

Media Release

October 2015

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Biography: Robert Irwin

Born in 1928 in Long Beach, Calif., Robert Irwin lives and works in San Diego. With a career spanning more than half a century, he has been recognized as a leading figure in California Light and Space art, as well as one of the driving forces behind an expansion of the definition of art that has moved it away from the production of discrete objects and into the arena of experience and perception.

Between 1948 and 1954, Irwin attended Otis Art Institute, Jepson Art Institute and Chouinard Art Institute, all in Los Angeles. In the late 1950s he joined the Ferus Gallery, which represented a stable of pioneering Los Angeles artists. At this point, Irwin was a painter under the influence of abstract expressionism. Over the following decade he undertook an inquiry into the nature and purpose of art that led him to experiment in a variety of media and ultimately to cease being primarily engaged in “the making of things.”

In 1970 Irwin abandoned a traditional, object-based studio practice and instead made himself “available in response” to anyone who wished to engage him in dialogue or to invite him to create new work. He toured the country, speaking and producing artworks at venues large and small, in contexts formal and casual. He began producing what he later termed “site-conditioned” works, which he conceived in response to the particulars of a given site.

Over the past 40 years, Irwin has created more than 50 site-conditioned projects, ranging from the Central Garden at the [Getty Center](#) in Los Angeles and the master plan and landscape design for [Dia:Beacon](#) in Beacon, N.Y., to major works at the [Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego](#) and the [Walker Art Center](#) in Minneapolis. A large-scale project for the [Chinati Foundation](#) in Marfa, Texas, is scheduled to be completed in 2016.

Irwin’s work is in the collections of numerous museums, including the [Museum of Modern Art](#) in New York; the [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#); the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#) in New York; the [Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles](#); the [Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego](#); the [Walker Art Center](#); the [Centre Georges Pompidou](#) in Paris; and the [Hirshhorn](#).

In March 1984 Irwin became one of the first visual artists to receive the MacArthur Foundation’s “genius” grant. Irwin is also the recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship and the Thomas Jefferson Foundation Medal in Architecture.