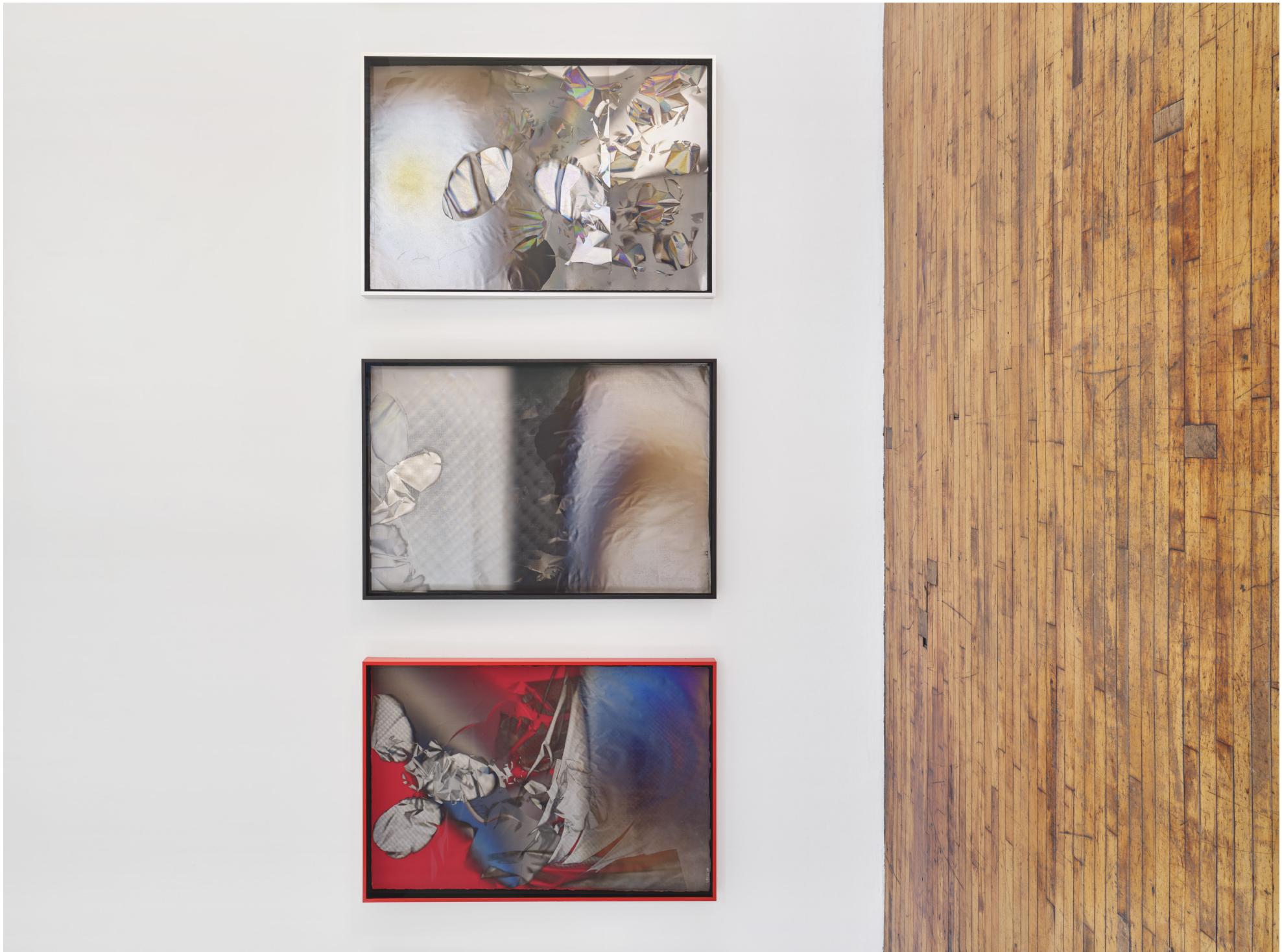
# Larry Bell: Irresponsible Iridescence



Larry Bell (b. 1939, Chicago, IL) is one of the most renowned and influential artists to emerge from the Los Angeles art scene of the 1960s. Known foremost for his refined surface treatment of glass and explorations of light, reflection and shadow through the material, Bell's significant oeuvre extends from painting and works on paper to glass sculptures and furniture design. Bell's understanding of the potential of glass and light allows him to expand visual and physical fields of perception, and his sculptures to surpass traditional bounds of the medium.

Exhibited for the first time, the 'Solar Study' series is a striking departure from work Larry Bell has done before utilizing new processes and technologies. Following a transition to solar powered-energy, Bell entered a period of productivity over a short span of time in his studio in Taos, New Mexico.

# Larry Bell: Irresponsible Iridescence

Larry Bell in conversation with Erin Schneider, Judd Foundation Archivist.*

ES
How did *Irresponsible Iridescence* become the exhibition title?

LB
It just popped into my head. There was no plan. It just seemed like a funny thing to think about and it came out of my mouth. And once it's out of my mouth, it sort of bounces around everywhere until it lands on something.

In a funny way, the images that are in the exhibition were totally autonomic. They made themselves in a period of time when I was recovering from the loss of my mate. I think that it had a profound effect on what I worked on. In the case of this body of work, around 150 pieces fell out of my hands in probably four months. There wasn't much time to think about anything, I was just letting this work happen.

ES
What was the creation process behind the 'Solar Studies' series?

LB
I had a vast reservoir of stuff to work with and I just dove into it. These things just fell out of my hands, they were extraordinarily skilled. That's not something that I think about very often but since I did not recognize the source of the imagery other than the fact that I had actually fabricated the parts myself—how the things went together—these are collages. They are layers and layers and layers of things that reflect light, transmit light and absorb light. And they all fused together to make up some kind of a tableau on the surface.

ES
Can you talk about the narrative nature of the work in the exhibition?

LB
It essentially is a composition created as a narrative, but I don't know what the story means. It reads as things that seem to be wanting to have a certain feeling, and the feeling is not necessarily abstract at all. It's actually quite literal. The feeling is—although the imagery sort of toys with cartoony things that are created by balloon shapes and things like that, that seem to want to go somewhere. If the composition works out as I hope it will, it'll be a rather amusing display [at Judd Foundation].

ES
In terms of the material you work with, there is a lot of silicon monoxide in the 'Solar Studies' series.

LB
Quartz is silicon dioxide. Silicon monoxide has one molecule less of oxygen in its makeup. In my use of that stuff, it looks like a hunk of coal. If you get it hot enough, it does something called sublimating. It turns into a vapor, but it never becomes a liquid—it just goes from what looks like a lump of coal to a coating on something.

The process of evaporation is what transports this lump of coal to a vapor and the molecules collect on the surface. Depending on the thickness of this crystalline structure that's building on the surface, it determines what colors are interfered with by the thickness of the film.

It's not so different than if you go to a gas station and look at a puddle of water. The rainbow colors you see are from a thickness of gasoline that floats on top of the water. Where you see blue on the water, the gas is thinner than where you see red. The same principle is how this works in my compositions.

ES
Spontaneity, intuition, improvisation and trust are paramount to the work you do. In terms of your creation process, do you consider it a collaboration between yourself, the material, and the equipment you use?

LB
I don't think about any of those things. I just go to work and things present themselves. As long as I don't think about it, they finish themselves and start themselves. If I try and think about what it is, then I'll trip or I'll go a direction that the materials don't want to go.

I believe that when I lay hands on certain supplies that I've worked with over the years, it charges them up like there's an energy that's imparted to the components that is only available through me and only responds to me. And so we collaborate—usually it is the use of time. The shorter time it takes to make the feeling of a statement, the better.

ES
What is the relationship between the earlier works, such as the cube of coated glass with chrome-plated banding at 101 Spring Street, and your later work?

LB
I still make cubes. I like making these objects that are part of the spirit of the environment that we live in. I mean, what would the world be like if there were no right angles? There's a kind of power in the 90-degree relationships that confront our peripheral vision every day. Sometimes they depress us and sometimes we can ignore them, but they are always present. Something about that structure has always intrigued me.

*This conversation is excerpt from a conversation recorded with the artist in his studio on September 23, 2025.

Larry Bell
*Irresponsible Iridescence*
101 Spring Street
September 29, 2025–January 31, 2026

Public hours:
Friday–Saturday
1:00–5:00pm

*Irresponsible Iridescence* is made possible with support from Hauser & Wirth and Anthony Meier.

Larry Bell exhibitions concurrenlty on view this season.

In New York:

*Improvisations in the Park*
Madison Square Park
September 30, 2025–March 15, 2026
madisonsquarepark.org

In Texas:

*Larry Bell: Improvisations*
San Antonio Museum of Art
August 29, 2025–January 4, 2026
samuseum.org

Exhibition Checklist

Left Wall

Solar Study 35, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 x 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Solar Study 36, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Solar Study 37, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Solar Study 38, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Right Wall

Solar Study 42, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Solar Study 82A, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Solar Study 39, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Solar Study 41, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Solar Study 69, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Solar Study 95, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Solar Study 25, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches

Solar Study 76, 2024
Mixed media with aluminum and silicon monoxide mounted on canvas
158.1 × 107.3 × 10.2 cm / 62 ¼ × 42 ¼ × 4 inches