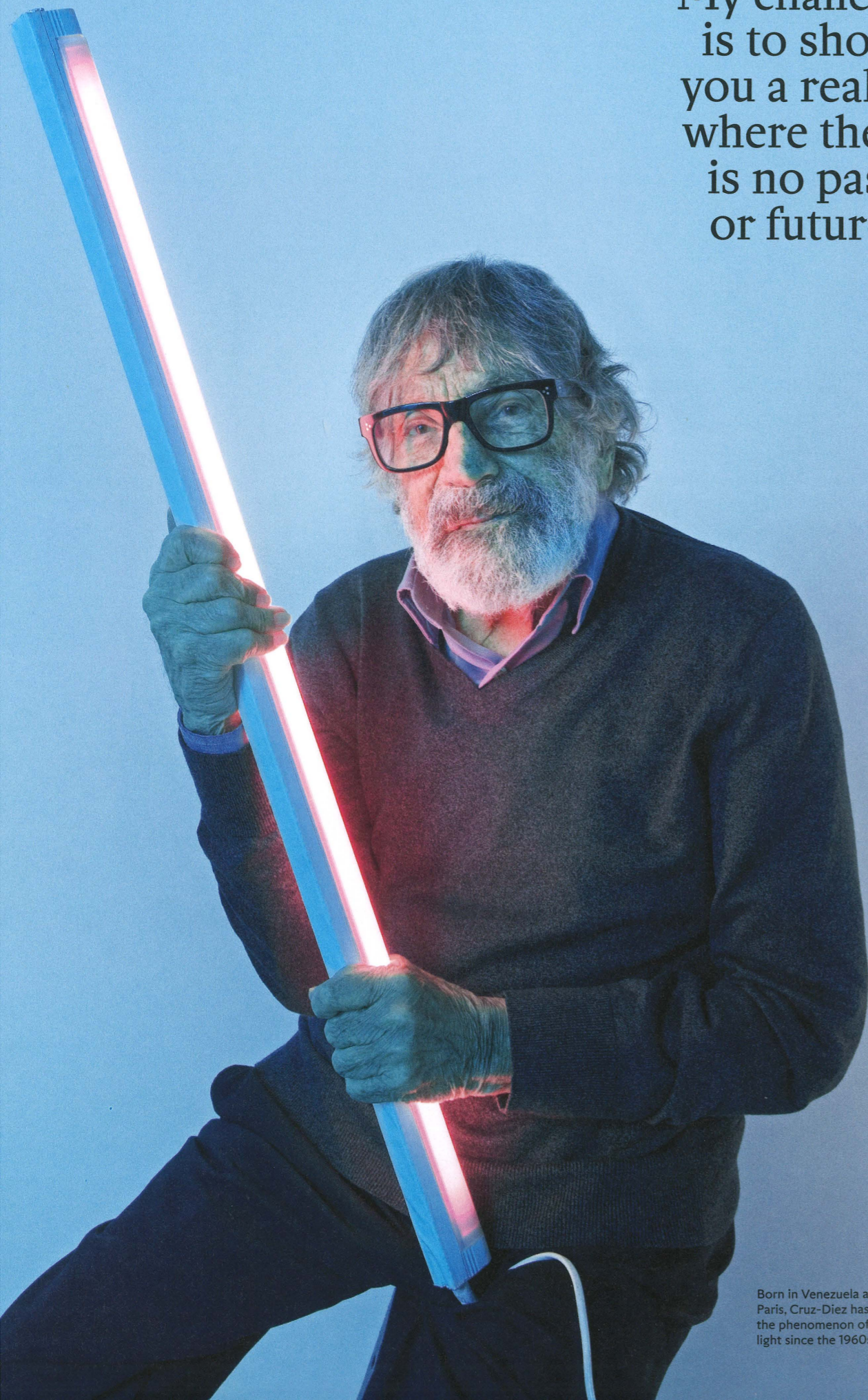
CARLOS CRUZ-DIEZ is often associated with the kinetic-art movement, owing to the sense of motion in his installations and intriguing *Physichromies*. Yet this classification belies the 94-year-old artist's singular objective: to transform our experience of colour into a participative event that is dependent on changing light. Born in Venezuela and now living in Paris, he expresses this philosophy – which has underscored his work since the 1960s – through *Chromosaturación*, a series of spatial installations bathed in colour. The artist's children established the Cruz-Diez Art Foundation (hosted by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) and the city of Caracas in Venezuela named a museum after him: Museo de la Estampa y del Diseño Carlos Cruz-Diez.

Your *Chromosaturación* installations are about bringing art into the public space and exploring the phenomenon of colour through light. What inspired you?
CARLOS CRUZ-DIEZ: The Bauhaus talked about the integration of art into everyday life – and especially in architecture – but nobody had gone through with it until architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva designed the Ciudad Universitaria in Caracas [the main campus of the Central University of Venezuela, built between 1940 and 1960]. This inspired me, because I believe that art is about social engagement – that artists work for people.

Everywhere, art was exhausted; everybody was doing the same painting, whether it be abstract, philosophical or lyrical. When I came to Paris in 1955 to see the »



‘My challenge is to show you a reality where there is no past or future’



Born in Venezuela and now living in Paris, Cruz-Diez has been exploring the phenomenon of colour through light since the 1960s.

Salon de Mai exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne, I thought it could have been a solo show because the paintings all looked alike. I realized that I needed to find new ways to integrate elements into my work – ideas outside the domain of painting – and I focused on colour, because it was neglected by artists. It was considered anecdotal and decorative. I thought that working with colour could lead to meaningful experiences, like how an August sunset in Venezuela can turn everything orange for a few seconds. Colour is not something to be applied to a surface with a brush; it needs to be brought into the space. It took me many years of experience, research and failure to create works such as the *Chromosaturations* installations, which allow light to evolve like an event.

The first time you presented a *Chromosaturations* was in Grenoble in 1968, followed closely by the Odéon crossroads in Paris. How has the public's response to your work changed? Because people didn't encounter any drawings or objects in Grenoble, only

a coloured empty space, they thought there was nothing to see. Then the City of Paris invited me to exhibit a *Chromosaturations* wherever I wanted. I chose the Odéon crossroads because people from diverse social backgrounds circulated there. But visitors who took part in a survey said it was a bourgeois experience and an elitist manipulation of the environment.

I've made 134 *Chromosaturations* so far. Today, people understand that something is happening – a discourse that reveals a space materialized by colour – and they stay to discover the piece. They realize that it's a participative event rather than something more contemplative, like a painting.

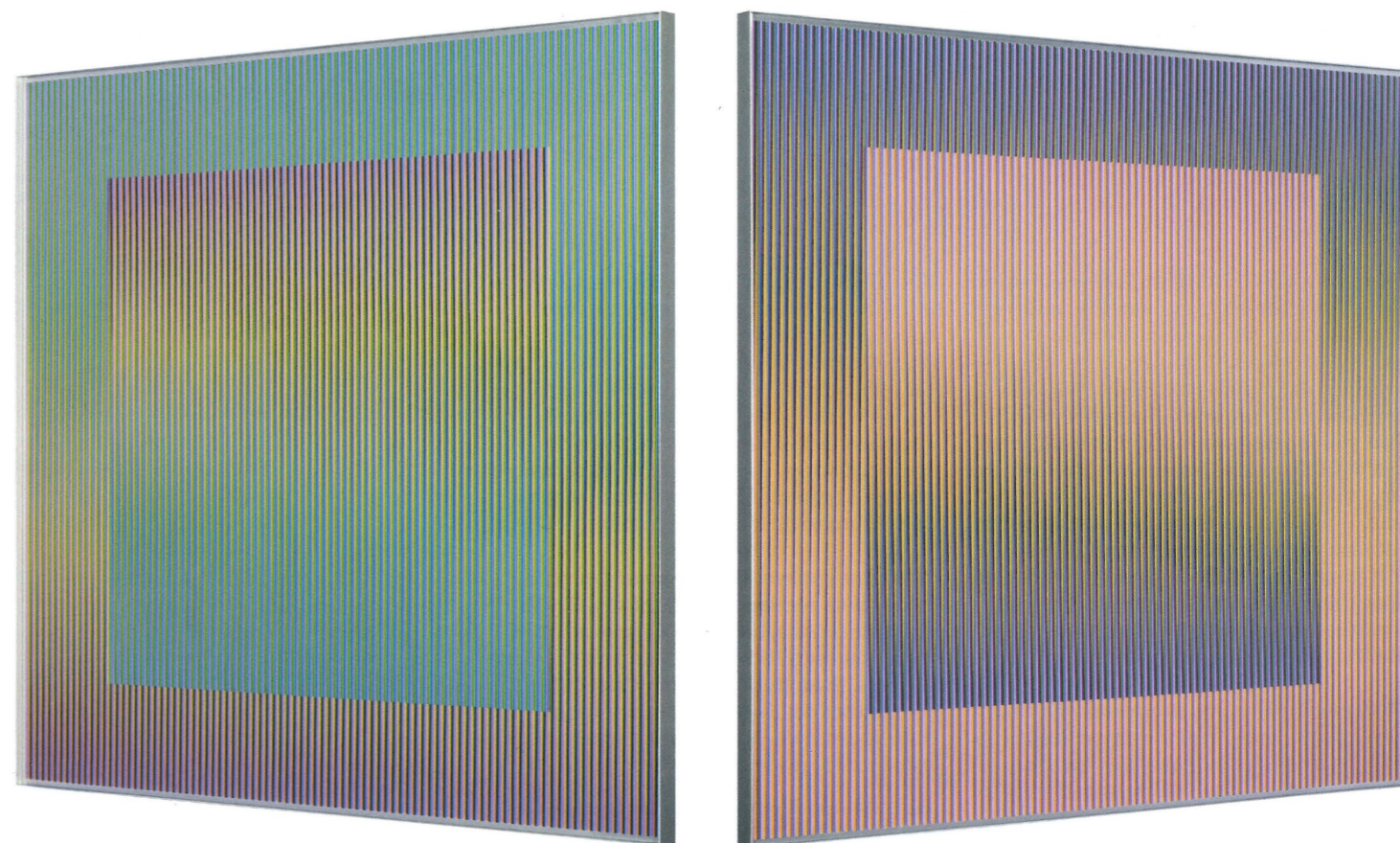
How do you approach the site-specificity of a *Chromosaturations*? Every solution is different, because every location is unpredictable. First, I study the space to see what colouration it already possesses. The answer lies in creating a harmonious relationship between the integrated work of art and its context and in having it be coherent

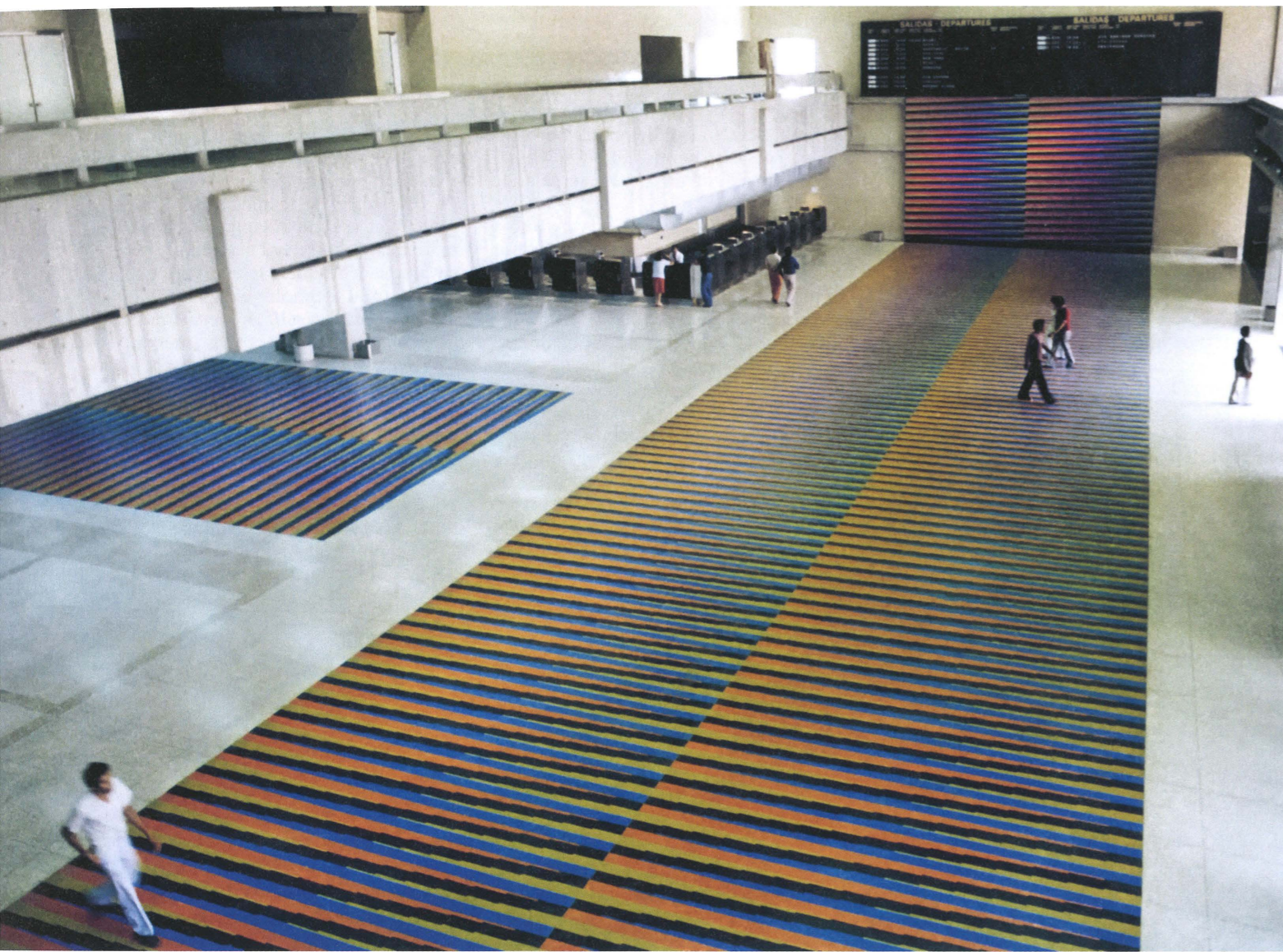
with the whole environment. All my works change in relation to the light and the time of day. I try to make the situation as legible as possible so that colour can be perceived in time and space.

How have technological developments changed your way of working? Initially, I tried using electric light bulbs. Later I switched to a type of lamp that offered more nuances. Today I use LEDs. I've always been attentive to everything that industry and technology can offer to allow me to express myself. The result, not the materials, is what catches my interest. When I started, everything was in my head. Only after weeks of work could I see whether the result was satisfying. Now, thanks to the computer, I can more or less see what the final result will be in advance.

What have you learned during your many decades of working with colour? Dealing with colour inevitably leads to surprises because of the impact of light. Even if I can »

Cruz-Diez has produced a sizable series of *Physichromies*, structures whose colours appear to change in response to the position of the viewer and the level of surrounding light. *Physichromie 1858* is pictured.





Atelier Cruz-Diez Paris © ADAGP, Paris, 2018

'Additive Color Environment has become a symbol of the Venezuelan diaspora,' says Cruz-Diez of the 1974 work he made for Simón Bolívar International Airport.

anticipate what will happen, I always discover new information. Take the *Psychromie* on the wall behind me, for instance. How you perceive its colours depends on your movements and the surrounding light – the way the light strikes the work alters everything. What you see from your position is different from what I perceive from mine. My challenge is to show you a reality that has no past or future – a piece that exists in a perpetual present. One of the fundamental conditions of art is to provoke astonishment. My works are about triggering something that's different from what you experience when viewing a traditional painting.

Which work makes you proudest? *Additive Color Environment* [1974] – in the main hall of Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía, Venezuela – has become a symbol of the Venezuelan diaspora. Every day thousands of people are photographed as they move along the colourful walkway or make selfies that include the architectural interven-

tion. Young people dedicate letters and poems to the piece. It has become an extraordinary reference of identity. I observe with sorrow the young talents that leave the country and the photographs of their farewells – with my work as a backdrop – as witnessed by countless messages and photographs on social networks. I only hope that these images prompt a reunion in the near future, when they return to their beloved country.

What are you working on now? I have exhibitions coming up in Germany, Russia and France. As artist Marcel Duchamp said, 'What's most difficult for an artist is the first 75 years.' [Laughs.] During my career, I've contributed art to planes, boats – even a high-speed train. Now there's a much wider audience for my work than ever before. ●

You can see a site-specific intervention by Carlos Cruz-Diez at The Other Trans-Atlantic, open until 9 May 2018 at Moscow's Garage Museum of Contemporary Art cruz-diez.com



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