

2 October 2024

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“Great emphasis on meditative states” – Interview with Barnabás Bencsik and Szabolcs Vida

By [Zsuzsa Borbély](#)



Kati Katona: *Immensia*, 2024 - Photo: Dávid Bíró / Light Art Museum Budapest

Dream images drawn onto glass with smoke, light neurons flashing in the nervous system, trees communicating with each other and visualising actual dreams using AI. The Light Art Museum’s latest exhibition *Phantom Vision – Undercurrents of Perception* takes us behind our closed eyes. Chief curator, Barnabás Bencsik, and the head of the programme, Szabolcs Vida, give us a guided tour.

Physics and optics were the main theme of LAM’s previous exhibition but at the present show the focus is on biological phenomena, in addition to which, there are many symbolic and lyrical projects. The meditative works are especially suited for the museum’s darkened spaces. Visitors will find themselves outside of time and space and thus better able to focus on both the works and themselves.

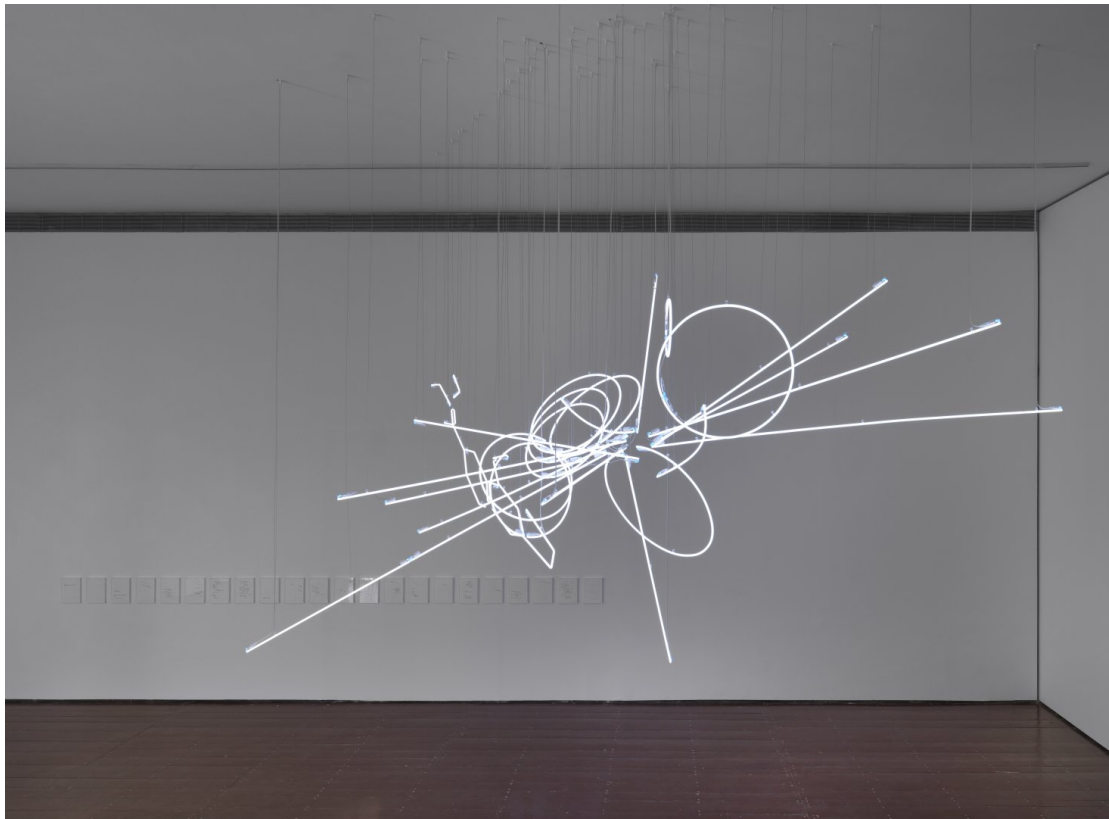
“We’re confident that we are able to organise exhibitions, including this one, that exude such a strong ambiance that they can effectively draw visitors out of the outside world and into a new environment for several hours, and bring them such excitement that their interest in new shows will never flag,” says Szabolcs Vida as he introduced the new exhibition.

“Over the last year, we’ve managed to nurture excellent international ties that have helped us attract real world stars and their works. Ólafur Eliasson’s project has its Hungarian debut, and we have other guest artists at this show such as Cerith Wyn Evans, Brian Eno and John Rafman. It’s a move forward for us that the Hungarian audience – we believe – will encounter these works for the first time here,” says the programme director pointing out the special features of the exhibition.



ÓLAFUR ELÍASSON: *Eye See You*, 2016 – Photo: Dávid Bíró / Light Art Museum Budapest

This will be the third year and exhibition of the Light Art Museum in Hold Street, in the building that used to be a market and is now becoming more and more a home for it. “We’re familiar with the features of the place as well as the room we have for manoeuvre, and we’re expanding the exhibition space wherever we can. One of the latest results of this is a 100-square-metre, air-conditioned and humidity-controlled space with a ceiling height of over three metres, which meets any museum standard. We needed this to be able to display Cerith Wyn Evans’s work, which arrived here from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection.” The installation is a suspended structure of neon tubes. “One side shows the shape of an LSD molecule (the substance revealing inner worlds), while the other is the visual representation of the Higgs boson, which, according to some theories, marks the starting point of our world: two factors of creation crucial for humanity combined in a single installation,” expounds Barnabás Bencsik on the symbolism of the work.



Cerith Wyn Evans: *A Community Predicated on the Basic Fact Nothing Really Matters*, 2013 Neon 318 x 3... Cerith Wyn Evans – *The What If?... Scenario* (after LG) – Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

“Brian Eno’s name might be familiar from the music industry. He was the first to write ambient music in the mid-70s. He is a real world star composer and producer but he also studied painting and in recent years, has become more and more active as an artist. His work displayed here is based on similar principles as ambient music and perfectly fits in with the concept based on which we organised the exhibition. It’s a very calming, contemplative object,” says the curator giving an example of star artists. “These are actually programmed LEDs. Watching them for just thirty seconds to a minute gives you a feel for how their colours and shades change, and the rhythm at which this process takes place. Eno’s three works focus on the process of perception and how the senses function. They also show the limitations of perception since colour memory is also a special ability.”

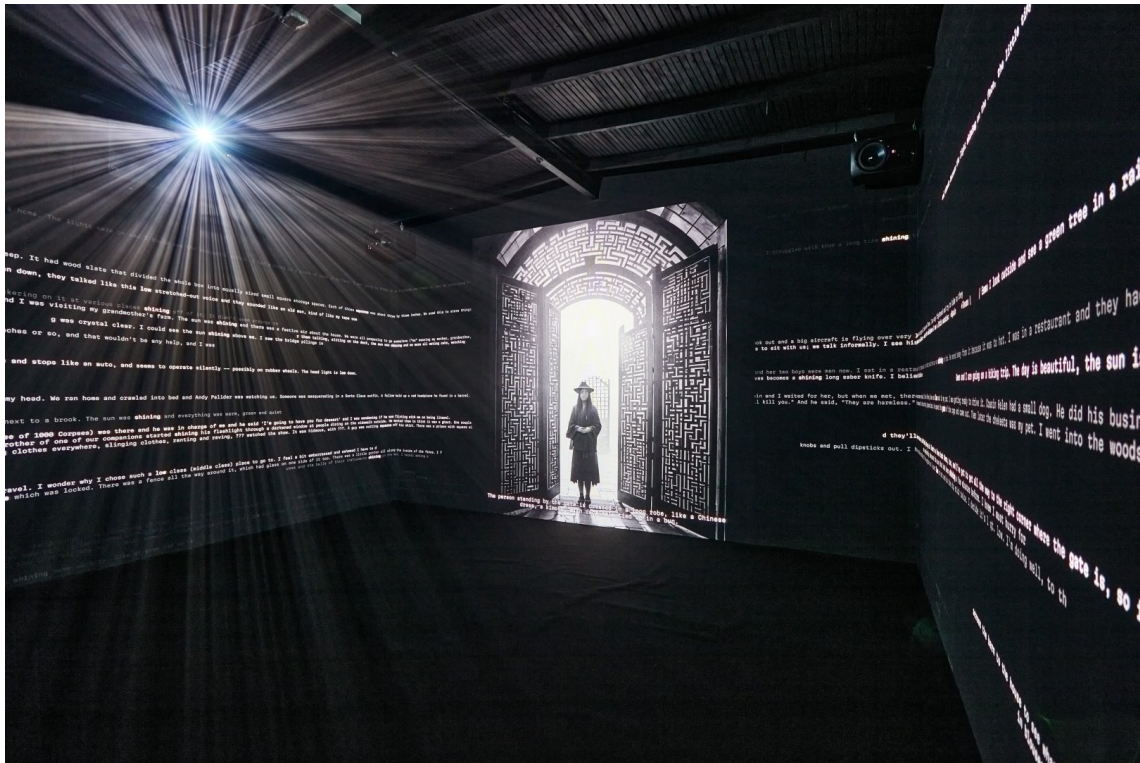


Randomroutines (Tamás Kaszás, Krisztián Kristóf): *Gathering* (third version), 2024 – photo: Dávid Bíró / Light Art Museum Budapest

The exhibiting artists bring into play the imagery of dreams but also the neurological processes taking place in the body and brain during dreaming, and, in association with these, highly diverse waves also appear in the works.

This year's project by the Randomroutines artist duo (Tamás Kaszás and Krisztián Kristóf) titled *Gathering* is one of the few figurative works displayed at this year's exhibition. The two glass hills are built from rubble, more specifically broken boards 'painted' with soot. They depict the story of the lucid people, who are supposedly able to pursue their dreams, meet in their dreams, or even create a dream world together. "Soot-coated glass is a very elusive thing: if you hold it, it all just disappears. This represents the concept of the project very nicely," comments Barnabás Bencsik showing the glass plates depicting various scenes and figures. Just like in dreams, uncertainty is tangible here: what is real and what is the creative mind's imagination behind the story of these people, who can control their dreams?

The Italian FUSE* group's installation is also based on dreams manifest in images. They used a database of 30,000 dreams from dream research institutes in Bologna and Santa Cruz as raw material. "The project is a synthesis of forty dreams recorded in clinical settings. The number of minutes the person slept was recorded along with the phase of the dream process in which the person woke up, and, in the end, the subjects recounted their dreams, which is what visitors hear. Based on these descriptions, artificial intelligence created a visualisation," says Barnabás Bencsik, outlining the background of the 1.5-hour film running on the middle wall. The descriptions of the dreams can be read on the two side walls with the highlighted phrases made searchable so that visitors can see how many people struggle with the same recurring subjects every night. "There are no particularly surprising twists and turns in dreams, at least in these descriptions. And although there are a few extreme things, the point is that people usually dream about quite ordinary things."



fuse*: *ONIRICA* (), 2023 – Photo: Dávid Bíró / Light Art Museum Budapest

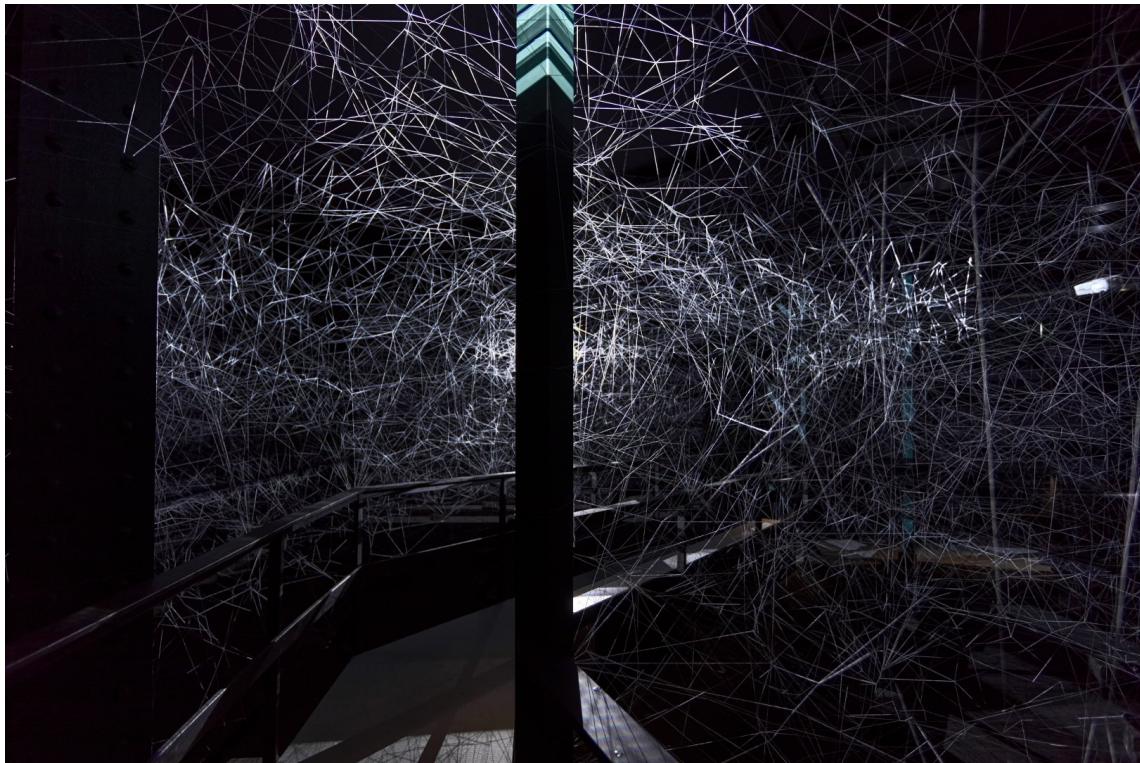
It's as if Jon Rafman's *Dream Journal* – projected in a room behind a door locked with a code – was a mirror piece of this work. “John Rafman’s animation shows images influenced by the internet, the dark net, spies and computer games: those contents of consciousness that are generated when people spend a huge amount of time looking at digitally generated images in digital reality. The work addresses the phenomenon of physical and virtual realities completely merging in many people’s minds,” says the curator explaining the film, which features disturbing figures and events.

“This is an artwork with a completely different visual character and imagery than the previous one. It evokes the technology of the 2010s, i.e. game-creation programmes. Older people do not really know what this world is: the world of obsessive gamers. It is Rafman’s contention that people who spend 12 to 14 hours a day playing such games are completely at the mercy of dopamine delivery algorithms created by software designers. The games make them addicted.”



Jon Rafman: *Dream Journal 2016–2019*, 2019, Courtesy the artist and Sprüth Magers
 Photo: Dávid Bíró / Light Art Museum Budapest

In addition to works that can be interpreted as critiques of everyday life overstimulated and inundated with images, the meditative projects displayed at the exhibition offer a balancing counterpoint. For example, visitors can take the chance to sit down and immerse themselves in the dark space of Yasuhiro Chida's *Analemma*. Tiny particles of light surround and slowly glide by the viewer with a purpose but no haste. This meditative experience is simultaneously akin to jellyfish floating in a tank and stimuli running in the nervous system. For brief moments, the whole room is illuminated, revealing the dense network through which the points of light pass and which completely surrounds the visitor. The artist responds to another attribute of dreams. "The functioning of the central nervous system creates images, sensations and sensual impressions generated during sleep without any contribution from our senses. During the REM phase, the nervous system purifies itself," said the curator providing the scientific background to this. He also draws attention to the fact that many of the exhibits are connected by the motifs of waves and wave phenomena, including radio waves, brain waves, water waves or electromagnetic waves.

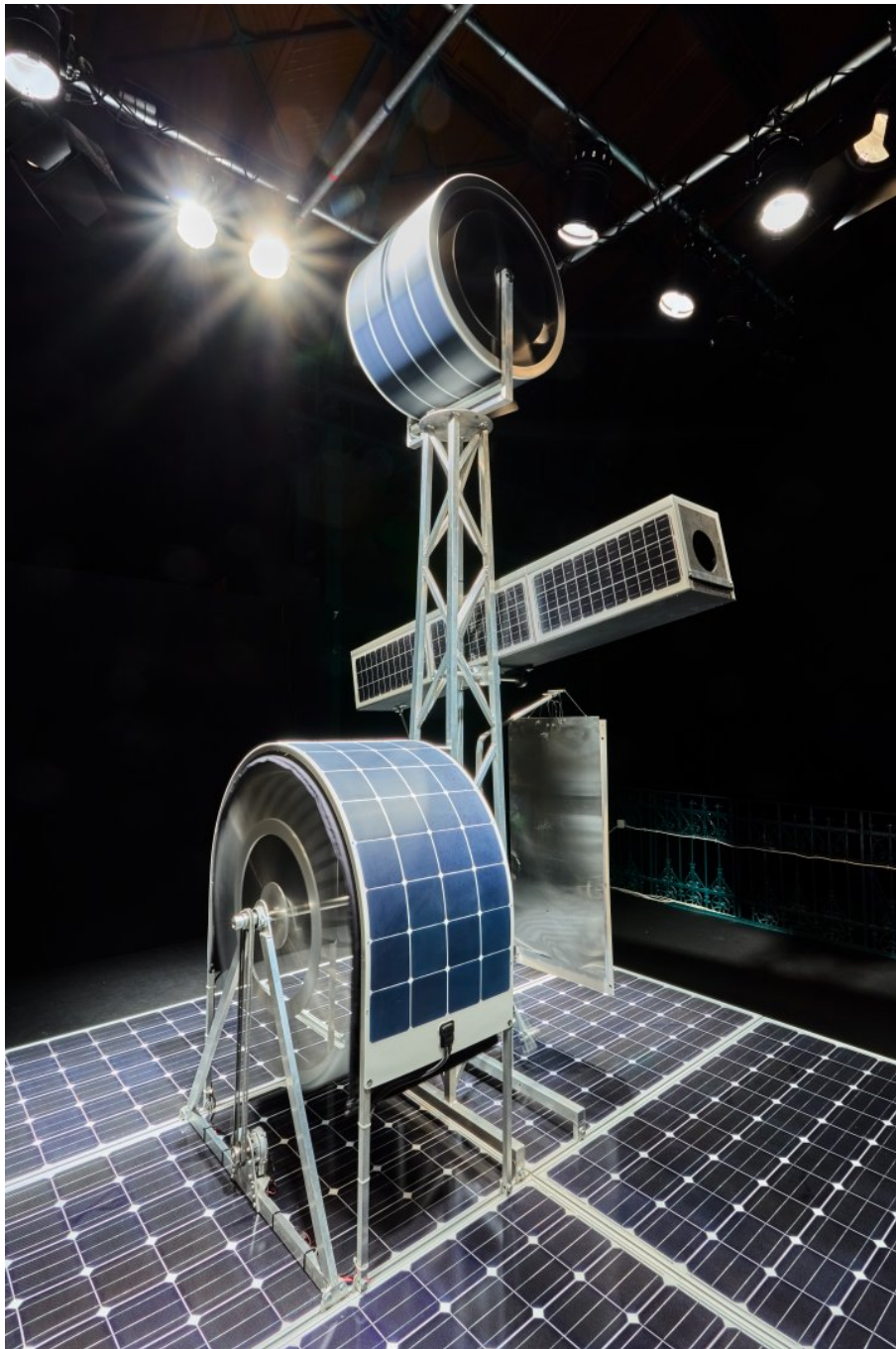


Yasuhiro Chida: *Analemma*, 2019 – Photo: Dávid Bíró / Light Art Museum Budapest

Waves can also be in a single drop of water, as demonstrated by the artist's other work at the exhibition, in which a LED-illuminated drop of water keeps forming and falling. "It's basically the drop of water that functions as a lens. It's like a living organism, like an animal. This work definitely requires the focused attention and time that plays such a significant role in these meditative situations in the exhibition," adds Bencsik. "It's also essential that we maintain a balance between the digitally generated and the analogue visual experiences and situations."

"There are different artistic stances or approaches. Thijs Biersteker specifically bases his works on scientific research. He tries to visualise the facts and processes learned from such research: for example, how trees communicate with each other through their roots. The answer being that they use various fungi and chemical processes to share information important for their survival," says the curator about *Econtinuum*. "They used a 3D printer and plastic bottles collected from the sea to model the root systems of two existing trees, while the flow of fluids is projected onto them by two projectors installed with a mapping programme. This is an interactive installation. The speed of flow and the direction of movement are constantly changing depending on the humidity and the temperature in the exhibition space. For example, if 20-30 people enter at once, the flow will be quite different. Many people have a personal relationship with trees and the installation creates this situation in a very abstract form. The basic idea was to make invisible things visible – like the tree roots here."

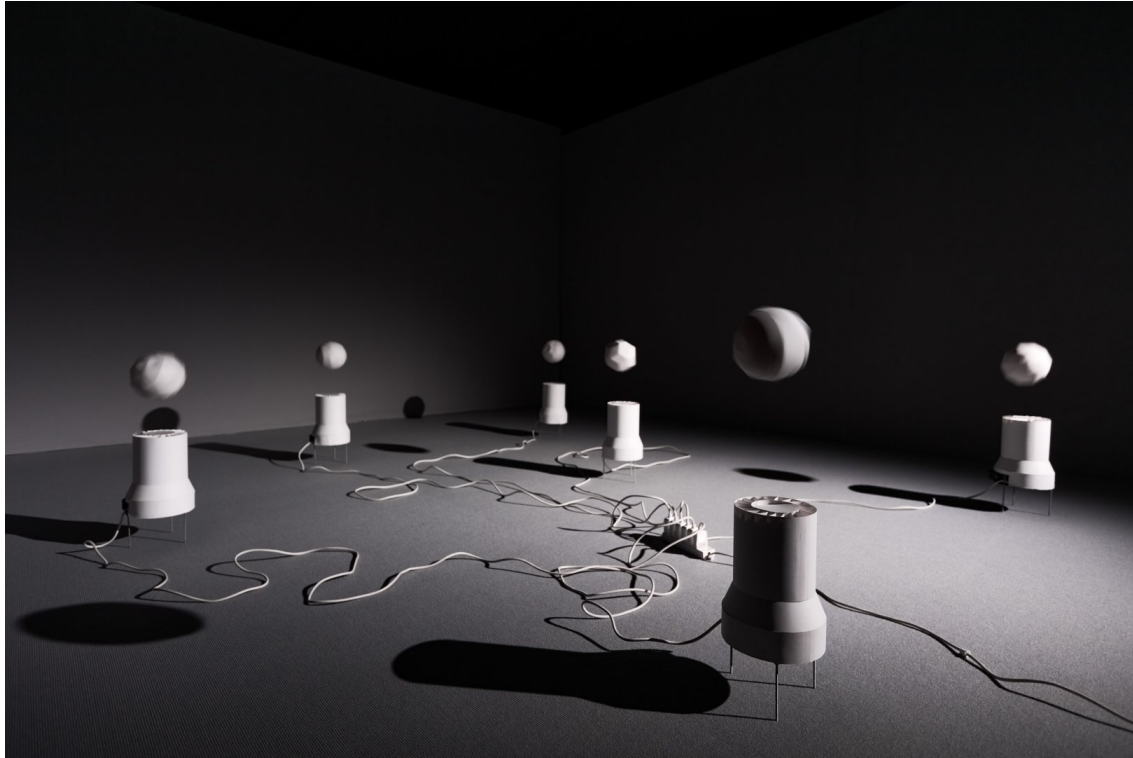
"Biersteker is an ecological artist who presents issues related to the climate crisis in spectacular ways. His works engage with the deepest recesses of our brains," says Bencsik explaining the creator's ars poetica. "This is an artificially produced object but nature is evoked very directly, for example by showing the shadows as the sun shines through the trees."



Bigert & Bergström: *Scenario/Scenery*, 2020 – Photo: Dávid Bíró / Light Art Museum Budapest

The exhibits are often reflections upon one another. It is precisely what we've just talked about that Bigert and Bergström's work calls into question. "Their work runs on solar panels but it draws attention to the fact that sometimes we are trapped in the misconception that we can save nature with technology. Of course it's absurd to think that we can power this machine with solar panels as it obviously consumes much more energy than what can be recycled with the solar panels," says Szabolcs Vida pointing out the artist's critical approach.

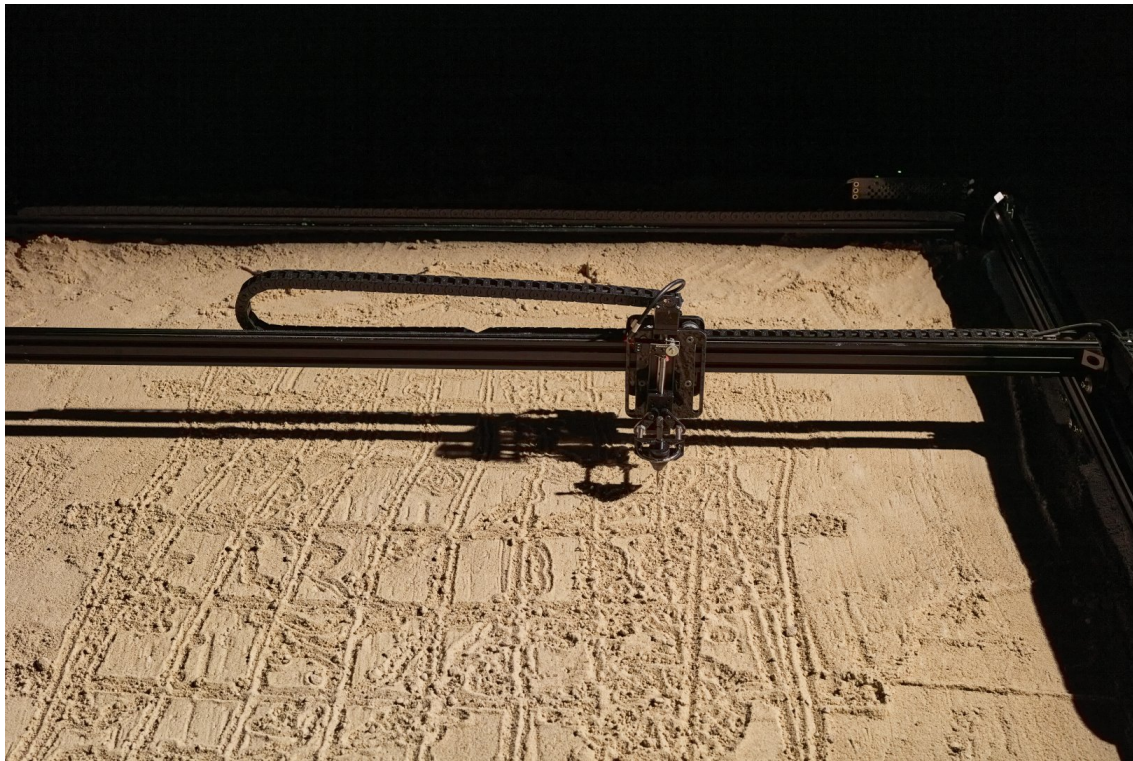
"This is a stage technique that was applied in Baroque theatres: the forces of nature – storms, wind, and thunder – were imitated behind the scenes in this way. The work highlights the contradiction that characterises many ecologically committed artists, who produce a much larger ecological footprint with their works than the extent to which they draw attention to environmental problems or transform public perception. Indeed, the issue regarding the relationship between man and the environment has become increasingly controversial lately," adds the curator.



Attila Csörgő: *How to Construct an Orange?*, 1994 – Photos: Dávid Bíró / Light Art Museum Budapest

The wind moves Attila Csörgő's installation, quite literally. The project is an experiment with an optimal solution using bodies of various structures. Each body closely approximates a perfect spherical body but have different structures, so they all react differently to the same aerodynamic phenomenon," explained the artist standing in the installation. "They jump differently in the flow of air. The assumption is that a real sphere would be motionless, while a balloon would just vibrate. However, these bodies are constructed with all kinds of flat planes so the air is caught in them and sets them in motion. They all have a different structure, so the air moves them a bit differently, hence the diverse movements."

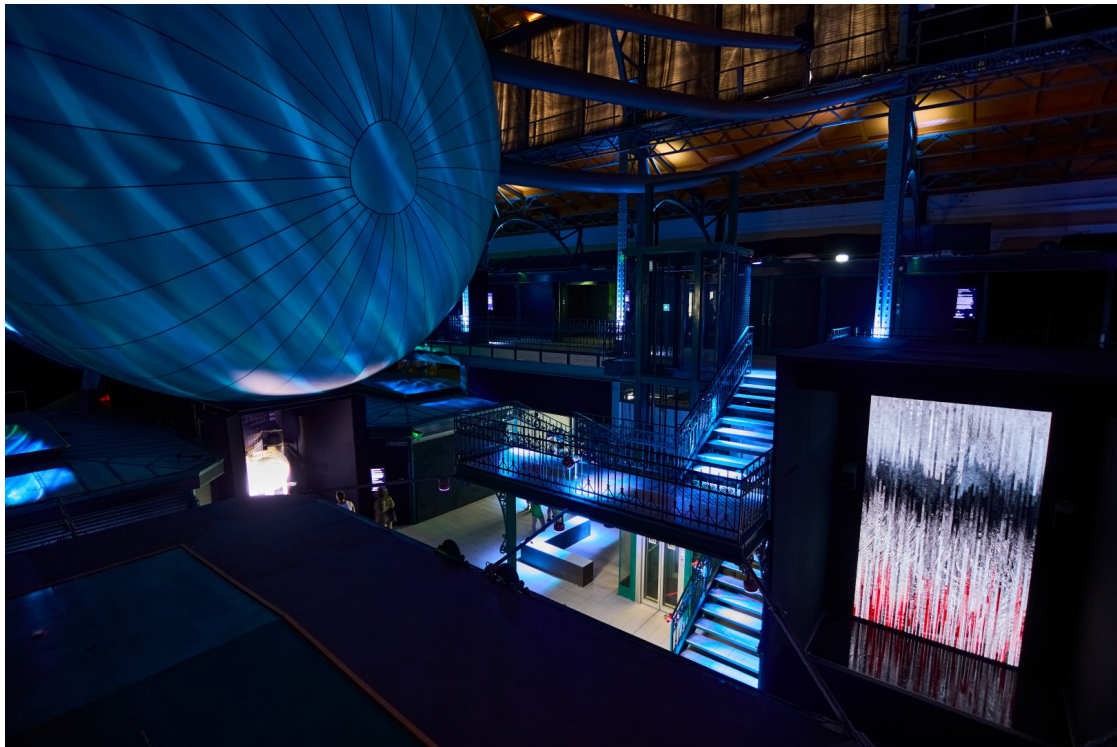
Sébastien Robert's work is at the meeting point between nature and man. "The French artist discovered stray radio waves by accident while collecting radio signals on the Dutch dam system. He identified a regular radio frequency broadcast from Munich. It contained meteorological data from the North Sea, which was the weather report for the following week," recounted the curator. "The broadcast had been made from Germany from the 1940s but the equipment that was used on ships to receive the radio waves disappeared in the meantime. The transmitters have not disappeared, only the receivers. No one uses them for anything anymore. Based on this, the device in Robert's installation draws a map into the fine-grained sand under it daily. In the original installation [on an island], the wind blew away the completed map at the end of the day. And now we are smoothing it out here."



Sébastien Robert: *Back-and-forth*, 2022–2024 – Photo: Dávid Bíró / Light Art Museum Budapest

The idea of materialising waves also forms the core of Antal Lakner's work titled *REM bed*. "The artist cut out the curve of the brain's activity during the REM phase, turned it into an image and then into a 3D object: a fakir's bed. In this form, the curve virtually returns into itself: it becomes a sleeping surface, representing what the man lying on it dreamed, i.e. the activity of his/her brain. A synthesis is thus created between the achievements of Western science and the tradition of reflexology in Far Eastern medicine."

One of the most complex spaces in the exhibition is that of AlanJames Burns' project on neurodiversity. "There are two aspects to this work. One is a video work with talking and conversations facilitating a clear understanding of the topic. The other is a brain sensor, and it is planned that there will be weekly sessions where visitors can try it, while talking to a psychologist about psychological issues relevant to the subjects addressed by the work," Vida explains. "Here, for example, the use of a brain sensor shows how difficult it is to learn to focus attention."



The interior spaces of the museum – Photo: Dávid Bíró / Light Art Museum Budapest

“They put the sensor on my head and an electronic representation of my brain activity comes up on the monitor. In the meantime, I am listening to the text, and watching the video, while the image I see changes depending on how intense my brain activity, my attention and other parameters are,” adds Bencsik giving a practical description. “The issue of neurodiversity from ADHD through autism to Asperger’s syndrome is one many people are preoccupied with. It is important that everyone properly understands that these are not diseases but merely other ways in which the nervous system functions, and that they can have countless benefits,” according to Barnabás Bencsik. “These people think very differently but they are marginalized by traditional social norms because of this. It would be much better for everyone if they were included and involved in social discourse.”

“There are works that have been adapted in some way for this exhibition, and there are several that have been created specifically for it. So there’s a wide spectrum but site-specificity is quite common due to the characteristics of the exhibition space and the genre,” says Szabolcs Vida.



Kati Katona: *Immensia*, 2024 - source: Light Art Museum Budapest

One of the site-specific genres is the 360-degree projection in the ‘zeppelin’, which is the iconic space of the museum. At the current exhibition, it is used for a mapping by Kati Katona, a Hungarian artist under the age of 30. The experts hope this will encourage other young artists to exploit this unique space. Only the works made especially for the exhibition are included here.

“I think immersive exhibitions like ours will become increasingly popular in the foreseeable future. It is no coincidence that more and more museums are experimenting with these types of spaces and situations,” added Vida in connection with the relatively large number of such works at this exhibition.

“The exhibition is very intense, so I wouldn’t be surprised if quite a few people decided to come back more than once. It’s not really possible to take in almost forty works like these all at the same time. I think it’s worth coming back,” recommends the head of the programme.