

CRITICS' PICKS

New York

Lauretta Vinciarelli

TOTAH

183 Stanton Street

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Light can be terribly cruel. Excessive amounts can damage eyes and burn skin. Think of José Saramago's *Blindness* (1995), a story about a bright-white sightlessness that inexplicably afflicts an entire city, causing violence and horror. Or the Old Testament God: an incandescence who was severe and punishing.

One could easily assume the light depicted in Lauretta Vinciarelli's numinous watercolor paintings is healing and warm. The architect and artist—who died of cancer on August 2, 2011, her sixty-eighth birthday—studied Eastern philosophy and was especially devoted to the eleventh chapter of the *Tao Te Ching*, which discusses the importance of nothingness. Indeed, the rooms and spaces in Vinciarelli's works are empty, save for her various streams of light. But this luminousness is circumspect. It rarely suffuses. It peeks around corners and walls from unknown sources and pours itself carefully out of windows, doorways, and skylights. It is controlled, discriminating—a radiance refusing to illuminate all.

For ten years, the artist and Donald Judd were romantic partners. The cube-like forms of Vinciarelli's *Pond Water (Study 1)* and *(Study 2)*, both from 2007, overlap formally with Judd's stack sculptures. But her exquisite renderings, in moody gradations of emerald, are funereal, spectral—dark sisters to Judd's polite and businesslike objects. The most arresting pieces in Vinciarelli's show are from her 1996 "Night" series. They appear to be pictures of bridges, temples, or cenotaphs—tombs without bodies—subtly lit and mirrored from below as if by pools of water. Their symmetry and clean lines pull from the vocabulary of modernism, but their spirit is rooted in something far more unknowable, and much older. Maybe they're structures of the underworld as imagined by the ancient Greeks, built by the damned, to welcome us ruefully at the end of this long and tiresome journey.



Lauretta Vinciarelli, *Night Nine*, 1996, watercolor on paper, 30 x 22". From the "Night" series, 1996.

— Alex Jovanovich