

Billy Apple®
Rainbows
1965



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**THE
MAYOR
GALLERY**

18 May–27 July 2022

Billy Apple, *Rainbow 10*,
1964–65, colour transparency,
(photo: Richard Polson),
Billy Apple® Archive



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Colophon

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On the occasion of the exhibition:
Billy Apple® Rainbows 1965
18 May–27 July 2022

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**THE
MAYOR
GALLERY**



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Billy Apple with 360°
Rainbow at the Chelsea
Hotel, New York, 1965,
colour transparency,
photographer
Richard Polson,
Billy Apple® Archive.



Foreword

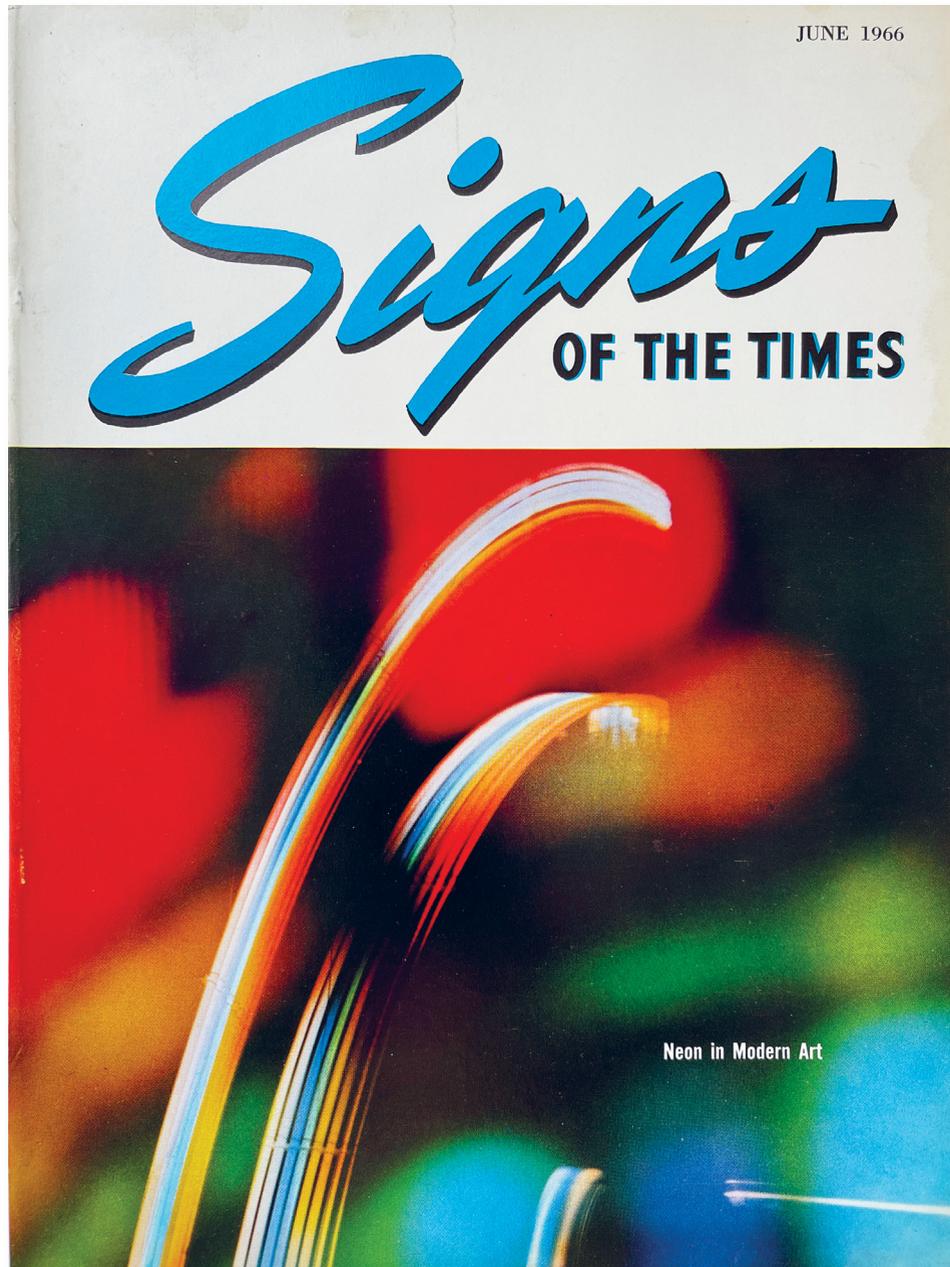
Hans Ulrich Obrist

“I would encourage people to think harder and develop their imagination. The sky is the limit at that point.” This is how Billy Apple concluded our final conversation. These words ring true when considering the many inventions, collaborations, and approaches to art Apple worked on throughout his trajectory.

When I first started working at the Serpentine Galleries in London, I came across Apple’s work in my archival research of the gallery’s exhibition history. His 1974 survey show, *From Barrie Bates to Billy Apple 1960-74*, presented the artist and his journey of creating himself as a brand. His interest in branding and marketing allowed him as a conceptual and pop artist to develop his work with what he described as a ‘hands off, head on approach.’ When we spoke about the conceptualisation of himself as his own personal brand, he told me about the day he formulated his epiphany to Richard Smith, on Thursday, 22 November 1962: “I’m going to proceed with the notion of branding. I could be the subject matter of the future. It has nothing to do with the landscape or anything else. I could be self-contained in a windowless room and carry on.” And that’s what happened. I became Billy Apple. And I made a series of works as visual aids to support the name change, for instance casting an apple and painting it in automotive paint, red or green. They became the paramount colours for the brand.”

Yet Apple’s understanding of the possibilities of art and himself as an artist reached beyond the brand of Billy Apple. He understood the importance of traversing disciplines, and has collaborated with people from many different fields, often reflecting his scientific interests. His ability to think harder – especially about the necessity of sustaining himself as an artist – led him to create *Promissory Notes: IOU* (1984–2018), which within the work itself declared the negotiated terms between artist and collector, building on the history of promissory notes, as well as seemingly anticipating the role of the blockchain in today’s art market.

Apple’s visionary approach to going beyond the confines of the artworld shows that within art, the sky truly is the limit.



Cover of *Signs of the Times*, June 1966 [showing Billy Apple's *Double Arc*, 1965] (photo: Maria Martel)

“The Rainbow Master”

Christina Barton

The impressionists struggled to depict in dabs of oils the natural light that bounced off haystacks into their eyes. Tomorrow’s artists may ladle their color, at 60 cycles per second, right out of the rainbow.¹

Rainbows 1965 is a reprise of the exhibition Billy Apple (1935–2021) held at Bianchini Gallery in New York in November 1965, the first of several ‘light art’ shows he staged and contributed to between 1965 and 1972. All three floor-based neon sculptures in The Mayor Gallery have not been seen since then. Unpacked, checked, cleaned and rewired, these works are as fresh as the day they were made. They are brought together with three Plexiglas sculptures and Apple’s *Rainbow* serigraph, all of which were included in the Bianchini exhibition. Though not the complete list of works in the original presentation, these are the sculptures that survived and have remained in the artist’s possession. The idea to present these works was the artist’s. Conceived as the second year of the pandemic wrought its havoc around the world, he wanted to make a show that was upbeat and positive. Apple died after a short illness on 6 September 2021. This show is delivered posthumously on his instructions, with the same ambition to celebrate life.

In 1965 the rainbow had not acquired its contemporary connotations with either hippy counterculture or gay pride, let alone the spectrum of gender, racial and ethnic identifications we attach to it today. It was, of course, a recognisable motif, one that had been taken up in the 1960s by anti-war protesters as a symbol for peace, and had found its way into advertisements, fashion, and popular music. A readymade symbol, it was sufficiently familiar for contemporary artists to want to appropriate it, as they turned away from the abstract vocabulary of expressionism, in search of a palette and

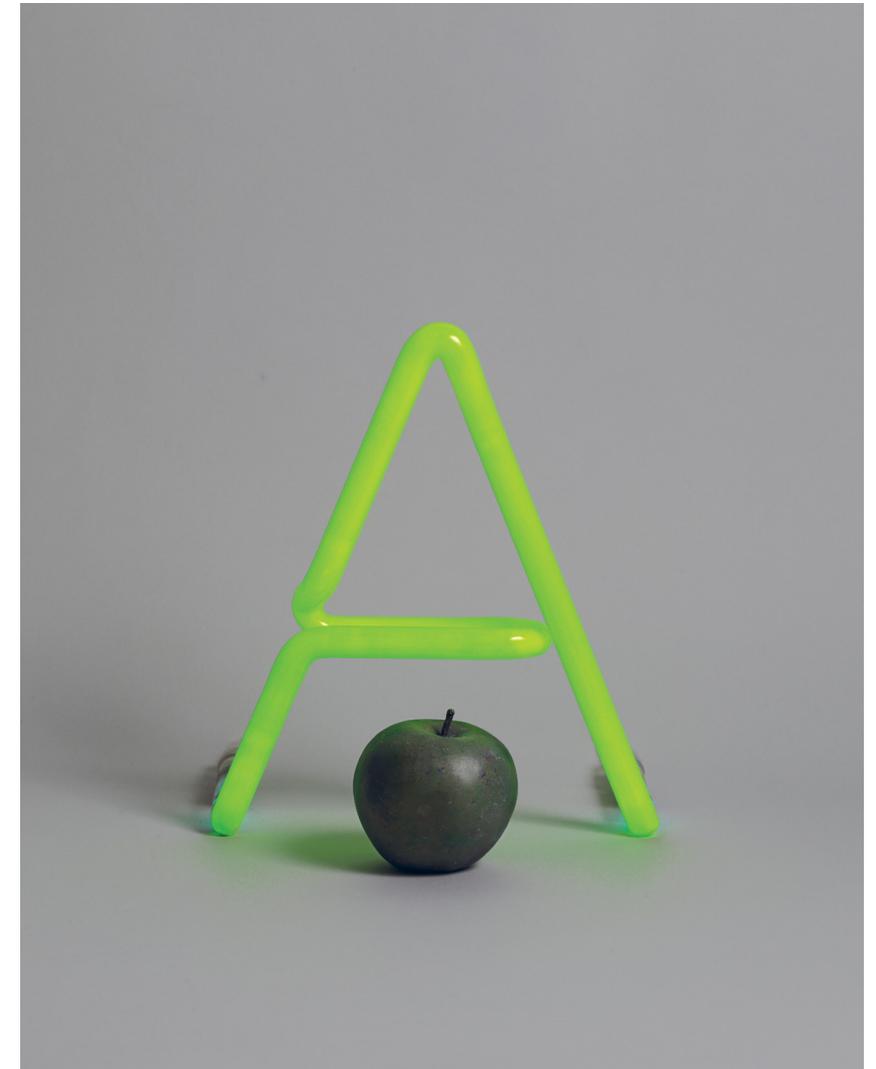
¹ “Sculpture: A Times Square of the Mind,” *Time* magazine, 18 March 1966, p. 100.

a form that was instantly recognisable, on the verge of kitsch. One senses that Billy Apple would have been drawn to the rainbow for these reasons, having fully engaged with the motivations of Pop, which were to revel in the shallow and the everyday. By 1965 he had cast fruit in bronze, purchasing them from the market and delivering them straight to the foundry. He had reworked the Union Jack and other signs of Britishness, and borrowed American advertisements and press photos to reproduce them on canvas through the new process of xerography. As he said at the time, “I come from a generation that is technology oriented and mass media influenced.”²

He had already made use of neon, that light-emitting technology that had transformed the urban landscape through its use in largescale outdoor signage that was the common experience of city living. Indeed, Apple’s first encounter with the medium was in New Zealand in the late 1950s, when he worked in advertising and designed a stylised three-pronged fork with a bent ‘handle’, as a logo for the Bel-Air Restaurant in downtown Auckland. He envisaged this as a white flashing sign that pointed to the restaurant’s name like a strike of forked lightning. And at the Royal College of Art, where he studied graphic design between 1959 and 1962, Apple had appended a red neon ‘tick’ to one photograph repeated to make up a grid of four, seemingly identical, shots of an anonymous ticket officer whose image he found as a lithographic plate in the College’s print department. Added as an arbitrary mark of approval, of the kind a photographer would make when selecting the best image from a proof sheet, Apple’s *Relation of Aesthetic Choice to Life Activity (Function of the Subject)*, 1961–62 (Tate Collection) was his ironic refusal to privilege artistic invention. He also oversaw the production of two bright-green neon ‘A’s. One he placed beside a cast bronze apple, the other he attached to a painted canvas above a printed apple (*A for Apple*, 1962, Philadelphia Museum of Art), as two of several signature pieces in his ‘coming out’ exhibition as the newly named “Billy Apple,” at Victor Musgrave’s Gallery One in April 1963.

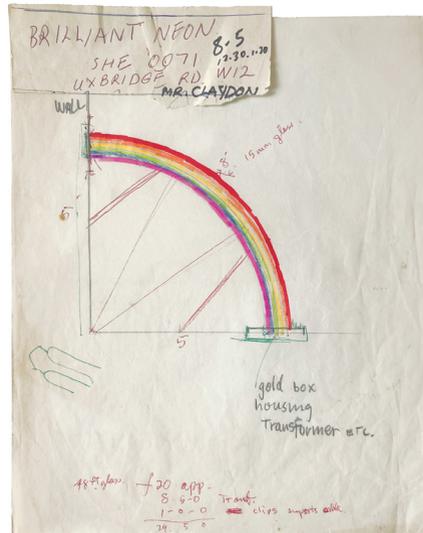
Neon was one of several modern technologies Apple was drawn to as he found ways to marry the contemporary subjects he favoured with modes of delivery that were equally true to the times. Neon signage was a communication tool, a means to say something out loud, in the patois of the street, and bringing it into the gallery must have felt an exciting means to test the boundaries that the traditional art world still had in place. But more than this, the technology relied on physical laws that science had uncovered, and Apple had always been fascinated by the larger systems that governed life as a framework to structure his decision-making.

In particular, he was drawn to colour as a fact of existence that linked phenomenal reality to human perception through the actions and effects of light. Rather than treating colour as an expressive tool, he had always been obsessed with its systematisation, from the time he had worked out a way to standardise mixing tints in a paint factory soon

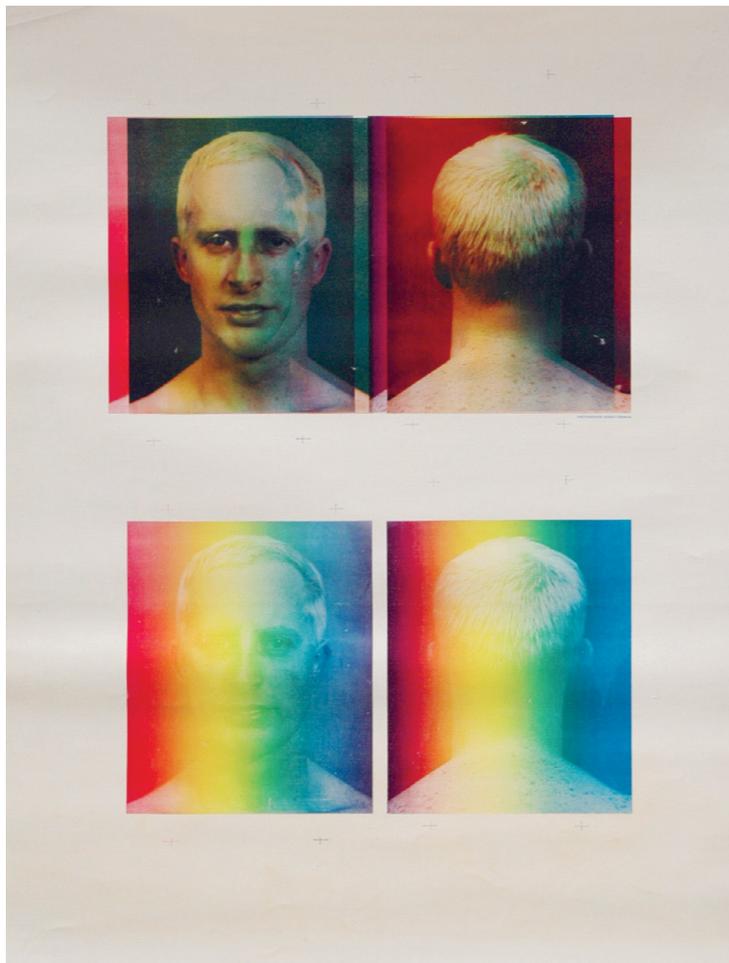


A for Apple, 1962–63, argon gas with mercury vapour, 15 mm coated yellow glass tubing, cast bronze, 243 × 210 × 150 mm, courtesy of The Mayor Gallery, London

² Billy Apple, interviewed by Judson Rosebush III, 1970, unpublished typescript, p. 10, Billy Apple® Archive.



Billy Apple, drawing for rainbow neon sculpture, 1964, Billy Apple® Archive



Rainbow Blend, 1967, (detail) offset lithograph on unstretched canvas, 1220 x 942 mm, Billy Apple® Archive

after leaving high school, to his decision to treat red and green as his signature colours, because of their association with the fruit that shares his name, to his interest in the subtractive colour printing process that combines cyan (C), magenta (M) and yellow (Y) with black (K), to produce full colour reproduction. In these terms, neon signage interested Apple because it was governed by the measured combination of inert gases and an electric current within the confines of a glass tube. He was inevitably intrigued that, by this simple process, pure luminous colour could be produced. As he wrote in 1966:

Neon is the medium in which I have found myself most able to capture the experience of pure alive color, color in its own form (light). The color created by neon is far more vital than is possible in an artificial color medium such as paint. This continually glowing, electrically transmitted color is color that tingles with suspended energy. It gives the sculpture its own existence, its own heartbeat, like a living organism.³

Prior to turning his attention to the rainbow spectrum – or perhaps simultaneously, as the first idea to make rainbow neons occurred to Apple before he left London for New York in mid-1964⁴ – the artist produced split-colour versions of the self-portraits he had made for *Live Stills: Apple Sees Red on Green*, his Gallery One exhibition. For these, he specifically asked his printer to mis-register the separations so the CMYK colours were distinct, leaving off the black so his head shots seemed to hover at the threshold of visibility. There is a logic to Apple's next step. Unpacking the CMYK-colour printing system is strikingly close to what happens to light when it hits a raindrop at precisely 42 degrees. Refracted and reflected through water droplets, light is split into the wavelengths of its constituent colours: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. This is the rainbow's fixed and consistent colour spectrum that is visible to the human eye. It was an easy next step for Apple to apply this system to the production of his first discrete neon sculptures. The rainbow perfectly combined his Pop sensibility with his interest in science, and neon proved the mechanism for him to reproduce a version of the natural phenomenon as an electrified substitute that brought a new intensity and saturation to his colour experiments.

Another key impetus for this new phase in his work was the artist's decision to move permanently to New York (in August 1964). Subletting an apartment on the Bowery for his first year in Manhattan, Apple found himself in the heart of the lighting district in a city that never slept. Here, he was able to access all the equipment he needed and make use of the best technicians in the business. The neon rainbow sculptures

³ Artist's statement for *Kunst-Licht-Kunst*, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1966, typescript, Billy Apple® Archive.

⁴ There are drawings for rainbow neon sculptures in the artist's archive made in 1964 before he left London. These can be dated by the inclusion of an address and telephone number for a neon fabricator in Uxbridge West London. Apple recalls showing these to dealer Robert Fraser. Fraser's lack of interest is cited by the artist as another reason to leave London for New York. Conversation with the artist, August 2021.

Billy Apple holding
Rainbow Waterfall at the
Chelsea Hotel, New
York, 1965, 35mm colour
transparency.
(photo: Richard Polson),
Billy Apple® Archive



he made for his second solo show at Bianchini Gallery consisted of lengths of glass tubing bent and wired together to form varying shapes: a full circle, a chevron, a long arc, and shorter curved sections folded back on themselves so that they were self-supporting. These were pumped with the standard colours available to the neon industry, and arranged according to the natural order of an actual rainbow.

At the same time as he was testing the possibilities of neon light, Apple was quick to utilise other new materials and manufacturing processes then finding their way onto the scene. Less than a year after spending time as artist in residence at the Xerox Corporation to work with the first-generation xerography machines the company was putting into production, Apple found a technician at the American Museum of Natural History who could manipulate Plexiglas to his instructions. He fused and moulded translucent, neon-coloured plastic strips to form rainbow sections, some set into transparent or opaque white moulded plastic shapes resembling waterfalls, which are real-world backdrops where rainbows manifest (in the mist generated by the force of the falling water). He also sought out a new palette of Dayglo printing inks and designed a serigraph rainbow in seven scintillating bands of bright neon colour.

By this stage Apple was using a room at the Chelsea Hotel as his studio. A strip of 35mm-colour transparencies has recently come to light in the artist's archive that shows several of these works set up and illuminated in the small space. This would have been in early November 1965. Apple has related a story about this exact moment that captures well the lure of electric light as a new tool for the artist:

He remembers plugging in one of the sculptures in his room on the evening of 9 November and being alarmed when the hotel was plunged into darkness. Looking outside, he was shocked to see the lights going out block by block all the way to the East River. He, of course, was not the cause; the city and much of the north and east of the US suffered a massive blackout that created havoc for the several hours it took to mend the blown transmitters. If there ever was an occasion for thinking that electric power was the essential resource for contemporary living, the great Northeast Blackout of 1965 was undoubtedly it. With thirty million people affected, electricity would surely, at this moment, have struck Apple as modernity's truly vital medium.⁵

Apple's exhibition opened on 23 November 1965 in Bianchini Gallery's new premises on the eighth floor of the building at 50 West 57th Street. With no external windows in the main gallery, Apple was able to create an immersive environment with the neon sculptures themselves illuminating the space. Here he set out seven neon rainbows across the gallery's floor, then arranged five Plexiglas sculptures on two plinths placed at either end of the room, and on the wall he hung a brilliant Dayglo-coloured serigraph

⁵ Christina Barton, *Billy Apple® Life/Work*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2020, p. 93.

of a semi-circular rainbow. Apple's rainbows were clearly stylised approximations of the natural phenomenon, rendered with entirely artificial means and lacking all the illusionistic or evocative potential of their romantic antecedents. Nevertheless, they accurately canvassed what Apple had learned about his subject, from the correct set out of the colour spectrum, to the full-circle rings that referred to how a rainbow appears when viewed from above (from a plane for example), to the double arcs that were a nod to the naturally occurring double rainbow, even to the fact that a rainbow appears in a waterfall's mist. These were technological doubles rather than imaginative re-creations; a symptom of the shift among contemporary artists towards science and technology as their next field of enquiry after the iconography of consumer society that was Pop.

An unforeseen by-product of Apple's installation in the unlit room was the perceptual effect created by his arrangement. For, when switched on, the neon rainbows' combined colours produced white light, but when their light rays were blocked or interrupted by a visitor, their cast shadow split back into the multi-colour spectrum. Though these works were constructed as stand-alone objects, with porcelain-enamel coated steel bases designed to hold the transformers, when dispersed across the gallery floor, they in fact operated together as a light environment where people walking among the works caused the visual experience to change. This was exactly in step with – in fact a prescient example of – what Jack Burnham would describe in 1968, in his survey, *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, as: “the trend of Light Art to eliminate the specific art object and to transform the environment into a light-modulating system sensitive to responses from organisms which invade its presence.”⁶

Apple's exhibition was noted by several reviewers as a pioneering contribution to the new medium of light art that was beginning to attract attention in the USA and Europe. Robert Pincus-Witten gave the show its most sustained reading in his *Artforum* review in the February 1966 issue. He called Apple “the rainbow master” and described the works as “among the most beautiful that hover over the present scene.”⁷ In a short few hundred words, the critic provided an impressive genealogy for Apple's choice of subject, placing his rainbows in the context of early modern movements like Orphism and neo-Plasticism, and alongside more recent manifestations in works by Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, George Brecht, and Morris Louis. Although he did not dwell on the environmental effects of the light works, he understood Apple's neon sculptures as “impersonations,” aligning Apple with the more down-to-earth tendencies of contemporary art rather than the mysticism of earlier iterations. Himself a product of the 1960s, Pincus-Witten understood Apple's works as “closest to the real thing that one is likely to encounter in a gallery.” Such cynical realism did not however stop him from expressing his pleasure in the sensuousness and luminosity Apple had achieved,

using a string of colour names to characterise this – “orchid, mauve, cerulean, chartreuse, yellow, tangerine, cherry, ruby” – as if the words themselves conveyed the visual pleasure they induced.

Clearly Apple's *Rainbows* hit a mark, for he was quickly invited to present his work in several group exhibitions around America and in Europe.⁸ Indeed, the earliest sculpture in the Bianchini show, *Apple at the End of the Rainbow* (1962/64, private collection) had already been included in *Current Art*, one of the first surveys of light art to be undertaken in the USA, a show organised by Samuel A. Green for the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia that opened in March 1965. This same work was later presented in *Art Turned On* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (December 1965 – January 1966) and it was illustrated in several of the articles and news items that these shows generated. With its combination of bronze apple and arching neon rainbow, this work was the only one to link with Apple's earlier exhibitions, serving as a tongue-in-cheek self-portrait as the proverbial ‘pot of gold’ at the end of the rainbow. The others made no such allusions to the artist, signalling his subtle shift towards newer concerns with colour systems and the technologies and materials that could deliver them.

After the Bianchini show Apple embarked on an ambitious new body of work, which would see him present fully three-dimensional suspended neon sculptures that took the form of recognisable motifs such as a rocket, kite, Catherine wheel, arrow, and teardrop. These would be shown over the following two years, first in a truncated presentation at the Pepsi Cola Exhibition Gallery on Park Avenue in 1966, then at the Howard Wise Gallery in 1967.⁹ While technically challenging for the fabricators and electricians who assisted him, perhaps the most interesting aspect of these works was Apple's testing of the colour range he could achieve through a thoroughgoing exploration of the elements that went into producing neon. It is this aspect of his work that places him as a true innovator, for by mixing gases, combining coated and uncoated glass, adjusting the electrical current and the tube's diameter, he was able to generate a vastly expanded palette of colour effects. Judson Rosebush III, in an unpublished interview with the artist in 1970, lists some of the two hundred colours Apple maintained he had created: “Hot Orange, Lemon Yellow, Apple Green, Mint Green, Purple, Violet, Bronze, Forest Green, Bromo Blue, and a host of reds, oranges and purples...”¹⁰ Such results led Apple to be recognised – in the words of Jack Burnham – as a “lyrical user of neon with a very personal sense of color.”¹¹ And at least one of his colours – Apple Green – is still being used commercially, a practical outcome that proves the reciprocity of Apple's relations with the industry.¹²

⁶ Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of this Century*, George Braziller, New York, 1968, p. 285.

⁷ Robert Pincus-Witten, “New York: Billy Apple,” *Artforum*, vol. 4, no. 6, February 1966, p. 57.

⁸ See the catalogue of works for more details of where and when the works were shown.

⁹ Apple's two shows were titled *Neons* and *U.F.O's* (Unidentified Fluorescent Objects). For a fuller discussion of these exhibitions see Christina Barton, *Billy Apple® Life/Work*, ibid., pp. 94–101.

¹⁰ Billy Apple in Judson Rosebush III, 1970, op. cit., p. 4.

¹¹ Burnham, ibid., p. 307.

¹² This fact is mentioned in Rosebush's interview, ibid., p. 4.

NEON SCULPTURE

Billy Apple

Neon is the medium in which I have found myself most able to capture the experience of pure alive color, color in its own form (light). The color created by neon is far more vital than is possible in an artificial color medium such as paint. This continually glowing, electrically transmitted color is color that tingles with suspended energy. It gives the sculpture its own existence, its own heartbeat, like a living organism.

Simplicity and purity of form adds to the intensity of each piece of sculpture and increases the viewer's color sensitivity, as his eye does not become involved with intricacies of shape and outline. He is left free for the whole sensation. I do not use neon as line or outline to express form, but rather in mass areas, which is essentially a painterly use of a non-painterly medium. In each piece the glass itself becomes the structure, to be viewed from all sides.

Technical and mechanical perfection is important for each piece as it is part of the purity of the form. I use the team system of modern industry, employing the best craftsmen of their respective trades to execute my conceptions. I myself have experimented extensively in creating new colors.

I chose the rainbow for my first major works in neon as it is the natural phenomena of pure color- the breaking up of light. I transferred this fleeting visual experience, as distant and elusive as a dream, into a solid physical creation that is a permanent reality. The rainbow also represents many things to people that are part of fantasies beyond the mundane. The rainbow is a very beautiful and mysterious thing.

The pieces I am presently doing have a greater flexibility, a mobility actually. I have added a twist of humor, and a kind of bright raw freshness. The works are really about youth. The color is even more screaming. I'm working towards greater areas of solid color, and I've become involved in more abstract forms and symbols that relate to motivations in human existence such as youth, war, love, power. The pieces are much larger also. As each piece becomes bigger and more abstract, the need for greater discipline and refining increases. I must be highly selective. It is necessary to do quantities of drawings experimenting with size, proportion, and color relationships before any glassblowing is done. Eventually I would like to do something of monumental size for a public place, so that everyone could enjoy and experience it.

I found I was no longer interested in decoration, in sculpture or objects... I no longer want to build sculpture for a room, I want to do something with a room. I want to light a room. My interest with neon is no longer to build an object with it, but to create an environmental experience.¹³

As an unwanted consequence of the brief but intense flurry of interest in Apple's neon sculptures, the artist was plagued by breakages and delays caused by poor packing and handling and then the time needed for repairs following insurance claims. These were very real reasons why his works dropped out of sight. Despite its ubiquity as signage out in the urban environment, neon was in fact a fragile medium, with the glass tubing easily broken unless the manufacturers' instructions were carefully followed. Though frustrated by the technical challenges of keeping his sculptures safe so they could be seen in different contexts, in fact, as the decade drew to a close, this phase of his work was granted new life. It survived, first, in the continuing circulation of the *Rainbow* serigraph that remained an attractive item in Multiples, Inc.'s catalogue of artist editions through to 1969.¹⁴ And second, the technical process of pumping inert gases, the breakability of the glass tubes, and the real-world functionality of the electrical componentry began to be of interest for the artist's subsequent transition into an ephemeral, process-oriented installation practice.

In 1968, Billy Apple invited his cameraman friend Barry Schein to film the flowing gases in his *Neon Knots* installed in his loft-space cum gallery, APPLE, at 161 West 23rd Street. These were made in 1966 on a residency in Boise, Idaho, where Apple met a fabricator with the skill to take the two ends of a glass tube and to fold them back over each other to make a literal knot. Apple realised that this footage could substitute for the glass artefact. Instead of showing the neon sculptures, he provided viewers with an immersive encounter with pure pulsing colour now projected on film and set to an electronic soundtrack by Nam June Paik.¹⁵ Allied with this was his interest in the even newer technology of laser light, which he experimented with at the end of the decade, and which provided him with real and imagined opportunities to project pure light at scale and produce images that appeared as three-dimensional projections.¹⁶

Gaseous Discharge Phenomena (1968/1971) was one side of the process of dematerialisation Apple's practice underwent as the 1960s turned into the 1970s. The other was his progressive series of temporary installations set out at APPLE. Here, he gradually shifted from constructing discrete sculptural assemblages to laying out a random array of tubes on the floor and lighting them to create a glowing grid.¹⁷

¹³ Billy Apple interview, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁴ Multiples, Inc. was founded in New York in 1965 by Marian Goodman and two partners to sell artist editions. It remained in operation until 1992.

¹⁵ *Gaseous Discharge Phenomena* was presented at APPLE, 161 West 23rd Street, on 16 October 1971.

¹⁶ For a fuller account of Apple's work with laser light see Christina Barton, *Billy Apple® Life/Work*, ibid., pp. 102–105.

¹⁷ Billy Apple, *Neon Floor I-III*, 6–21 December 1969, APPLE, 161 West 23rd Street, New York.

He completed his exploration of neon in a culminating piece called *Inventory* (February 1972), in which he sorted intact and broken tubes, the electrical paraphernalia associated with them, and even the soft packing and boxes they were housed in, and documented the activity as a time-based process piece, before packing everything away, where it remained largely untouched until this exhibition.¹⁸

Despite their relatively brief appearance in his practice, Apple's neon rainbows do not exist in a vacuum. No mere flirtation with a form, subject or technology, these colourful, innovative and upbeat objects, and the images that accompanied them, betray certain fundamental consistencies that can be tracked through Apple's entire career. One was Apple's treatment of an existing motif as a readymade (first the apple, in this case the rainbow) that would be submitted to a thorough and systematic deconstruction so that its symbolic associations were identified and repurposed. Here, the rainbow motif was reformulated as a sign and put into circulation as an aesthetic commodity in a system that required exactly this kind of diagnostic materialism. As he put it:

I chose the rainbow for my first major works in neon as it is the natural phenomena [sic] of pure color – the breaking up of light. I transferred this fleeting visual experience, as distant and elusive as a dream, into a solid physical creation that is a permanent reality.¹⁹

This is strikingly consistent with Jack Burnham's conclusions to his chapter dedicated to light as a medium, where he noted the tendency of contemporary artists to treat light as "pure energy and information," an "essence" where all else – metaphysical, spiritual, symbolic connotations – is "dropped by the wayside."²⁰

Another was Apple's fascination for the laws of science that enabled him to suspend artistic decision-making (and the presumptions of expressivity on which this was based), to defer to a colour palette produced by the splitting of light into its constituent wavelengths. Science not only explained the rainbow, but it also gave him the technological tools to reproduce nature's colour spectrum in all its luminous ephemerality. Utilising innovations in the technologies of electric lighting, advances in the production and moulding of coloured plastics, new vivid inks, and the technical proficiencies of skilled fabricators, Apple found ways to transfer immanent reality into thoroughly contemporary models of physical phenomena, to produce art works that spoke unequivocally to the ethos of his era.

Billy Apple, *Inventory*, 1972, argon and neon gases with mercury vapour, glass tubing, electrical wiring, cardboard and wood packaging, installation view, APPLE, 161 West 23rd Street, 35mm colour transparency, Billy Apple® Archive



¹⁸ An exception to this is *Neon Signature*, 1967, which he included in his Serpentine exhibition, *From Barrie Bates to Billy Apple*, in 1974, and the glass tubes and electrical componentry he sent to New Zealand in 1975, which was shown as *Neon Accumulation* at two venues on his first visit since leaving to study at the Royal College of Art in 1959.

¹⁹ Artist's statement for *Kunst-Licht-Kunst*, op. cit.

²⁰ Jack Burnham, op. cit., p. 311.

Billy Apple, Proposal for
Under the Rainbow, 1968
ink on bromide print,
courtesy of The Mayor
Gallery, London



Eventually I would like to do something of monumental size for a public space, so that everyone could enjoy and experience it.²¹

Though Billy Apple's fascination for rainbows did not re-emerge after his Bianchini Gallery exhibition in 1965 and only survived in the ripple effects that saw his sculptures and prints entering into wider circulation, there is a period in the late 1960s when the artist envisaged large-scale outdoor works that might be realised with broken glass, neon tubing, search lights, and laser beams. One such work is a proposal for a giant neon rainbow for HemisFair, the World Fair held in San Antonio Texas in 1968. This hugely ambitious event, one of a long line of international expositions where nations and corporations could show themselves and their wares, was grandly titled "The Confluence of Civilisations in the Americas," and coincided with the 250th anniversary of the city's founding. For this, thirty national and fifteen corporate pavilions were spread over a site on the southeast edge of the central city, which incorporated a river walk along the Paseo del Rio and a small lagoon called Hourglass Lake inside the fair's park. It was this lake that Apple envisaged his neon sculpture would span.

Consisting of seven bundles of coloured glass tubing, with each band of colour made up of three 12mm glass tubes spaced 12mm apart, the sculpture was to be sponsored by the Texas Neon Co. It would have been a massive advertisement for that operation, but also a glowing public spectacle. Apple titled the work, *Under the Rainbow*. Perhaps a rejoinder to Judy Garland's much loved song from *The Wizard of Oz*, this seems in keeping with the artist's preference for all things worldly, tangible and real. It is unclear from the surviving correspondence if this was a plan developed in response to an invitation, or if it was Apple's idea to submit a proposal. Either way, while progressing to the point that Texas Neon's lawyers were in communication with Apple's dealer Howard Wise, the plans never left the drawing board. However, they leave a tantalising trace of Apple's clear affection for the rainbow, that ephemeral demonstration of the laws of nature, which so perfectly delivers a pure and incontrovertible colour system. Usually serving as a sign that the rain is passing and blue skies are coming, the rainbow performs in the artist's lexicon as an upbeat symbol. Even if limited to the hypothetical condition of drawing, this project, like the body of work that preceded it, manages to lift the spirits.²²

²¹ Billy Apple, artists statement for *Kunst-Licht-Kunst*, *ibid.*

²² A serendipitous comparison can be drawn to the coloured steel *Rainbow* by Tony Tasset (born 1960, USA) that was erected in 2012 over the Sony Pictures Entertainment headquarters in Culver City, Southern California. A major public sculpture for the city, it bridges the lots used to film *The Wizard of Oz* in 1930.

Bianchini Gallery, New York, 1965

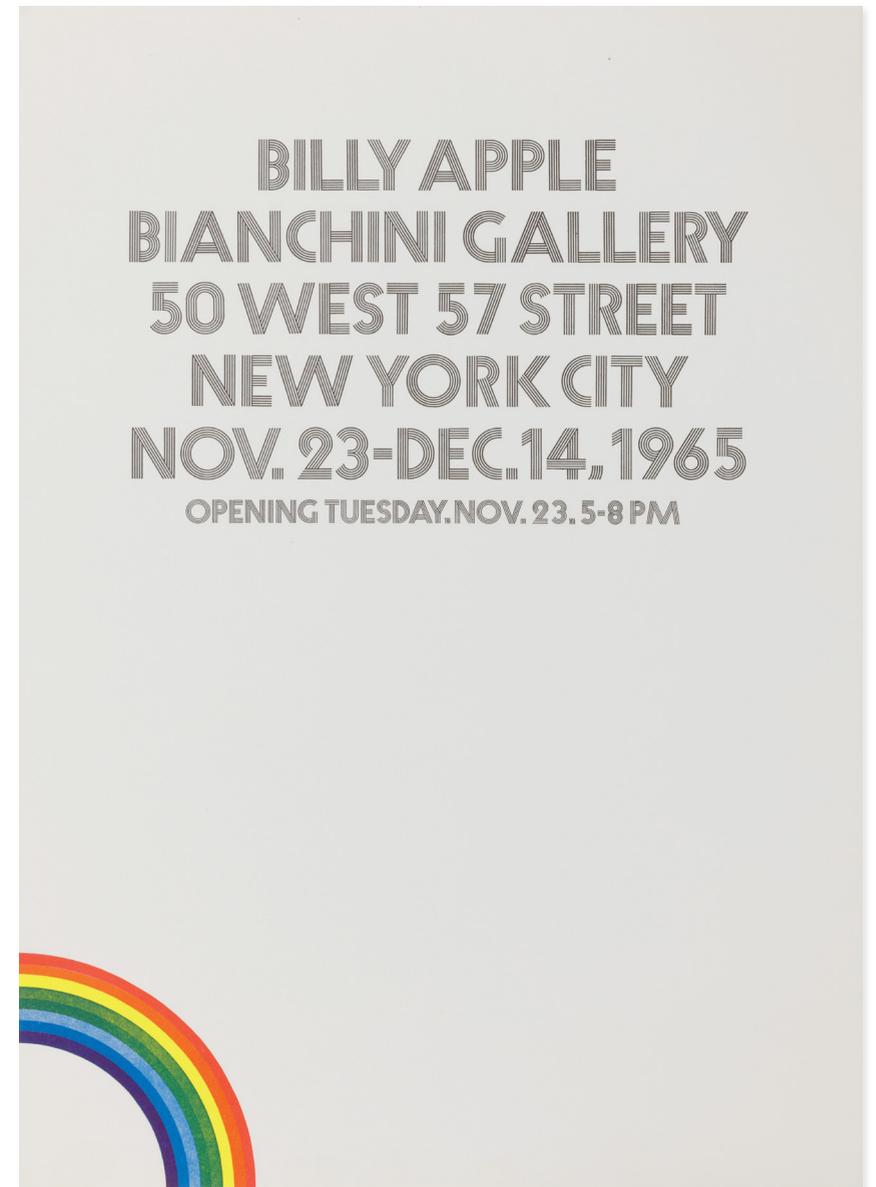
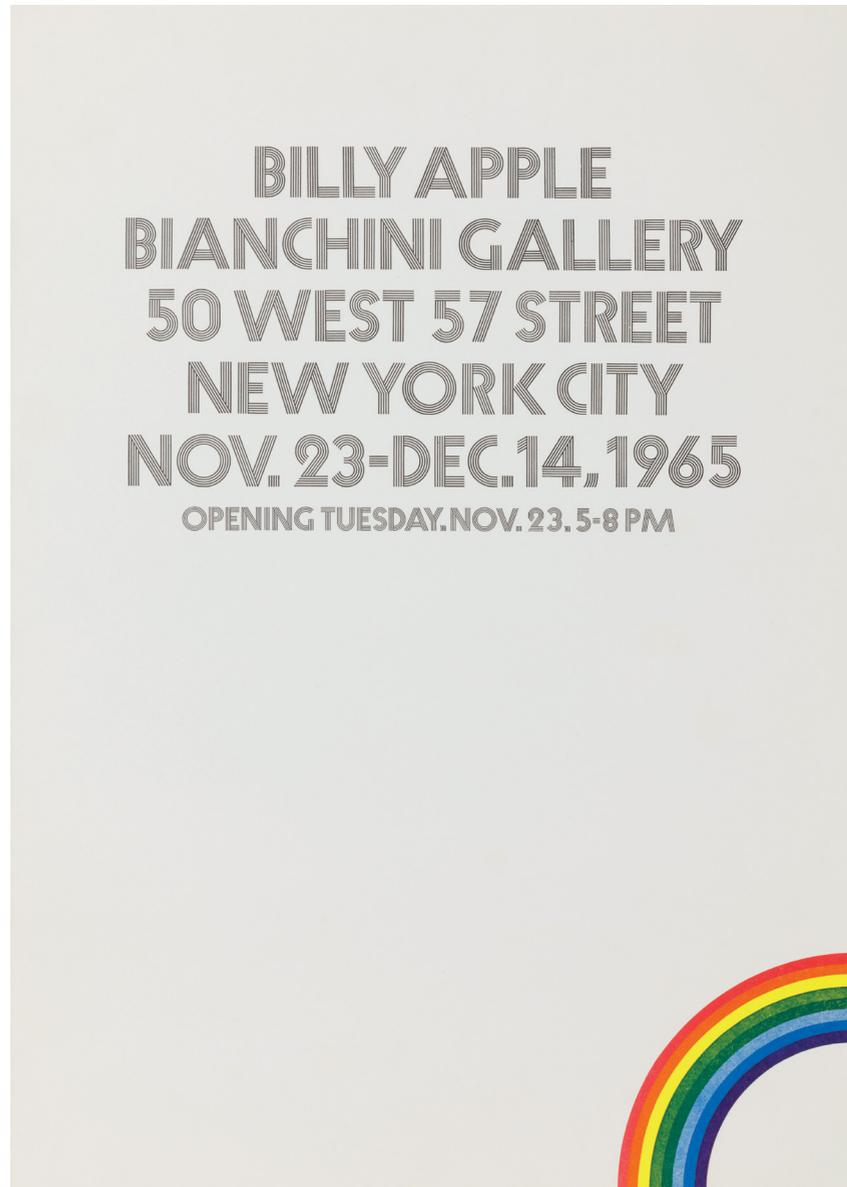


Installation view of *Rainbows* exhibition, Bianchini Gallery, New York, 1965, colour transparency, courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive

Installation view of *Rainbows* exhibition, Bianchini Gallery, New York, 1965, colour transparency, courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive

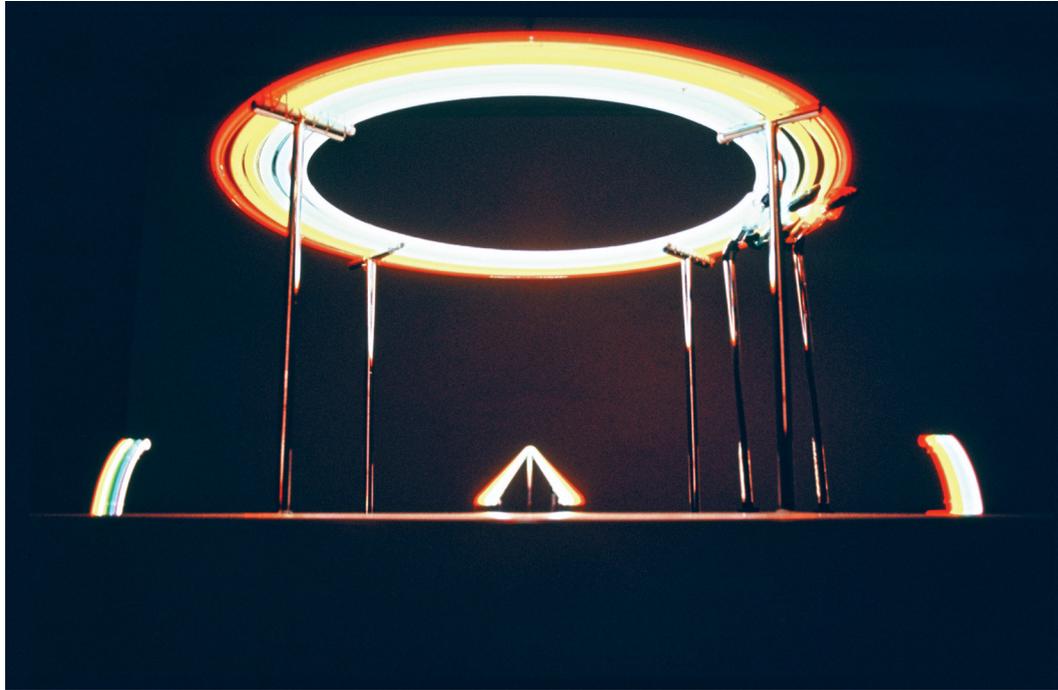
Plates





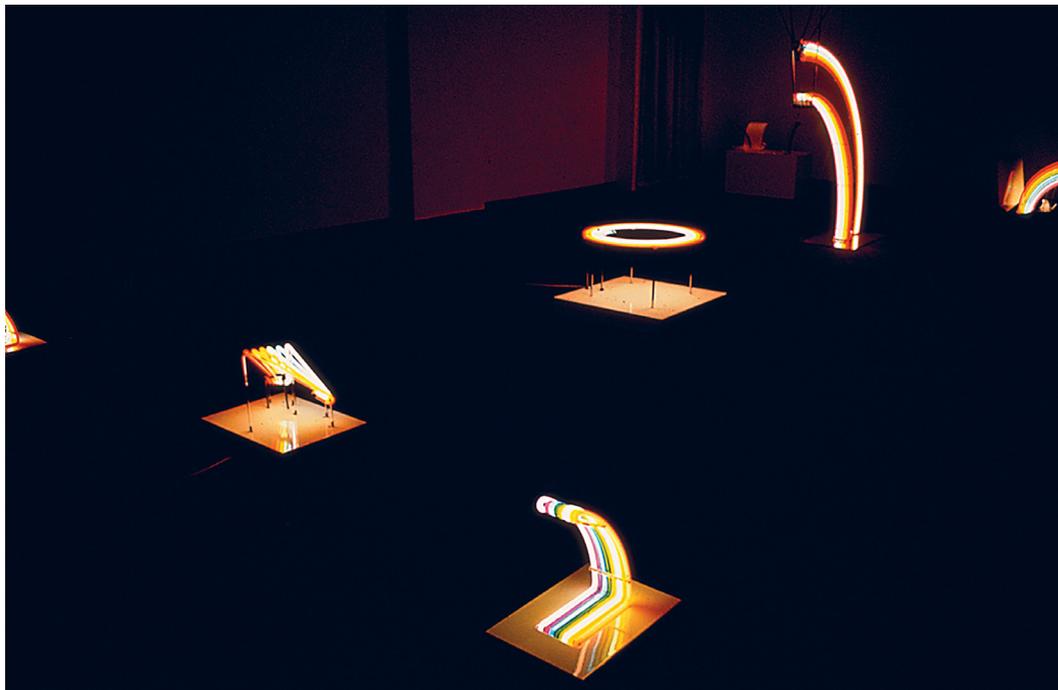


Double Arc
1964–65
Installed at Bianchini Gallery, New York, 1965
Colour transparency courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive (left),
and at The Mayor Gallery, London, 2022 (right)

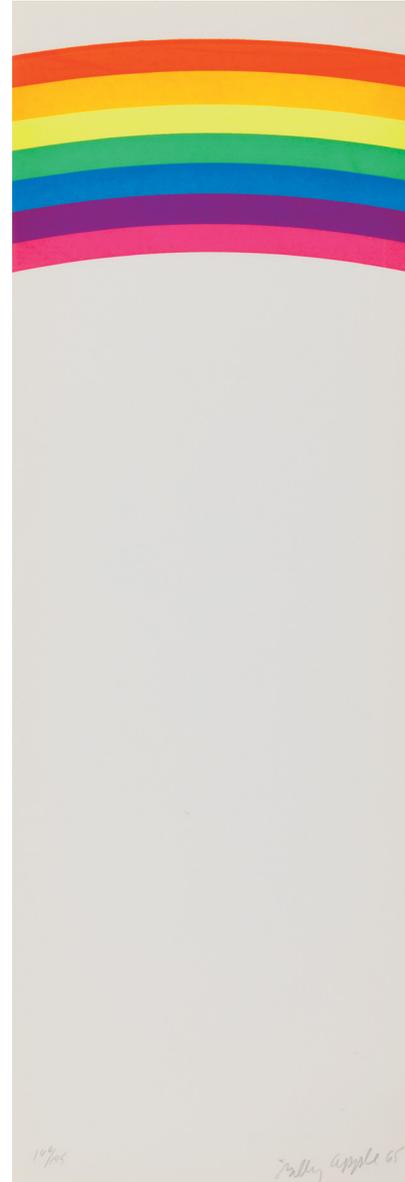


360° Rainbow
1964–65
Installed at Bianchini Gallery, New York, 1965
Colour transparency courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive (left),
and at The Mayor Gallery, London, 2022 (right)

Rainbow 8
1964–65
Installed at Bianchini Gallery, New York, 1965
Colour transparency courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive (left),
and at The Mayor Gallery, London, 2022 (right)



Rainbow Sections
1965
Serigraphs
Courtesy of Mary Apple and
The Mayor Gallery, London
(photo: The Mayor Gallery)



Rainbow
1965
Serigraph
Courtesy of Mary Apple and
The Mayor Gallery, London
(photo: The Mayor Gallery)



Rainbow with Waterfall
1965
Plexiglas
Colour transparency courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive (left),
and at The Mayor Gallery, London, 2022 (right)





Rainbow Waterfall
1965
Plexiglas
Installed at Bianchini Gallery, New York, 1965
Colour transparency courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive (left),
and at The Mayor Gallery, London, 2022 (right)

Rainbows
1965
Plexiglas
Colour transparency courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive (left),
and at The Mayor Gallery, London, 2022 (right)



Catalogue of Works

This is the complete list of works included in the original *Rainbows* exhibition staged at Bianchini Gallery, 50 West 57th Street, New York, 23 November – 14 December 1965.

Works in **bold** are presented at The Mayor Gallery, London, 18 May – 27 July 2022.

A note about titles

Although the poster for Billy Apple's Bianchini show has no title, and paid advertisements in the *New York Herald Tribune*, *The New York Times*, and *The Village Voice* list the exhibition as "Billy Apple Neon Sculptures," *Rainbows* has been assigned as the title to the artist's 1965 exhibition. This is the name the artist used when discussing the exhibition, and it is the critics' descriptor in listings and reviews in contemporary newspapers. Individual works have also been given titles despite there being no extant list of works. These titles have been assigned through research in the artist's archive or based on information published in exhibition catalogues where works were subsequently shown.



Billy Apple Bianchini Gallery 50 West 57 Street New York City Nov.23–Dec.14, 1965, 1965 printed poster, offset lithography on paper, two sheets 552 × 354 mm (each sheet)
courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive and The Mayor Gallery, London

Eight pairs of the exhibition poster from the original print run have been located in the artist's archive. The conceit of the poster is that two versions were printed with a quarter rainbow either in the bottom left or the bottom right of the sheet so that when the two versions are placed together they form a perfect semi-circular rainbow at the bottom edge of the two sheets.



Apple at the End of the Rainbow, 1962/64
cast bronze, six colours, 10 mm clear and fluorescent powder-coated glass tubing pumped with either Neon or Argon gas, with Mercury vapour, porcelain-enamel coated steel base containing a 7500V 30mA transformer (converted to 230V)
330 × 406 × 178 mm overall
collection of Tony and Hazel Petrie, Auckland, New Zealand (photo: Mary Apple)

Provenance

Purchased from the artist.

Exhibition history

Current Art, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 18 March – 10 May 1965, with Billy Apple, Chrissa, Dan Flavin, Charlotte Gilbertson, Preston McClanahan, Martial Raysse, Richard Smith, Robert Smithson, John Willenbecher, and Michael Steiner. Organised by Samuel Adams Green.

Art Turned On, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 10 December 1965 – 30 January 1966, with Billy Apple, Ay-O, Robert Breer, Dan Flavin, Horacio Garcia-Rossi, Herbert Gesner, John Goodyear, Robert Indiana, Joe Jones, Howard Jones, Tom Lloyd, Sheldon Machlin, Ronald Mallory, Paul Matisse, Charles Mattox, Preston McClanahan, Nam June Paik, Abraham Paltnik, Otto Piene, Thomas Tadlock, Jean Tinguely, Wen-Ying Tsai, Tom Wesselman, Robert Whitman, and John Willenbecher.

The BILL: For the Collective Unconscious, Artspace Aotearoa, Auckland, 12 March – 22 April 2016, with Billy Apple®, Amy Blinkhorne, Black Cracker and GFS, Teghan Burt and George Rump, Léuli Eshraghi, Tom of Finland®, Alicia Frankovich, Nan Goldin, Nilbar Güreş, Dale Harding, Samuel Hodge, Lonnie Hutchinson, Paul Johns, William E Jones, Yuki

This was the earliest work in the Bianchini exhibition. The neon components and base were manufactured in 1964. The tubes were bent to form a curved section of a rainbow with a kink near the base that created a space to accommodate one of the artist's cast and polished bronze apples produced in London at the Art Bronze Foundry in 1962. In March 1965, prior to the Bianchini exhibition, this work was included in *Current Art*, reportedly one of the first surveys of light art undertaken in the USA at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.



Double Arc, 1964–65
eight colours, 12 mm clear and fluorescent powder-coated glass tubing pumped with either Neon or Argon gas with Mercury vapour, steel wire, Plexiglas plate, two parts, two 9000V 30mA transformers and a 15000V 30mA transformer (power supply, 110V)
2290 × 560 × 150 mm
1700 × 430 × 150 mm
courtesy of Mary Apple and The Mayor Gallery, London

Exhibition history

Kunst-Licht-Kunst, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 25 September – 4 December 1966, cat. no. 38 (illustrated).

This work consisted of two long arcs of glass tubing set at right angles to each other suspended on steel wires over a Plexiglas base. It was subsequently included in *Kunst-Licht-Kunst* at the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, in 1966, where it was titled *Rainbow Motif*.



360° Rainbow, 1964–65
six colours, 12 mm clear and fluorescent powder-coated glass tubing pumped with either Neon or Argon gas with Mercury vapour, chrome-plated steel T-stands, porcelain-enamel coated steel base, 1200V 30mA transformer, power supply 110V, original USA plug
508 × 730 × 730 mm overall
courtesy of Mary Apple and The Mayor Gallery, London
image courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive (photo: Richard Polson)

Exhibition history

Kunst-Licht-Kunst, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 25 September – 4 December 1966, cat. no. 37 (illustrated).

Bibliography

Natalie Edgar, 'Reviews and Previews: Billy Apple', *Art News*, January 1966, p. 12 (*360° Rainbow* illustrated on p. 13 as "Untitled neon sculpture").
Artis: Das aktuelle Kunstmagazin, Germany, December 1966 (works by Baranoff, Moholy Nagy, Ray, USCO, ZERO, Apple, Raysse, and Antonakos illustrated)



Rainbow 10, 1964–65
ten colours, 12 mm clear and fluorescent powder-coated glass tubing pumped with either Neon or Argon gas with Mercury vapour, porcelain-enamel coated steel base containing a 7500V 30mA transformer, power supply 110V 495 × 457 × 356 mm overall
collection of Corning Museum of Glass, New York
images courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive
(photo: Richard Polson)

Exhibition history

Focus on Light, New Jersey State Museum, Trenton New Jersey, 20 May – 10 September 1967, curated by Richard Bellamy, Lucy R Lippard & Leah Solberg, cat. no. 3a.
Light in Art, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas, 25 February – 17 April 1966

The title of this work has been assigned from handwritten notes located in the Billy Apple® Archive.



Chevron, 1965
six colours, 12 mm clear and fluorescent powder-coated glass tubing pumped with Neon or Argon gas with Mercury vapour, porcelain-enamel coated steel base containing a 7500V 30mA transformer, power supply 110V 483 × 432 × 457 mm overall
(measurements converted from Imperial)
destroyed
image courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive

Exhibition history

Light in Art, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas, 25 February – 17 April 1966, with Billy Apple, Enrique Castro-Cid, Horacio Garcia Rossi, John Goodyear, Wilber G. Herring, Gyula Kosice, Julio Le Parc, Josef Levi, Tom Lloyd, Frank Malina, Ronald Mallory, Preston McClanahan, Gerald Oster, Abraham Palatnik, Otto Piene, Earl Reiback, and John Willenbecher. Organised by director, Wilson Burdett. Also included *Rainbow*, 1965 (not illustrated).

The work was irreparably damaged on its return from the exhibition in Houston.

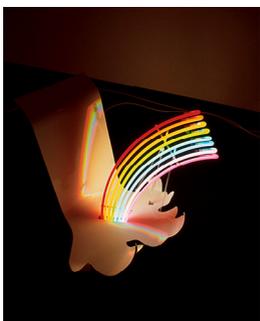


Rainbow 8, 1964–65
eight-colour, 12 mm clear and fluorescent powder-coated glass tubing pumped with either Neon or Argon gas with Mercury vapour, porcelain-enamel coated steel base containing a 7500V 30mA transformer, power supply 110V
485 × 320 × 460 mm overall
courtesy of Mary Apple and The Mayor Gallery, London

Exhibition history

Art Electric, Ileana Sonnabend Gallery, Paris, 6–18 May 1966, with Billy Apple, Leo Rabkin, Takis, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Watts, James Rosenquist, Robert Whitman, [Daniel] Smerck, Dan Flavin, Tom Wesselmann, Tom Lloyd, [Robert] Morris, Lynn, George Segal, and Jasper Johns.

The title of this work has been assigned based on handwritten notes located in the Billy Apple® archive. After its presentation at Bianchini Gallery it was sent to Paris for an exhibition at Ileana Sonnabend Gallery in May 1966. That gallery's label is still adhered to the sculpture's base.



Rainbow with Waterfall, 1965
white Plexiglas, 12 mm clear and fluorescent powder-coated glass tubing pumped with either Neon or Argon gas with Mercury vapour, eight colours, 7500V 30mA transformer, power supply 110V 687 × 673 × 787 mm overall
(measurement converted from Imperial)
destroyed
image courtesy of Billy Apple® Archive

Exhibition history

Fifth Exhibition, Collectors Club of Minnesota, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 5 June – 10 July 1966.

This work was irreparably damaged whilst being unpacked for exhibition at Walker Art Center. It was to have been sent to Eindhoven for inclusion in the *Kunst-Licht-Kunst* exhibition, however it was replaced by *Double Arc* after the damage was reported.



Rainbow, 1965
seven-colour serigraph,
fluorescent ink on paper
633 × 1270 mm (semi-circle),
603 × 507 mm (left/right sections),
633 × 210 mm (middle section)
courtesy of Mary Apple and
The Mayor Gallery, London



Exhibition history

Billy Apple Shop, 352 A Street, Idaho Falls
The Rainbow Room, Graham Gallery, New York, 21 June – 27 July 1966. An exhibition of rainbows, spectrums and prisms with Billy Apple, Martin Canin, Arthur B. Daview, Alfred Jensen, Charles Ross, Lucas Samaras and Mario Yrizarry.
Sculpture Exhibition, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney, 24 July – 1 September 2007
Billy Apple™, Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington, 5–29 March 2008
Rainbows: Billy Apple New York, 1965, The Vivian Gallery, Matakana, 8 July – 6 August 2017.
Group shows, Starkwhite, Queenstown, March – December 2021
New York Rainbows, Bergman Gallery, Rarotonga, 16 – 31 August 2022.

This semi-circular rainbow print was printed by Bob DiGiacomo, display technician at the American Museum of Natural History, as a multiple for the Bianchini exhibition. Apple utilised the newly released Dayglo fluorescent ink range in neon colours. The difficulty of achieving perfect registration for each colour separation using the manual serigraph process meant that many prints were either rejected or cut into sections, thus creating three separate prints (two quarter rainbows running either from the bottom edge to the right side or from the left side to the bottom edge and a small central section of the rainbow arc). There are only six extant semi-circular prints. The prints that were cut into sections have been numbered in an edition of 195. These prints proved popular and after the closure of the Bianchini Gallery in 1966, were consigned for sale via Multiples, Inc., from 1967 to 1969.

Rainbow prints are in several public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; gift of Paul Bianchini, 1967 (Accession no. 67.677.1); Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand (bequest of Judge Julius and Betty Isaacs, 1983 (Accession number 1983-0032-243). Isaacs was Billy Apple's lawyer in New York. Isaacs was also lawyer to Marcel Duchamp. The Isaacs Bequest also includes several works by Marcel Duchamp. See Marcus Moore, "Attracting Dust in New Zealand. Lost and Found: Betty's Waistcoat and Other Duchampian Traces." *Toutfait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, 2007/2019, <https://www.toutfait.com/attracting-dust-in-new-zealand-lost-and-found-bettys-waistcoat-and-other-duchampian-traces/>; Museum of Contemporary Art, University of North Florida, Jacksonville; and Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand.



Rainbow with Waterfall, 1965
transparent and eight-colour translucent Plexiglas
450 × 530 × 485 mm
courtesy of Mary Apple and
The Mayor Gallery, London

This work was produced by Bob DiGiacomo at the American Museum of Natural History in New York working to Apple's instructions. It was presented in the Bianchini exhibition on a plinth alongside a similar work with a white Plexiglas 'waterfall' (see next entry).



Rainbow with Waterfall, 1965
white opaque and six-colour translucent Plexiglas
390 × 570 × 395 mm
private collection, Wellington, New Zealand

Provenance

Purchased from Bianchini Gallery on 10 May 1966, private collection Minnesota; private collection, Hanmer, New Zealand; sold at Art + Object, Auckland, in *Important Paintings and 3d Sculpture*, Art + Object, 22 November 2007, Lot 11, Wellington, New Zealand.

Exhibition history

Fifth Exhibition: Collectors Club of Minnesota, Walker Art Center, Minnesota, 5 June – 10 July 1966.

This was presented at the Bianchini Gallery on a stepped plinth with two other translucent and opaque Plexiglas Rainbows.



Rainbow Waterfall, 1965
six-colour translucent Plexiglas
425 × 225 × 163 mm
courtesy of Mary Apple and The Mayor Gallery, London

Exhibition history

Billy Apple, Mikala Dwyer, Rob McHaffie, Ricky Swallow, Ronnie van Hout: Sculpture Exhibition, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney, 24 July – 1 September 2007 (exhibited with framed *Rainbow* serigraph (central section))

Two of the three Plexiglas rainbows Apple had made were presented at the Bianchini Gallery. These were produced by Bob DiGiacomo at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.



Rainbows, 1965
six-colour opaque and translucent Plexiglas
193 × 76 × 132 mm (each)
courtesy of Mary Apple and The Mayor Gallery, London

Bibliography

Books

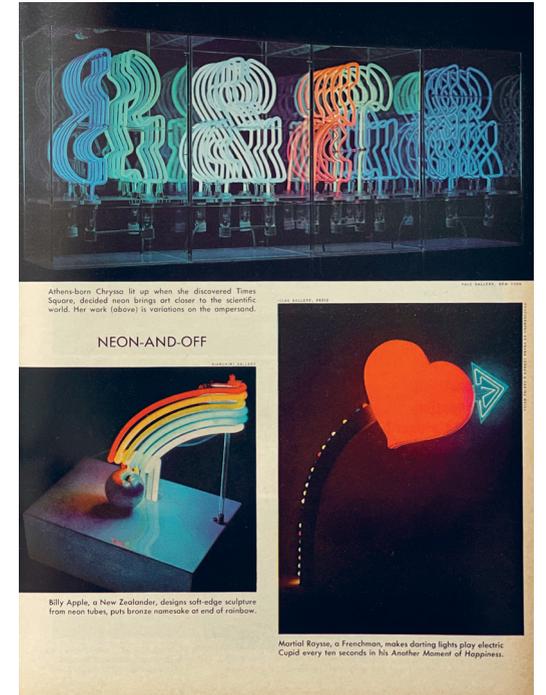
Christina Barton, *Billy Apple® Life/Work*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2020 (see Chapter 2: “America Calls 1964–1969,” especially pp. 92–101).
Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of this Century*, George Braziller, New York, 1968 (see Chapter 7: “Light as Sculpture Medium,” pp. 285–311).

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Current Art, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1965.
Kunst-Licht-Kunst, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1966.
Light in Art, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas, 1966.
Richard Bellamy, Lucy R. Lippard & Leah Solberg, *Focus on Light*, New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, New Jersey, 1967.

Reviews

Mel Bochner, “In the Galleries: Billy Apple,” *Arts Magazine*, February 1966, p. 66.
Natalie Edgar, “Reviews and Previews: Billy Apple,” *Art News*, January 1966, pp. 12–13.
J. G. [John Gruen], “Billy Appel [sic], Critical Guide to the Galleries,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 27 November 1965.
Robert Pincus-Witten, “Billy Apple,” *Artforum*, vol. 4, no. 6, February 1966, p. 57.



Apple at the End of the Rainbow illustrated in “Sculpture: A Times Square of the Mind,” *Time Magazine*, 18 March 1966, p. 101



Billy Apple with rainbow,
Wellington, New Zealand,
2021,
(photo: Mary Apple),
Billy Apple® Archive

Contributors

BILLY APPLE® was born Barrie Bates in Auckland, New Zealand in 1935. He left New Zealand in 1959 to study Graphic Design at the Royal College of Art in London. After graduating in 1962, he took the radical step of changing his name to Billy Apple to establish a new identity and turn himself into his own art work. In 1964, he moved to New York where he produced pop-related paintings and objects, some of which were included in the landmark *American Supermarket*, exhibition in 1964 at Bianchini Gallery. These were followed by a body of works made by the new process of xerography, then neon sculptures shown at Bianchini Gallery, Pepsi-Cola Exhibition Gallery, and Howard Wise Gallery. By 1969, Apple had shifted to a more conceptual and process-oriented practice. To create a venue for his work he established APPLE, a not-for-profit space at 161 West 23rd Street which he operated between October 1969 and May 1973. He also exhibited at various spaces in New York’s alternative art scene including 3 Mercer Street, Holly Solomon, Martha Jackson West, and the Clocktower, and for one year was director of 112 Greene Street Gallery (1975–76). A major survey of Apple’s work, which brought together his British and American works from 1960 to 1974, was staged at the Serpentine Gallery in London in 1974. Apple remained in New York until 1990, continuing to exhibit his work in various venues, including Leo Castelli Gallery (in 1977, 1978, 1980, and 1984). He also made two extended tours to New Zealand in 1975 and 1979–80, producing a string of site-specific installations in dealer and public galleries throughout the country. From the early 1980s Apple complemented his installation practice with text-based works that draw attention to the art system and highlight the artist’s social networks. A survey of these, *As Good as Gold: Billy Apple Art Transactions 1981-1991*, was organised and toured by Wellington City Art Gallery in 1991. Apple relocated permanently to Auckland in 1990. Apple became a registered trademark in 2007, and worked on a range of projects to create branded products in the eight classes in which his trademark was registered, including a new breed of apple called the ‘Billy Apple’, a ‘Billy Apple Cider’, ‘Billy Tea’ and ‘Apple’s Blend’ a mix of coffee beans. Most recently he was involved in several art-science collaborations that saw his cells immortalised, his genome sequenced, and his DNA extracted and analysed for microbiome research. Billy Apple died in Auckland, New Zealand, on 6 September 2021.

Apple’s works have been included in major international and national exhibitions. These include: *Toi Toi Toi: Three Generations of New Zealand Artists* (Kassel & Auckland, 1999); *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin* (New York, 1999); *Kronos + Kairos: Über die Zeit in der Zeitgenössischen Kunst*, (Kassel, 1999); *Shopping: A Century of Art and Consumer Culture* (Frankfurt & Liverpool, 2002–3); *American Supermarket* (Pittsburgh, 2002); *Art of the ’60s from Tate Britain* (Auckland 2006); *Gold* (Vienna, 2012), and *International Pop* (Minnesota & Philadelphia, 2016). More recent solo surveys include *Billy Apple®: A History of the Brand and Revealed/Concealed* at Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam in 2009 and *Billy Apple®: The Artist Has to Live Like Everybody Else* at Auckland Art Gallery in 2015. Most recently aspects of his work have been surveyed at MTG Hawke’s Bay (*Billy Apple®: A Brand Looking for a Product 1962–2020*, 25 September 2020 – 31 October 2021) and *After Billy Apple*, 25 November – December 2021, Rossi & Rossi, Hong Kong. His works are in many public and private collections including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia; Corning Museum of Glass, New York; Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit; Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, Wellington, Tate Britain, London; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

CHRISTINA BARTON is Director of the Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand. She is a respected art historian and curator with a deep knowledge of New Zealand art and a particular interest in conceptual art and its legacies. Her retrospective exhibition *Billy Apple® The Artist Has to Live Like Everybody Else* was staged at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki in 2015 and her monograph, *Billy Apple® Life/Work* was published by Auckland University Press in 2020.

HANS ULRICH OBRIST (b. 1968, Zurich, Switzerland) is Artistic Director of the Serpentine Galleries in London, Senior Advisor at LUMA Arles, and Senior Artistic Advisor at The Shed in New York. Prior to this, he was the Curator of the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Since his first show “World Soup” (The Kitchen Show) in 1991, he has curated more than 350 shows.

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