

# LEDIN ART

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# LIGHT'S EVENTS IN TOWN

by Clara Lovisetti

LIGHT ART AS KEY PLAYER  
INDOOR AND OUTDOOR:  
INTERVIEW WITH GISELLA GELLINI

Light Art as feature that interacts with architecture and urban landscape, for treating new visual experiences, new ways of enjoying either an indoor or an outdoor space of the city, for conveying messages and cultural contents. In particular the winter season, when the days are short and the Christmas celebrations light up streets and squares, is an ideal set for a light's event.

Just to name a few examples, since years Lyon is organising its famous festival at the beginning of December; Turin stages *Luci d'Artista*, now at its fifteenth edition, that turns the city into an open air museum. An event duplicated in Salerno, while in Milan we mention the short-lived experience of a Christmas light's event, *Led*, addressed

to the light designers and ended after only two editions. Nowadays there are countless of "Light's Festivals", events that often have nothing to do with an artistic happening, but are only performances of sounds and lights that fill with colours the urban places in order to attract the general public for trade purposes.

"*Light Art is other thing*", explains Gisella Gellini that since time is committed to a task of cultural spread of the "true" Light Art. Apart from issuing since seven years a book that collects the most outstanding temporary installations and works with light set up in Italy, she is promoter and even curator of exhibitions and events with light's artists, both in Italy and abroad. Her most recent experiences concern two events occurred last month of December, one indoor in Milan and other one outdoor in Arezzo.

**Light Art Ensemble**, the first chronologically speaking, took place from 12 to 14 December right in the heart of the

Overleaf: Arezzo in Luce 2014, Piazza Grande, light's projections by Sebastiano Romano.

1 Overview of the Light Art Ensemble exhibition, San Carpoforo, Milan, December 2014

Milan's arts district of Brera, that is at the San Carpoforo former church. The first information about this building dates back to year 831. Of the ancient church nothing remains, since it was totally rebuilt in 17<sup>th</sup> century after many refurbishments. At present belonging to the Milan's Municipality, starting from 1993 it is at free disposal of the Brera Academy for its courses and it can be also rented for cultural shows or high-profile trade events.

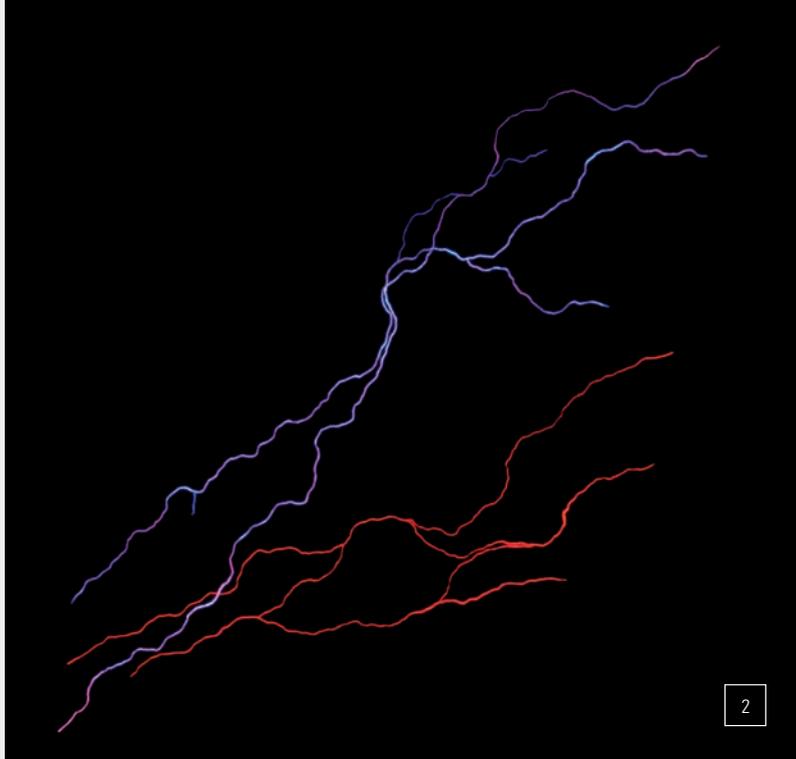
**Could you sum up the concept of that event?**

First of all I wish to tell that alongside me as curator there was Professor Domenico Nicolamarino, teacher of Lighting Design at Brera Academy. Then I would like to give thanks to Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis, Dean of the Milan's Polytechnic School of Design, for the support to my initiative. And of course to Franco Marrocco and Sandrina Bandera, respectively of the Academy and Pinacoteca of Brera, and to the artists who gave their availability.

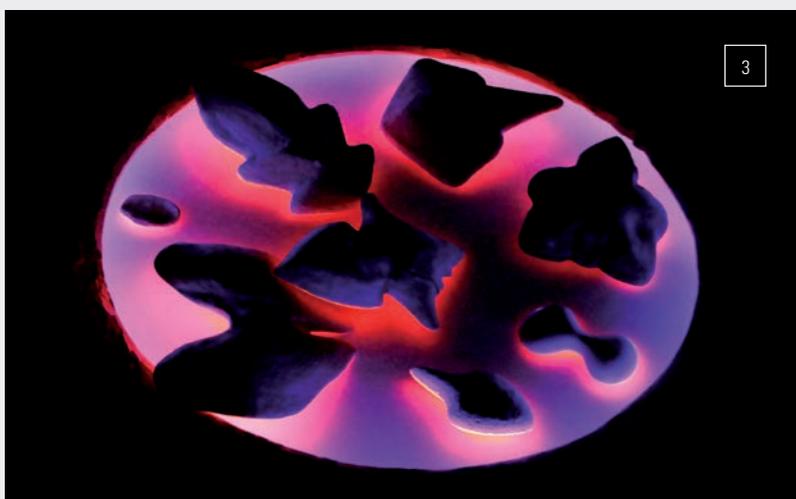
Light Art Ensemble was born as occasion of confrontation and debate among arts and culture experts with a group of artists - Nino Alfieri, Carlo Bernardini, Marco Brianza, Paolo Calafiore, Giulio De Mitri, Nicola Evangelisti, Maria Cristiana Fioretti, Pietro Pirelli,



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- 2 Nicola Evangelisti: Chromocosmos Panopticum Θ, 2010, glass and aluminium spatial structure with dynamic LED RGB system
- 3 Nino Alfieri: Light Seeds, terracotta and unbaked clay units and pulsating LED light system



the same artists. For instance, I wish to mention the speech by Roberto Lacabonara, an art critic; the Culture and Performing Arts counsellor of Arezzo Municipality, Pasquale Giuseppe Macrì, together with Fabio Migliorati talked about the experience of *Icastica* and presented a preview of **Arezzo in Luce**, the other event I curated. Then it was the turn of the artists, who were engaged in interesting debates with the public. But **Light Art Ensemble** was also an artistic happening, featuring two performances. On Saturday, Pietro Pirelli staged a short performance with his *Idrofono*, the exhibited work made with light, water and sound, involving the public who was invited to play it. On Sunday, the event ended with a short performance by Pierluigi Castellini and Barbara Novati who danced the site specific *Live the Light* choreography by Michele Mastroianni.

Sebastiano Romano, Donatella Schilirò, Paolo Scirpa - but also of paying homage to Marinella Pirelli, the great artist pioneer of Light Art who left us in 2009, of which were exhibited a few *Meteore*. In addition, some works of the invited artists gave life to an urban route in the neighbourhood, in co-operation with a local trade association, the one gathering the shops of via Fiori Chiari.

**Thus more than an exhibition, it was also an event that tried to clarify what does it mean really Light Art...**

...And examine in depth some of its issues.

That's why the first two days were devoted to meetings with curators, art critics, teachers and, of course,

#### **Talking more in detail about the exhibition, how the setting was worked out?**

The space of that former church is already partially arranged to house exhibitions and didactical activities or seminars, thus there was almost no need of special interventions, except for the Carlo Bernardini installation, a luminous ray made of optic fibres that looked like to "pierce" the dome and the floor.

Once all the works were installed, the impact was quite dramatic. After a first moment of bewilderment while entering the purposely dark environment, the visitors were amazed by the lights of our artists.

#### **What kind of technologies and light sources they implemented?**

I'd say almost all the light sources, from the "conventional" ones, as in the *Meteore* by Marinella Pirelli, to the LEDs passing through neon and, as I mentioned before, the optic fibres. Some artists presented their works in a video, letting to the images the task of telling their approach to Light Art and how by means of this latter they are able to transform spaces and stage events. It was the case of Sebastiano Romano, who usually works on urban scale, on monuments and even a marble quarry and sailing boats on a lake.

In a similar way, also Nicola Evangelisti, alongside his spatial structure *Chromocosmus Panopticum*  $\Theta$  with a dynamic LED RGB system, showed by means of a video some of his recent installations made either on the facades or inside a couple of churches in Bologna.

To exemplify the neon, two quite opposed approaches, the ones by Paolo Scirpa and Donatella Schilirò. The first artist uses that light source alongside mirrors thus resulting in an optical illusion of infinite, as one could see in *Ludoscopio*, one of the first works to be seen when entering the

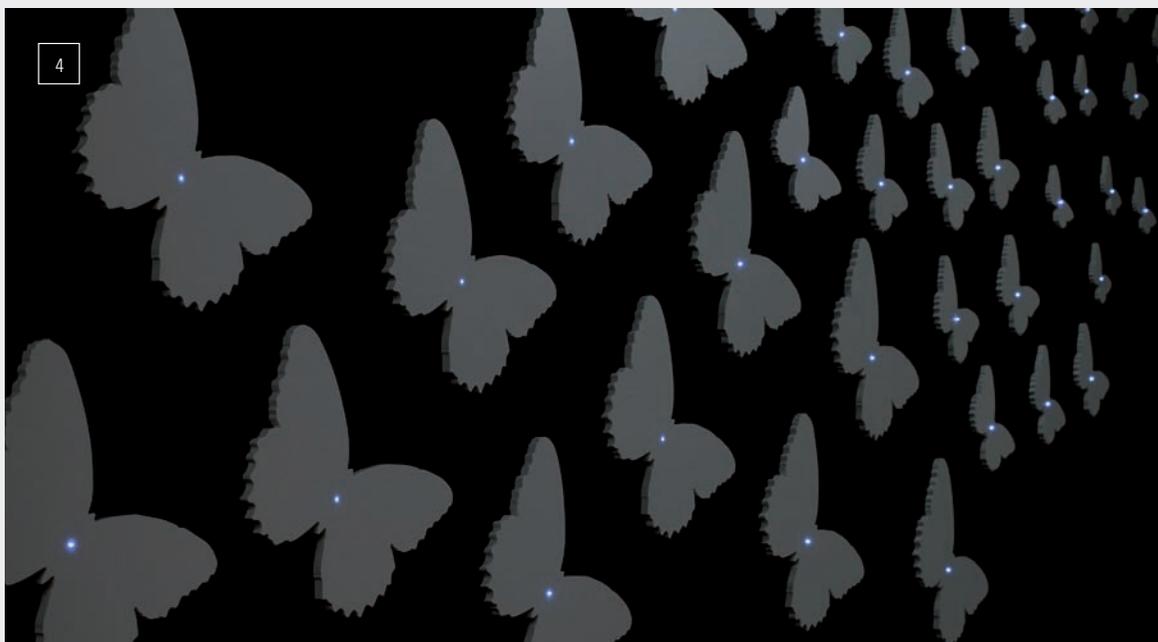
exhibition. On the contrary, Donatella Schilirò uses neon as light's writing, for conveying messages or drawing shapes such as the *Synapto* series placed in the abside.

Backlighted paintings made with special colours, these were the "light boxes" by Maria Cristiana Fioretti, an artist and also teacher of colour theory at the Brera Academy, who likes very much the LEDs in her multimedial installations - alas too complex for being exhibited in that occasion.

### **But now let's go deeper into the LEDs topic: what innovations did they bring to Light Art?**

The possibility of inserting light whenever and wherever one wishes, even in complex installations, due to their very reduced size. Then the great flexibility and possibility of obtaining dynamic light effects in a simpler and easier way than in the past. Let's take Marinella Pirelli, for instance. In her *Meteore* she managed to achieve the dynamic colour changes by means of photosensitive films and a mechanism for scrolling up and down the light source. Today all that may be obtained in a less complicated way, especially the mechanical apparatus, albeit the final result

4 Giulio De Mitri, detail of the installation with butterflies.



perhaps would not be the same. But anyway it is a proof of how great and pioneer that artist was, who obviously resorted also to LEDs in her last works.

**And in the exhibited works how the LEDs were dealt with?**

*Light Seeds* by Nino Alfieri is an example of how, by means of LED technology, a cluster of terracotta and unbaked clay turned into a living thing, enlivened up by a light whose intensity varied cyclically with pulsating evanescences. To enhance the effect, a soundtrack purposely composed by the musician Corrado Saija. Again the topics of the chromatic variations was expressed by Paolo Calafiore's *Quartet*, a series of music stands for light's scores, that is luminescent scores due to a LED strip integrated into their lower side.

Also the big wall installation by Giulio De Mitri, a white butterfly swarm, was alive and dynamic thanks to a small bright heart, a blue LED. To add up dynamism and harmony, the butterflies were of growing size and their number was inversely scaled according to the size of each butterfly, that this the smaller they were the more there were.

For his *1.000 Memories of Light (with candle)* Marco Brianza used not only LEDs but also one of the oldest light sources, the candle. The work explores the variations of a candle light in time showing the change in space.

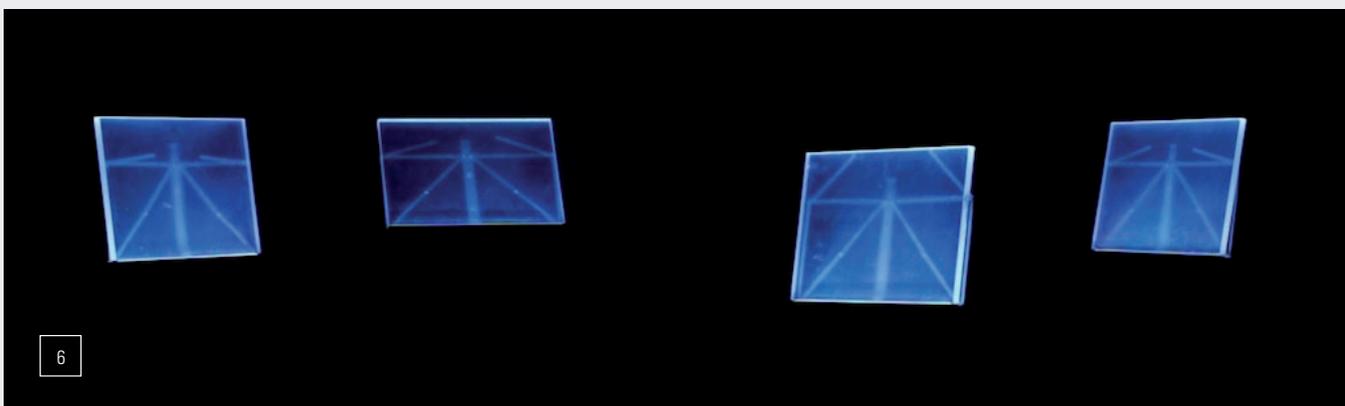
The light's characteristic is sampled using a colour sensor that acts as 1 pixel camera. The image recorded is reproduced using RGB LEDs. Each time there is a new image the previous one is shifted up in the LED strip of 1.000 pixels - that is the



5 Detail of Marco Brianza's installation *1.000 Memories of Light (with Candle)*.

6 Paolo Calafiore: *Quartet*, luminous scores with colour changing LEDs.

luminous strip stretched out along the church nave. The variations of light are in such way memorised and visible at the same time along the thin luminous track.



**In other words, a work that always evolving, it was never the same....**

Like the *Idrofono* by Pietro Pirelli, that installation is also a proof of how with a Light Art work the viewer may play a leading role and not only be observer. The candle could be placed either closer or farther from the sensor, thus obtaining a warmer or cooler light on the strip. Or one may blow on the flame, creating a pulsating light. Everybody was quite intrigued, especially our students, mine and those of Domenico Nicolamarino.

**GISELLA GELLINI:**

*Gisella Gellini*, Architect, is researcher in the field of the light's culture, with a particular reference to Light Art, she obtained the co-operation and consultancy of the great art collector Giuseppe Panza di Biumo. In 2009 she was curator of the exhibition *Dan Flavin in the Panza Collection*, set up at the Berardo Museum, Lisboa and of the Nicola Evangelisti' installation *Light Blade*, Villa Reale, Milan. In 2010 she was the curator of *Luces. Light Art from Italy*, a collective exhibition of Italian light's artists and in 2012 of the exhibition *JETZT Archäologische Schatten* by Fabrizio Corneli, both set up at the Archaeological Museum of Frankfurt. She is currently holding a Light Art and Design of Light course at the School of Design - Milan's Polytechnic.

**Are you planning to repeat Light Art Ensemble?**

In accordance to Professor Domenico Nicolamarino, we would like that it could turn into a recurring event in Milan each December, extending it and involving also other places of the city, but above all the Brera neighbourhood. I use this occasion for making since now a plea not only to the artists but also to the Via Fiori Chiari trade association members, to all the readers and companies of the sector. This year is the International Year of Light, is should be a pity if next December there will be only decorative lights.

**On the contrary, it seems that Arezzo is already addressed in that sense with Arezzo in Luce:**

**how was born that event?**

Arezzo has the great luck of having a Culture and Performing Arts councillor, Pasquale Giuseppe Macri, with a soft spot for arts and who started off *Icastica*, an artistic event taking place from May to October with the participation of internationally famed artists, whose artistic director is Fabio Migliorati.



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Arezzo in Luce:  
Piazza Grande, view  
of the Vasari Loggia  
where lighting fixtures  
with coloured filters  
and LED rods created  
an evocative blue  
ambient

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Arezzo in Luce:  
San Michele  
Church, projections  
obtained  
with gobo  
equipped  
luminaires



With the aim of having a follow-up also during the Christmas holiday season, when light is traditionally displayed in the luminous decorations, last winter, to be precise from 19 December to 11 January, made its debut **Arezzo in Luce**. For that first edition I opted for the artist Sebastiano Romano, whose luminous projections created a new scenic suggestion in a number of key points of that city so rich in culture and history.

**In comparison to an indoor event such as the one at San Carpoforo, which are the main critical issues when one must work in outdoor urban contexts?**

Mainly the same case of working in a public space and thus of paying respect not only to the architectures we are dealing with but also to the inhabitants of the same, or who is occupying them. When doing a project one must take into account that, before placing the lighting fixtures, one has to ask the permit to the owner of the building on which one wishes to install them. That owner may be either a public body, a business or a citizen, with the consequent timetable - provided that he

agrees with that. Then nearby each fixture there must be a connection to the power grid, an issue that often compels to strike a balance. In addition, where one wishes to highlight buildings and architectural features it is advisable to dim moderately and discretely in certain places the public lighting, with the resulting problems.

**On which topics the artist based his concept?**

The basic consideration - on which I totally agree - is the fact that "The magnificent cities of our Country are often humiliated by a lighting that doesn't enhance them adequately. During the day, they live in a golden dimension thanks to sunlight, while in the evening they plunge into a sad atmosphere that doesn't allow to enjoy the wonderful urban spaces". From that prior statement, Sebastiano Romano, due to his education and yearly experience as set designer for theatre, opera, ballet performances and multimedial installations for music festivals, in his works aims "at turning the urban spaces into evocative light's settings, whose colours are selected for creating chromatisms in tune with



9 Arezzo in Luce: LED equipped shapers projected Christmas features on the Pieve Bell Tower

the existing ones, but also for obtaining strong contrasts that enhance even more the architectural structures". In the Arezzo case, the artist explains, "the coloured geometries that draw the architectural faces of the Arezzo historical palaces - Piazza Grande, the Pieve tower and the statue of Piazza Monaco - stir the curiosity of the passers-by. That curiosity leads the viewer to linger on that palace or monument making him discover never seen before details in a scenic context derived from the overall light's design. Thus, for instance, the space in front the San Michele Church becomes a theatre set and being slightly sloping it acts as the plan of a theatre stage on which the projection draws a scenic carpet, while the facade is the background on which to draw with light an evocative projected painting".

**Here again the LEDs?**

For that project were used energy saving state-of-the-art LED beam lights and floodlights, that allowed to highlight at best the architectural volumes, while floodlights with gobos

**CLARA LOVISETTI:**

*Clara Lovisetti*, journalist, boasts a twenty year experience in the lighting sector as deputy editor of a series of lighting magazines with international circulation. Together with Gisella Gellini, curator, she organised the exhibitions *Luces - Light Art from Italy* (2010) and *JETZT Archäologische Schatten* (2012), both held at the Archaeological Museum of Frankfurt within the Luminale light's festival.

drew the festivity symbols. In Piazza Grande were used 1.000W shapers placed on the windowsills of Palazzo della Loggia Vasariana, of Palazzo della Fraternita dei Laici and on a balcony in front of the outdoor side of the Santa Maria della Pieve church apse. Six of them drew geometrical patterns on the ground and on one of the towers of the Piazza.

The remaining four drew trapezoid and elliptical shapes on the other architectural facades. On a window of the Vasari portico was placed a moving head projector that, with a prismatic effect, scattered star splinters on the surrounding surfaces. In the Vasari loggia lighting fixtures with coloured filters and LED rods were placed on the tie-rods of the domes creating an evocative blue ambient.

Other coloured reflections were obtained by filters and LED rods placed inside the spans of the Via Roma portico. A slight darker blue dominated the Campanile della Pieve (Pieve Bell Tower), where LED equipped shapers projected Christmas features on a facade. Also in the small square of the San Michele church gobo-equipped shapers drew Christmas motives on the ground and the facade. Finally a few LED floodlights, placed on the branches of the trees, lighted up the Guido Monaco statue, thus turning it into a reference point for the visitors.

**And how it may be considered Arezzo in Luce with regards to other similar events?**

I would like to say that my model, albeit at present with lesser ambition, is *Luci d'Artista* of Turin. That is a high-profile art event and, after the *Icastica* experience, surely we will follow suit.

Photo credits: Cecilia Brianza, Barbara De Romedis, Arezzo Municipality