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From left to right:

Kgama, 2007
steel, neon, paint, neoprene, rubber, and transformer
9' 8" x 6' 6" x 4'

Sassaly, 2008
steel, neon, paint, copper, neoprene and transformer
10' x 2' x 4' 5"

A new series of sculptures by Keith Sonnier on view at PaceWildenstein November 7- December 6, 2008

NEW YORK, October 23, 2008—PaceWildenstein is honored to present a new series of sculptures from 2007-2008 by Keith Sonnier. *Keith Sonnier: Recent Work* will be on view from November 7 through December 6, 2008 at 32 East 57th Street, New York City. The artist will be present for an opening reception on Thursday, November 6th from 6-8 p.m. A catalogue with an essay by Richard Kalina, a painter, art critic, and contributing editor of *Art in America*, accompanies the exhibition.

Keith Sonnier: Recent Work features approximately ten neon sculptures from the *Herd* series, ranging in size from 6 feet to over 10 feet tall. The artist's process is revealed in several studies on paper that will also be on view in the gallery. In conjunction with Sonnier's exhibition at PaceWildenstein, two large-scale installations will be on display in midtown Manhattan. *Whooper* (2008), a large sculpture from the *Herd* series measuring nearly 19 feet tall, will be on view at 590 Madison Avenue through January 19, 2009. This work, the largest in the series, extends into aerial space, throwing out colored gestures from a central bird-like armature. *BA-O-BA Lever House* (2003), a site-specific architectural commission from a series that began in 1968, will be reinstalled outlining Gordon Bunshaft's iconic landmarked skyscraper Lever House (390 Park Avenue at 54th

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Street) from the second week of December through February 7, 2009. *BA-O-BA Lever House* was Sonnier's first major architectural commission in New York City.

The abstract sculptures of the *Herd* series draw their inspiration from Africa and the wild animals of the Safari. Sonnier, a talented draftsman, immersed himself in studies of bone relics of Mastodons and other herd animals in the photographic archives and dioramas at the Museum of Natural History before embarking on the series. The works were also influenced by the artist's travels to India, the Far East, and Brazil, and reflect his interest in other cultures and anthropology. "The *Herd* sculptures are certainly some of Sonnier's most evocative, even romantic works, but they are scarcely exotic," Kalina writes in his catalogue essay; "Animals such as these form a profound part of ourselves—their images set in place when we are children. It is not necessary to have seen droves of migrating wildebeests to feel a familiarity, even a kinship, with the way they stand, run, or bow their heads to drink."

The sculptures of the *Herd* series evoke gazelles, antelopes, buffalos, elephants, and birds in elegant gestural lines of neon light. The most distinguishing animal features of the abstract sculptures are the horns, and, in the case of *Pachyderm* (2008), a large plasticized rubber ear. By drawing the viewer's gaze towards the illuminated upper portions of the figures, the artist allows the simplified dark gray supporting structure to recede. "Freestanding sculpture must literally balance itself, and in doing so, it tends to evoke either the architectural and the built, or living forms, animal or human," Kalina explains; "Stance is thus simultaneously metaphorical and actual." By moving the sculptures off of the base and into the viewer's own physical and emotional space, Sonnier has also addressed a challenge that has concerned sculpture for most of the twentieth-century and beyond.

The *Herd* series relate to the artist's angular metal pieces from the 1980s and early 1990s, such as *Deux Pattes* (1981), *Mangueria* (1981), and *Trois Pattes* (1991), as well as his painted bamboo pieces, including *India Hanuman* (1981) and *Kali* (1981). This exhibition marks Sonnier's second solo show at PaceWildenstein, following *Keith Sonnier* in 2005 at the 32 East 57th Street gallery. The works on view included sculptures referencing the second war in Iraq as well as a series that developed out of drawings of palm trees indigenous to the artist's native Louisiana.

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Sonnier has participated in nearly 130 solo exhibitions and over 360 group exhibitions throughout his career, including *Documenta 5*, Kassel (1972), the Venice Biennale (1972, 1982), and the Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art (1973, 1977). In 1974, Sonnier was awarded first prize at the 9th International Biennial Exhibition of Prints, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. He was also a two time recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Grant (1975, 1981) and was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in 1974.

Sonnier has had twenty important public commissions since 1981, including *Motordom* in the Caltrans District 7 Building in 2004, one of the largest public art installations in Los Angeles, and *Lichtweg* (or *Lightway*) at the New International Airport, Munich (1989-1992), a major commission that spans the 1,000 meter walkway of moving sidewalks, linking terminals and orienting passengers in a pathway of light. Sonnier's work can be found in dozens of public collections worldwide, including the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz; Kunstverein St. Gallen, Switzerland; Miami Art Museum, Florida; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton; Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany; Städtisches Museum Abteiberg Monchengladbach, Germany; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Keith Sonnier (b. 1941, Mamou, LA) studied at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette. After graduating with a B.A. in 1963, he went on to receive an M.F.A. from Rutgers University in 1966. Sonnier, along with his contemporaries Bruce Nauman, Richard Tuttle, Eva Hesse, Richard Serra, and Barry LeVa, radically reinvented sculpture in the late 1960s. Their 'New Sculpture' pushed beyond Minimalism and called all previous conceptions of the art form into question by employing unusual materials that had never before been used. Throughout his career, Sonnier has experimented with materials as varied as latex, satin, bamboo, found objects, satellite transmitters, and video. In 1968, the artist began working with neon, which quickly became a defining element of his work. The linear quality of neon allows Sonnier to draw in space with light and color, while the diffuseness of the light

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enables his work to interact on various architectural planes. Sonnier's architectural neon installations in public spaces have earned him wide acclaim in an international context.

Keith Sonnier currently lives and works in New York City and Bridgehampton, New York.

For more information on *Keith Sonnier: Recent Work* please contact Jennifer Benz Joy at jjoy@pacewildenstein.com or Lauren Staub at lstaub@pacewildenstein.com or call 212.421.3292.

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Whooper Study, 2007
permanent marker on paper
11-7/8" x 9" (30.2 cm x 22.9 cm)



Whooper Study, 2008
permanent marker and pencil on paper
13-7/8" x 11" (35.2 cm x 27.9 cm)

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