ALMINE RECH

Penumbra
Dia Art Foundation

Mar 28 — Aug 2, 2026 | Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires, Argentina

'Penumbra' takes its title from the zone of partial shadow that exists between illumination and darkness—a threshold condition in which light is neither fully present nor fully withdrawn. A word and a concept that is nearly identical in over a dozen languages, penumbra names a space of perceptual uncertainty, hesitation, and suspension, where form loosens, edges blur and meaning resists completion. Within this conceptual framework, a selection of works from Dia's collection by Walter De Maria, Félix González-Torres, Tehching Hsieh, Robert Irwin, Agnes Martin, Richard Serra, James Turrell, and Andy Warhol reflect key aspects of Dia's history and mission, foregrounding conceptual and minimalist practices of the 1960s and 1970s and tracing their ongoing resonance into the present.

The works assembled in this exhibition approach light not as a vehicle of revelation or transcendence, but as a contingent force—one that is shaped, obstructed, absorbed, or diffused by bodies, materials, and spatial conditions. On view from March 27 to August 3, 2026, 'Penumbra' marks the second collaboration between Dia Art Foundation and PROA, following the presentation of works by Dan Flavin in 1998, and continues a shared commitment to sustained, site-sensitive encounters with art.

Across postwar and contemporary practice, light has frequently functioned as a metaphor for clarity, immateriality, and access. 'Penumbra' instead attends to light's limits: to moments when illumination is interrupted, when visibility is slowed or destabilized, and when form emerges not through disclosure but through attenuation. In this context, light and shadow operate as reciprocal, active forces rather than oppositional terms, shaping perception through withholding as much as through presence.

Andy Warhol's silkscreened-paintings Shadows (1978–79) anchors this inquiry through repetition and seriality, presenting shadow as both subject and surface. Visually removed from any discernible source photograph, the shadows appear as autonomous images—simultaneously graphic and indeterminate—oscillating between abstraction and representation. Their rhythmic sequence and chromatic variation deny a stable point of view, situating the viewer within a field of visual fluctuation rather than narrative coherence, which is further reinforced by Warhol's concept to allow the paintings to be hung in any sequence.

James Turrell and Robert Irwin further complicate perception by working directly with light as a spatial and temporal medium. Turrell's installations generate environments in which light appears tangible. Catso Blue (1967/87), produced as part of the artist's Cross Corner Projections series, collapses distinctions between surface and volume and demands viewers to suspend conventional depth cues. Irwin's investigations into conditions of "light and unlight"— Untitled (1965-67), Blue Jay (2018), and Pacific Jazz (2010), similarly engage states of reduced visibility, activating peripheral vision and heightening awareness of duration and bodily presence. In both practices, perception unfolds gradually, contingent upon time, movement, and attention.

Agnes Martin's acrylic on canvas paintings from the Innocent Love series introduce a quieter, more introspective register of penumbra. Her finely calibrated grids and subtle tonal modulations operate at the edge of visibility, where structure approaches dissolution and repetition becomes meditative. Martin's work demands sustained, disciplined looking, proposing an ethics of attention grounded in restraint and sensitivity rather than immediacy or spectacle.

Material weight and gravitational force enter the exhibition through works by Walter De Maria, Richard Serra, and John Chamberlain. De Maria's Hardcore (1969) translates endurance, sound, and minimal action into a cinematic experience that confronts the viewer with time as both physical and opaque. Serra's torque ellipse maquettes (1994-1998) register shadow as an effect of mass and curvature, where form asserts itself through pressure, rotation, and resistance. These maquettes, manually produced by Serra, are studies for and accompany the monumental steel sculptures that the artist realized at an architectural scale on view at Dia Beacon since 2003. Chamberlain's compressed steel sculptures absorb and fracture light, producing dense, chromatic shadows that oscillate between violence and lyricism, collapse and exuberance. The artist's gesture of compressing car parts is formally translated to his mineral-coated translucent resin sculptures, which refract and scatter a multi-hued spectrum of light.

The exhibition's engagement with penumbra extends beyond material and perceptual concerns to include duration, exposure, and withdrawal. Tehching Hsieh's Exposure (1973/2016), presented on film, documents a performance in which photographic paper is subjected to prolonged exposure, foregrounding time, process, and the irreversible effects of light. Félix González-Torres's Untitled (Loverboy) (1989), an instruction piece realized as a translucent blue curtain installed over the institution's windows in which it's installed, subtly filters incoming light, transforming architecture into an instrument of attenuation and proposing opacity as both a visual and ethical condition.

Taken together, the works in 'Penumbra' articulate a shared commitment to what remains unresolved—visually, spatially, and conceptually. Rather than framing shadow as a deficiency, the exhibition proposes penumbra as a productive state: one in which perception is sharpened through indeterminacy and meaning emerges through restraint. In an era increasingly shaped by demands for transparency, immediacy, and total visibility, Penumbra insists on the value of partial light, delayed perception, and the enduring presence of shadow.