

The Museum of Modern Art

July 13, 1964

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Circle 5-8900 Cable: Modernart

WALL LABEL

THOMAS WILFRED'S "LUMIA SUITE, OP. 158"
RECENT ACQUISITION TO THE MUSEUM COLLECTION

Thomas WILFRED

#33

American, born in Denmark, 1889

LUMIA SUITE, OP. 158. 1963-64

Commissioned by The Museum of Modern Art, Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund, 1963.

LUMIA, the art of light, was developed by Thomas Wilfred through many years of experiment which began as early as 1905. During the years he designed and built a number of instruments which culminated in 1921 in his CLAVILUX, a keyboard instrument which projects the lumia composition on a theatre-sized screen. Wilfred gave the first public lumia performance on the clavilux in 1922 in New York. For twenty years thereafter he gave clavilux recitals throughout the United States, Canada and Europe. In 1930 he founded the Art Institute of Light which maintained research laboratories and a recital hall in New York until 1943. Since then it has been located in West Nyack, New York.

LUMIA SUITE, OP. 158.

The structure of this work may be compared to the sonata in music. Each of its 3 movements has its distinctive character, yet the themes of all three interweave with variations throughout the composition.

First movement, horizontal: A slow majestic sequence of large diaphanous forms moving from left to right in many planes and tempi. The colors are introduced along the contours of the forms, sweeping inward and blending in the eclipses. One rhythmic pattern is the opening and closing of the forms in the second plane; another, the waxing and waning of intensity over the entire field.

Second movement, vertical: The forms of the first movement decrease in intensity, leaving a deep vibrant ultramarine field. Two intense forms rise, one after the
more...

other, through the center field, with an interval of horizontal drift between them. The first form is pure white and asymmetrical, the second symmetrical and unfolding in color from its center outward as it rises in rapid tempo, creating the illusion of distance, great size and volume, and the feeling that it continues to rise after it has passed beyond the field of vision and its place has been taken by a variation of the first movement.

Third movement, elliptical: A descending arc slowly transforms the horizontal sequence into a central whorl of expanding and interlacing ellipses sweeping around a nucleus of intense color changes. At the conclusion of the movement the elliptical forms drift up and out of the field.

The three movements now repeat but with different form constellations and colors. The work may thus be termed three themes with almost endless variations.

The images on the screen are produced by several projectors which are actuated by an electronic player attachment. This work was originally composed for the clavilux, a keyboard instrument. The electronic player attachment used here substitutes for the keyboard in the clavilux.

* * * * *