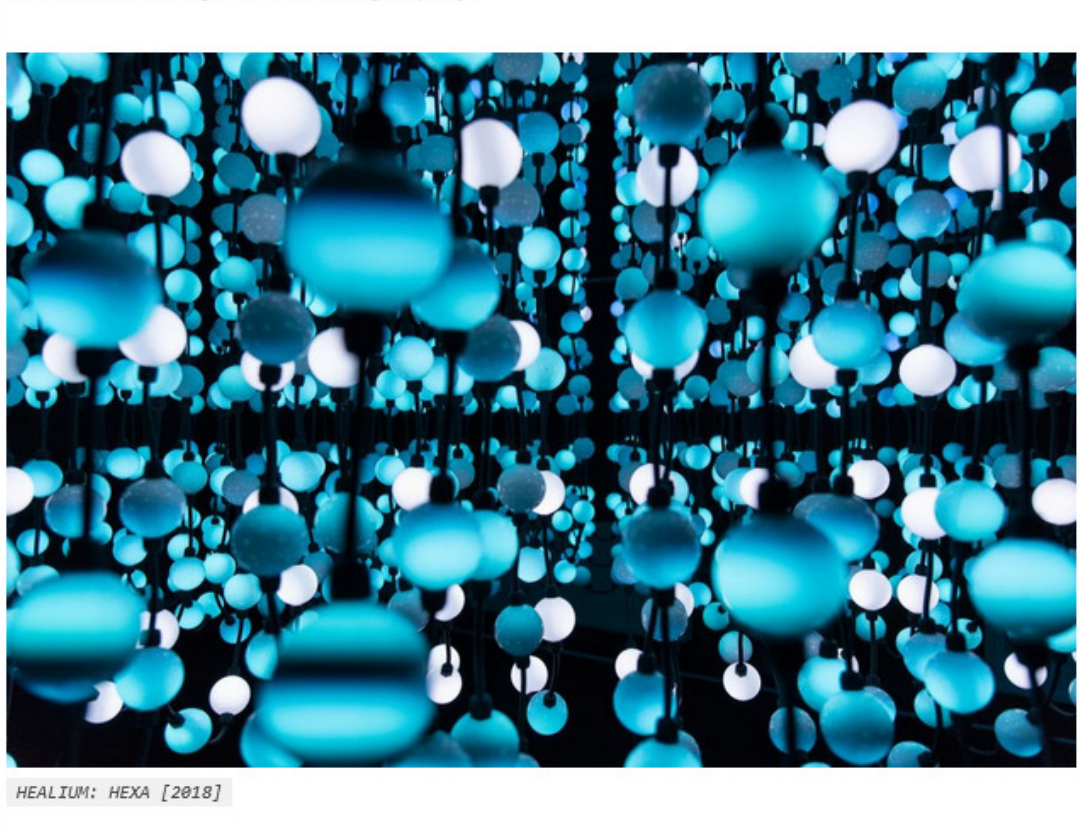
Lighthouse Eliminates the Fourth Wall

How art is becoming a collective experience through the medium of light

by Viola Lukács

If we admit that we are going through a collective trauma, we may ask; How does art liberate a "corona" state of mind? During the past year, the arts have also been limited, frozen, or ultimately deported to crystal screens. Millions of artists, including musicians, VJs, designers, technicians, performers, and dancers, have been put on hold without the promise of resumption. Politics confirmed the uncertain, media rumored lockdown for the next seasons. Lighthouse has been standing in solidarity with these artists and organized an exhibition that turned confinement into creative grounds and affliction into innovation with the support of the deputy mayor of culture, István Puskás, and the Csokonai Theatre in the city of Debrecen, Hungary.

The time-entry schedule and a pandemic-proof setting made it possible to safely immerse into the exhibition. When I step over the ornamental entry of a 19th-century building, the theater visit converts into an entirely unexpected journey. Fourteen technically complex and neurologically stimulating artworks turn the architectural maze into a subjective spatial landscape. I am invited to take the lead role through a 2-hour light play.


HEALIUM: HEXA [2018]

Gábor Kitzinger established his reputation by synthesizing art, audio/visual culture, and technology. He has been part of the Glowing Bulbs collective for twenty years, still works independently and in other collaborative settings, this time with Hanna Tardos and Martin Mikolai. Under S Olbricht, Mikolai became one of the key producers in Eastern Europe's new experimental electronic music scene; his iconoclastic noise composition quasi-regulates the sculpture's visuals. One part of their work's success is seeing horizontal art production in a perpetual conversation across disciplines. The other part is the work itself, a unique encounter with *Limbo*: which is a generative avatar. The techno blue bust is sealed into a transparent four-sided frustum and levitates at eye-level. The holographic entity first squiggles into a snake from a funny abstract mass, then morphs from a young boy to a worn human face. I just observe the monstrous machine from a distance and follow its closed life circle, trembling from a zygote state to life and decay and over again. Coming closer the creation reacts to my movement. I am granted the opportunity to liberate "them" and influence their existence in unexpected ways. This interaction made me realize that Limbo employs *recursivity* and *contingency* as the two principle concepts in Yuk Hui's recent media philosophy. He investigates the relationship between nature and technology, machine and organism, order, and freedom. In this way, Kitzinger applies In Catholic theology Limbo signifies to be stuck between heaven and hell, within our raptured zeitgeist, and beyond mythology identifies it with a speculative question: if the concept of contingency is always related to the laws of nature, then in what way can we understand contingency within technology? Along this line, the algorithm that keeps Limbo running might be equivalent to the recursive technological systems we live in.

GÁBOR KITZINGER, MARTIN MIKOLAI, HANNA TARDOS: LIMBO [2020]

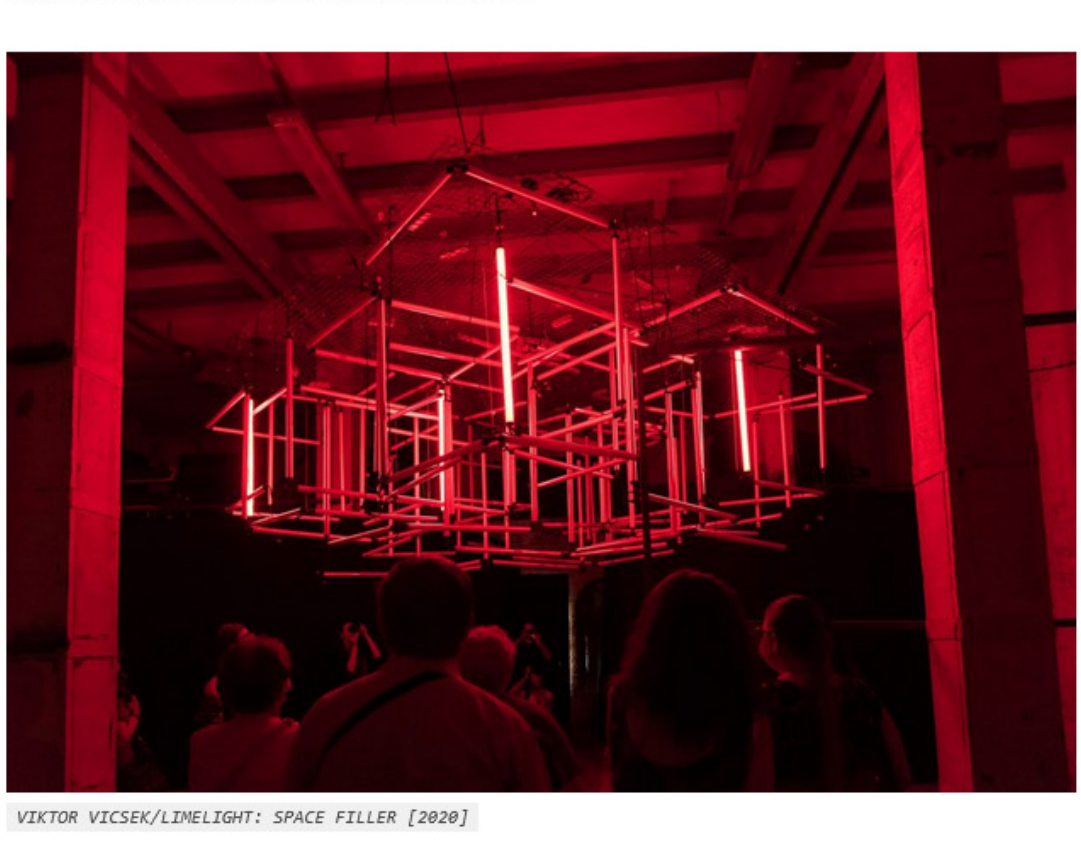
Kitzinger's thought-provoking work not only results from a computer-generated animation examining cybernetics, but also dives into the history of illusionary optics. Bence Buczkó built a large black box to hide the installation's brain, similar to Wolfgang von Kempelen's *Mechanical Turk* (1770). Instead of a human, the box contains a computer with a witty construction of a Victorian stage effect: the Pepper's Ghost. During an intimate performance on Christmas Eve of 1862, Prof. John Henry Pepper amazed a group of Londoners with a skeleton on stage in a strange transparent quality. The trick was not wholly new. Giambattista Della Porta mentioned the phenomenon in his 16th-century book, *Magia Naturalis* (Natural Magic). The point was to make an object behind a person appear as though it were in front of them. Pepper partnered with an engineer Henry Dircks to set the illusion easily adaptable to stage, "so they situated the actor in the orchestra pit, then tilted the pane of glass 45 degrees toward the audience while simultaneously matching the actor's angle on a board so he could be more easily obscured." It seemed to work, and the illusion kept on astounding spectators around the world, even today. Kitzinger's profound innovation makes Pepper's Ghost appear from any perspective in 3D because the computer-generated image is projected from four different angles.

ANDRÁS NAGY – ZALÁN ADORJÁN: IRIS [2020]

Among the deities, who dwelt on Mount Olympus, one was called Iris. When Iris carried particular messages from Heaven to Earth, she used rainbows as her pathway. Skip forward two thousand years, and I see her divine dance in the rain of line-red laser beams followed by the heartbeats of the universe. *Iris* is one of the few installations in this show with a definite beginning and end, a complete narrative folded into precise motion and spatial computing. The music, composed by **Jérôme Li-Thiao-Té**, like moaning wind, guides our listening with primitive beats to a futuristic rave. Iris could also stand for that tiny circular organ in the eye responsible for the amount of light reaching the retina by regulating the pupil's size. In the case of this artwork, Iris is the first robotic creation by engineer **Zalán Adorján** and mapping artist **András Nagy**. The convincing collaboration between these two extended reality (XR) titans symbolises the new generation of virtuous artists combining real-and-virtual environments with human-machine interactions generated by computer technology and robotics.

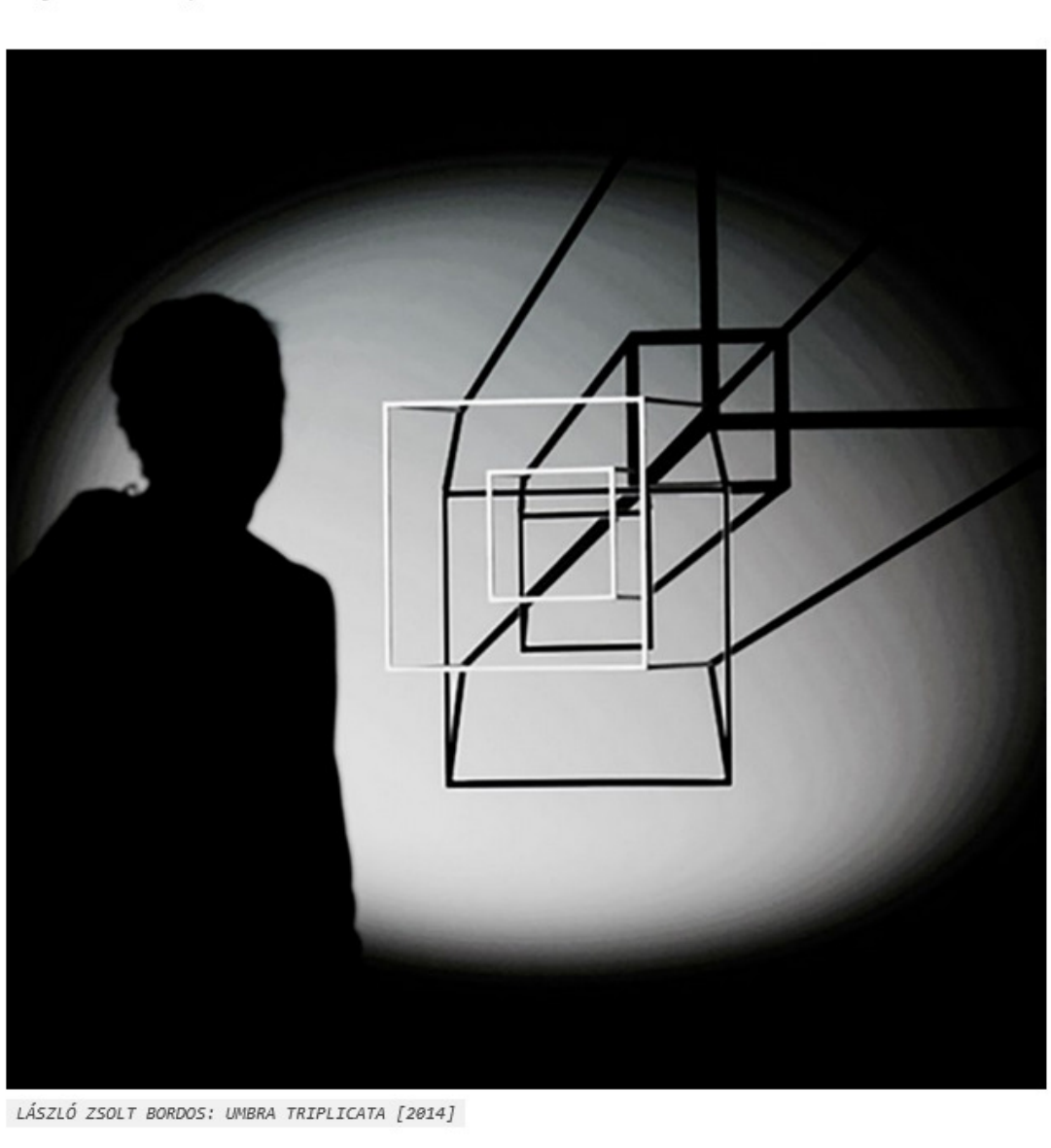
GÁSPÁR BATTHA: TWO SHAPES? [2020]

Same brood, **Gáspár Battha,** created *Two Shapes?*. The sculpture unfolds the curious relationship between two Platonic solids, the cube and the Octahedron. Both are made from equal polygons and precisely positioned one against the other so that the rules of mathematics easily trick the beholder's eyes. Inside of the Octahedron's magnifying glass body, an infinite loop of the lit cube is reflected. The brain would like to stay longer to understand the optical illusion while a stripe of light rushes the eyes to the lucid mirror cube, which has already swallowed up hundreds of octahedrons.


VIKTOR VICSEK/LIMELIGHT: SPACE FILLER [2020]

The chain of sacred geometry does not end here; the lofty storage room invites the visitor to a trembling experience, *Space Filler*. **Viktor Vicsek**'s red-tube installation cumulates a cube's permutation as if it were a chimera from Iannis Xenakis's Nomos Alpha. The stockpile of floating tubes shakes optically the entire room with their pulsing safelight on 4/4 beats. Vicsek emerged from the legendary Hungarian underground techno scene in the nineties. At the magical landscape of Frank-hegy (Frank-hill), on Budapest's outskirts, the rave parties pioneered the electronic music festival scene in Eastern-Europe and fostered the region's first projection mapping generations. In the early years, it was a nondigital, static technique using a light beamer with hand-painted glass filters. However, the technology was not radically new, comparing it to pioneer light and kinetic artists Frank Malina and György Kepes. Still, the implication and the context of the projections opened a creative channel for many present artists.

Walking alongside the faintly pulsing light stripe in the dusky rotunda, I discover a familiar sculpture. The recognition comes immediately; it is **László Zsolt Bordos**'s work what I saw at ZKM Karlsruhe in the exhibition of *Negativer Raum* (2019) aimed to redefine sculptures in our time. The show was remarkable in demonstrating the ever-changing human perception of space through works by Hans Arp, Alexander Calder, Bernar Venet, Trisha Brown, Refik Anadol, and dozens of outstanding modern and contemporary artists. The title of this work, *Umbra Tripticata*, translates from Latin to "folded shadow." Bordos' optical tour de force brings one's perception into conflict with their brain's response through an augmented experience between real and the virtual.


LÁSZLÓ ZSOLT BORDOS: UMBRA TRIPLICATA [2014]

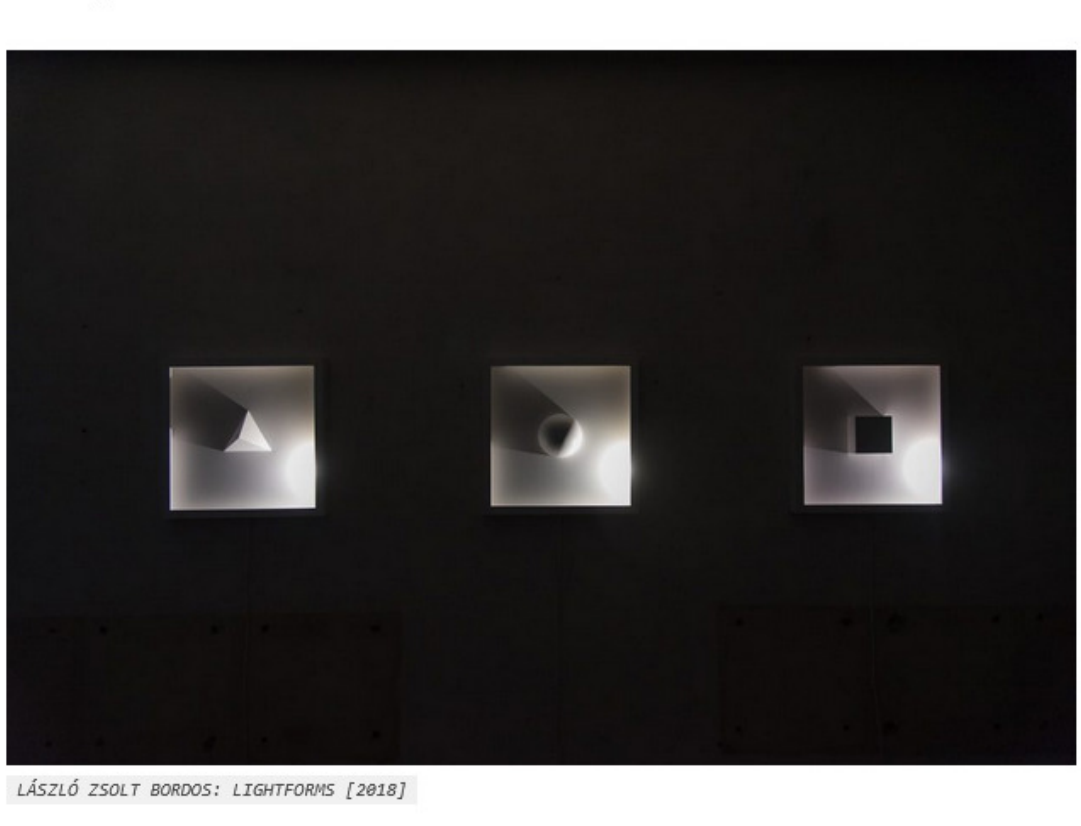
The metal grid shapes a concentric cubic structure grown out from the wall. The shadow is where the trick twists the viewer's eye; the object's natural shadow on the wall and yet it is utterly identical to the virtual shadow. While the "real" shade is gradually illuminated, the projected one moves and disrupts the mind as the light source stays fixed. Based on millions of cognitive experiences, this one does not fit one's own logic; rather, it indicates a spatial-visual rethinking. Thus, this virtuous object broadens the understanding of what sculpture might mean today. However, this is one of the best examples to illustrate the fundamental logic of 3D mapping as a thriving new art genre.

Using the abandoned room with a single light source as an instrument, **Erik Matrai** cut into conventional structures, creating unexpected apertures and incisions. Despite its mundane simplicity, there is something divine about this piece. More precisely, witnessing the work is humbling for the soul. I take a few silent steps towards the gradually approaching light wall that-along with the infinite number of diagonals-always divides the room into halves. The momentum of ultimate revelation occurs when the light passes over my pupils. I'm blinded for a second while completely embodying the uncanny feeling of transmission and eventually find myself on the other side of the diaphanous *Moving Wall*. I can very well think that Matrai's oeuvre is a generous offer to build on Renaissance polyhistors' foundations and even to precede modern visionaries such as Hilma af Klint, Renzo Piano, and James Turrell. The elevated awe experience is granted to everyone who wants to dedicate a different kind of attention to a quotidian phenomenon.

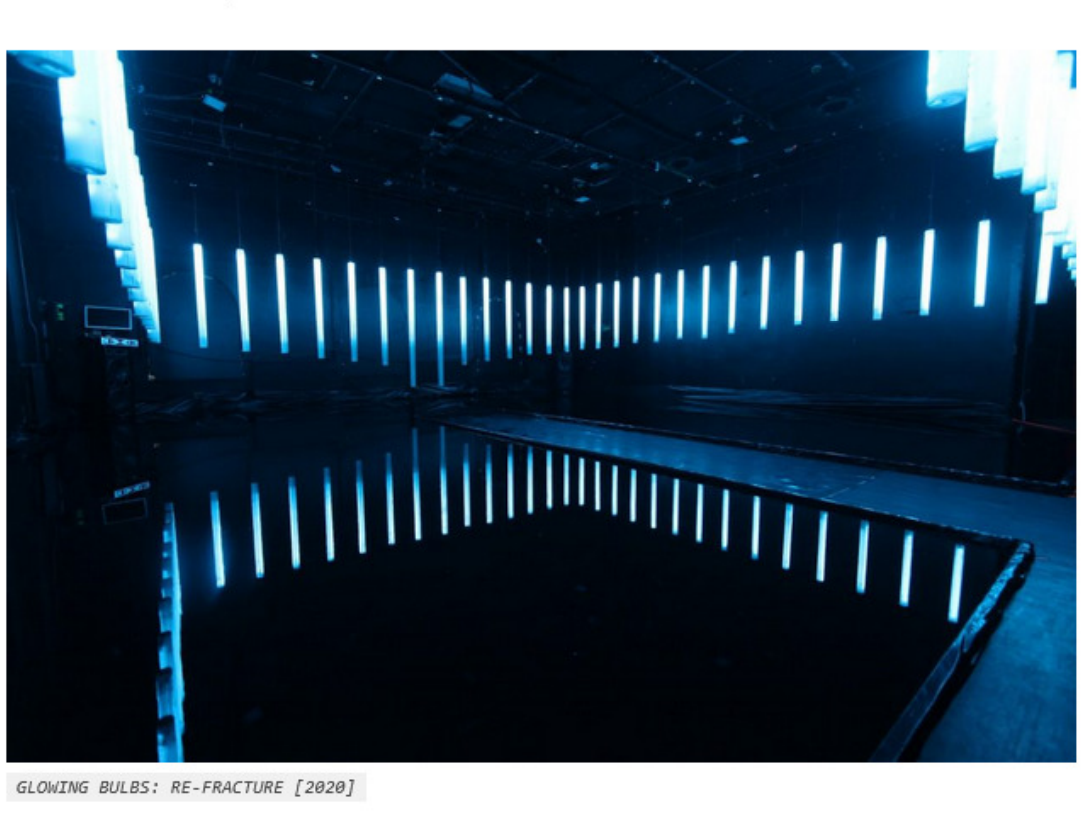
ERIK MÁTRAI: MOVING WALL [2019]

The conceptual and minimalist tendencies of the 1960s made it evident that human and non-human context defines art. The easiest way to identify and commodify art has been the well-constructed, immaculate walls of the "white cube." Marcel Duchamp brought everyday objects into the gallery space, and ever since, art has been trying hard to break its barriers and get closer to reality. The *Lighthouse:ON* exhibition demonstrates a radical exodus leaving the white cube space and temporarily occupying a theater building. Within this situation, the "*breaking the fourth wall*" occurs with the audience's direct engagement to present the theater as a space of complete ontological indeterminacy, reflecting the unstable metaphysics of lived experience. Therefore the traditional frames of art are entirely abandoned; the event creates subjective spaces and, indeed, a collective experience, a sort of ritual immersing into light.

László Zsolt Bordos' next work emphasizes the mission to position projection mapping not as a spectacle, but rather as a cutting-edge medium that transforms light to challenge traditional spatial-visual perception. *Refraction*, a performative installation, activates the building's northern facade's blinded windows. The curious experience makes me believe that glorious light is streaming out of the windows. I am aware that the theatre is completely dark so the light beams must be coming from the outside. The moment of understanding comes as a shiver over my body when I spot the projector installed seventy meters away from the building.


LÁSZLÓ ZSOLT BORDOS: LIGHTFORMS [2018]

Have you ever wondered how we actually sense time? In 2018, "researchers at the Kavli Institute for Systems Neuroscience have discovered a network of brain cells that expresses our sense of time within experiences and memories. The brain area where time is experienced is located right next to the area that codes for space." During this experiment, scientists investigate subjective time in conjunction with events stored in memory. No surprise that time perception is fluid and primarily based on various inputs; that's why devices have been used to measure and keep track of time for thousands of years. The current sexagesimal system comes from the Sumerians and dates to approximately 2000 BC. The Egyptians divided the day into two 12-hour periods and used large obelisks to track the sun's movement. Representation of temporality repeatedly appears in this exhibition. Probably the best example is **Csongor G. Szigeti**'s *Sunpin*. The meticulously crafted object appears as a telescope, which instead of providing a close-up view of the sun's surface, follows its path from the very point where it stands. When drawing an invisible circle around its axis point, the giant needle continuously maps time even at night when the Earth shows its other side to the sun. A triptych composition by **László Zsolt Bordos** is also "reminiscent of planetary motion," but for entirely different reasons; each solid–a hemisphere, a tetrahedron, and a half cube–contains its own little sun circling every 60 seconds. "As light fields in organically contingent gradations evolving from darkness to highest luminosity," thus, *Lightforms* becomes gnomons to demonstrate time and have my eyes enveloped by the multi-channeled invocation. The austere poetics of geometry captured the attention of many artists long after Platon's theory. However, tracing the conceptual spring of *Lightforms* leads us to study works by Marcel Breuer, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Manfred Mohr, Vera Molnar, Sol LeWitt and François Morellet.


GLOWING BULBS: RE-FRACTURE [2020]

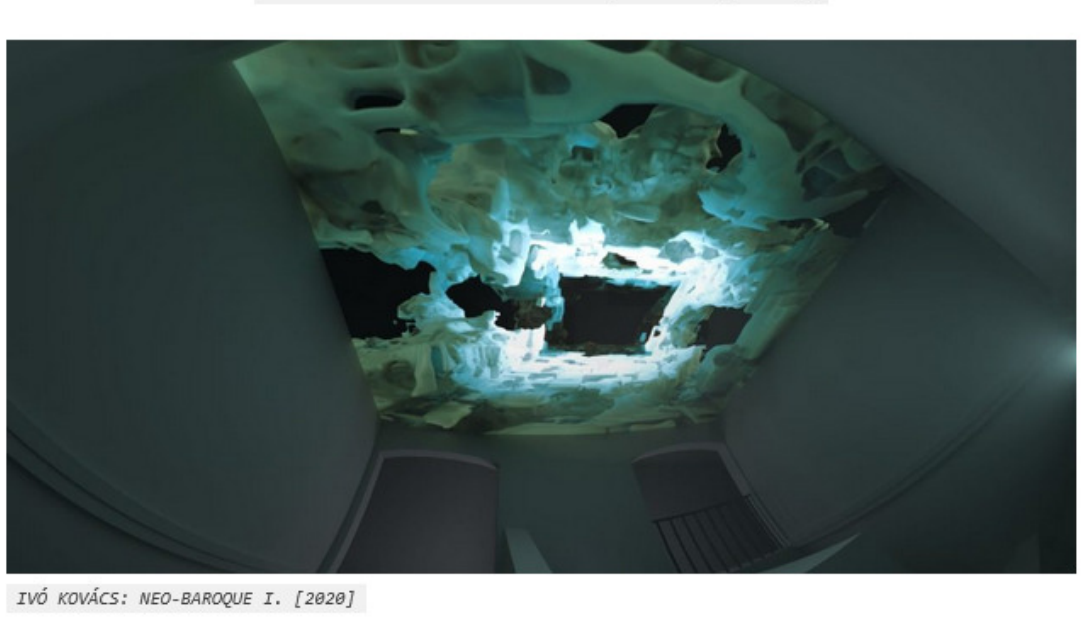
The art collective **Glowing Bulbs** has a remarkable history of 23 years creating ephemeral visual interventions across the globe. The members Tamás Zádor, Márton Noll, Fülöp Farkas, Gábor Kitzinger and Sarkadi Nagy Balázs perform the highest degree of endurance and integrity in collaboration. *Re-Fracture* is the second generation of Glowing Bulbs' spatial installation; *Fracture*, which was originally created in 2018 for the Hungarian Academy of Rome. The minimal recursive elements notably contrasted the baroque garden of the Palazzo Falconieri while fearlessly incorporated the examination of time. Whereas *Re-Fracture* occupies the theatre's darkest room. I cringe while approaching the vague agora surrounded by 60, bit-driven flashing columns. The process or the execution of the work is completely hidden from my eyes. In Glowing Bulbs's installation, the flickers of time have become ebullient-even ecstatic-while I am thrown into a passive role; so, the act of viewing is that which is ultimately performed.

CSILLA SZILÁGYI – TAMÁS HERCZEG: TRANSFUSE-SERIES [2019]

Csilla Szilágyi and **Tamás Herczeg** collaborated in the creation of a multi-layered project, *Transfuse*. Tamás Herczeg's fractal graphics and animations often appear in theatre sets and dance performances; this time, they activate three glass sculptures. Csilla Szilágyi combined crystal glass, stainless steel, and aluminum into spherical shapes based on a triangular lattice. The translucid triptych structure filters the gradually turning beams casting a cheerful kaleidoscopic light play on the back wall.

No video with supported format and MIME type found.

IVÓ KOVÁCS: NEO-BAROQUE I. [2020]

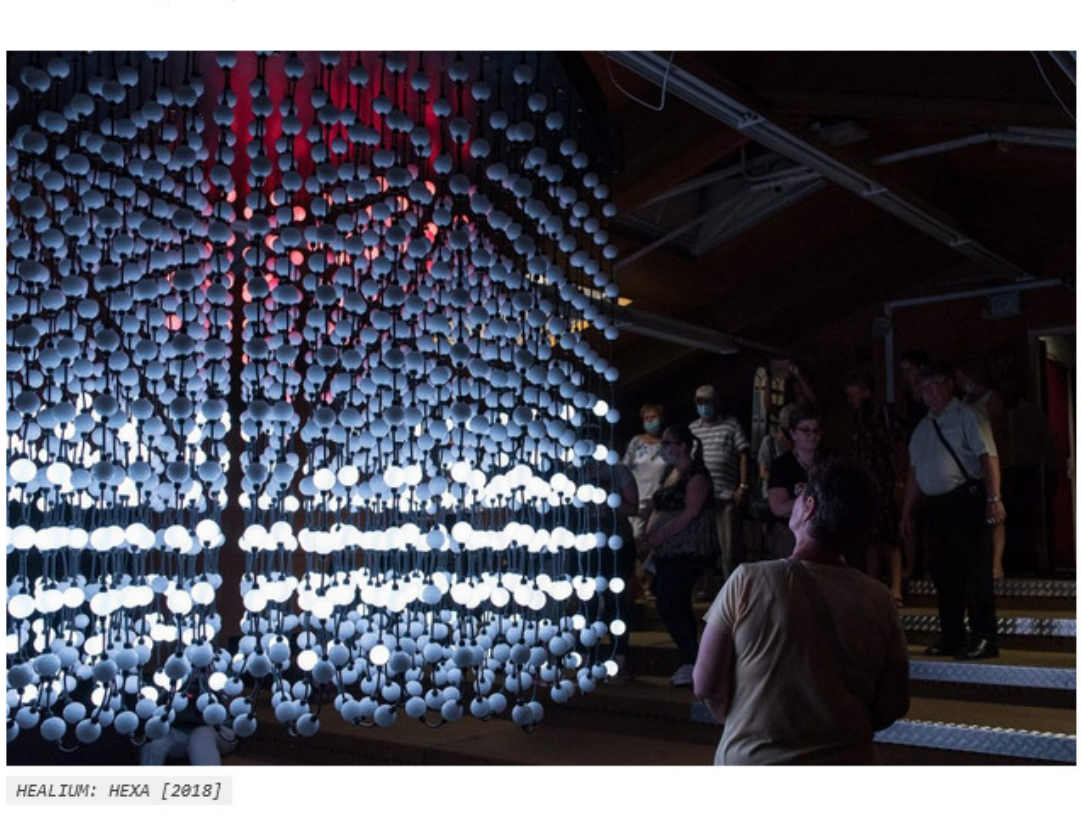

IVÓ KOVÁCS: NEO-BAROQUE I. [2020]

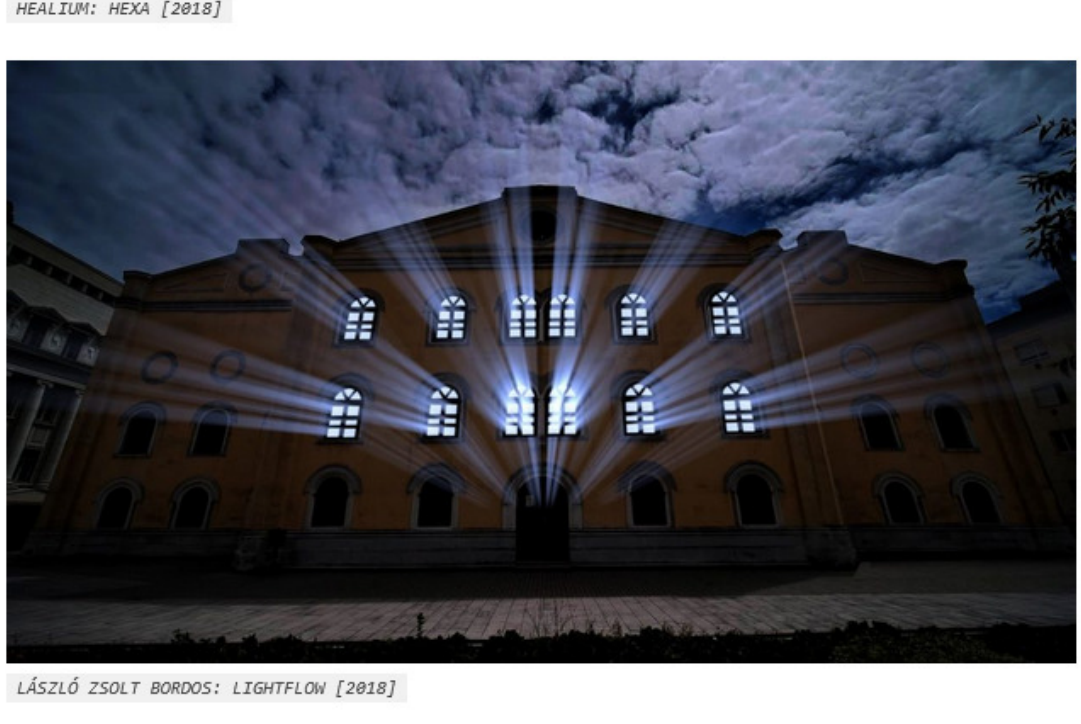
The spectacular illusionism and affective charge are evident in both the *Neo-Baroque I.* and the *Omni Space* audio-visual installations created by **Ivó Kovács**. There is a great reason to consider these works as one of the significant reflections of Neo-Baroque tendencies in contemporary visual culture. As of the nineties, we have been exposed to the baroque's reemergence into more technologically informed expressions. A baroque mentality has again become crystallized on a grand scale within the context of Hollywood cinema, mass media, and of course, the gaming industry. Ivo offers a critical approach to these postmodern phenomena with lavishing techno-mythologies. The site-specific installation *Neo-Baroque I.* is an exquisitely crafted digital landscape merging from the blue screen of death (BSoD) right onto the grand stairway ceiling. Typically, this part of the building was considered a negative space where people would pass, aiming to reach the hall. This time the carefully mapped computer-generated sky loops into an infinite discovery of moving architectural elements and modular clouds. Such an elevating experience induces awe by echoing Baroque sublime yet leaving me with a slight aftertaste of kitsch. However, it is not far from that of M.C. Escher, the master of illusion, for the intention, fiercely recurring, is to generate an endlessly extending and repeating perspective. A prolonged version of three techno tracks with a short sequence from Händle's Agrippina, distorted beyond recognition, follows the visual stream. "In its overall effect, it is so complex that it seems mystical to the viewer, though the algorithm only unconsciously designates, opens, and fills the space over and over again." Ivo's signature gesture of attraction and repulsion infiltrates a more intimate room on the second floor. The polished metal half-dome casts a somewhat baroque churchlike interior onto the dark walls. The delicate sound piece composed by Daniel Czene, aka Maks, invites me into a meditative session at *Omni Space*.
Heading to the last venue, I find a river of words running down the wall and across the floor. My perception is limited to a red light race streaming through the semi-darkly lit space. **Csongor G. Szigeti's** *R-Flow* modular loop installation is informed by Walter de Maria and Dan Flavin's generous heritage. However, it probably correlates more with a particular line of post-conceptualism taking a critical edge or even an activist tone. I am reminded of eminent artists such as Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Hito Steyerl. Their use of language and light as a medium is coding and transmitting a heavy political message. The association becomes apparent when I check the red stream of light and identify actual running advertisements on the bars facing downwards. Sziget's gesture to strip the ads' meaning into an abstract visual experience is somehow liberating. Nietzsche would pursue it through the Dionysian intoxication, attempting to return science to art and art to life.

CSONGOR G SZIGETI:SUNPIN [2006/2020]

Healium as one of the youngest collectives in this exhibition, have already attracted international attention at the Ars Electronica festival in 2017. *The Training 2038.* realized in collaboration with Kitchen Budapest, was a mixed reality installation based on human/AI interactions. The large cubic grid's sheer appearance shines over the attic when I approach the hidden rehearsal room. The in-house-developed software, Lightformer, programs 2000 light bulbs in a sensory interaction with the participants. This is HEXA, a game inside the game. I find myself amused by the floating magic solid object covering up most of my view spectrum; after a little while, I notice a person right across from me, on the other side of the hexahedron. There is no direct communication; the only possibility is to use hand gestures to lead my red color "snake" from bulb to bulb to reach the other player's altering blue territory. The magic occurs when this non-human communication terminates in an encounter; suddenly, the cube bursts into rainbow colors, and I just can't stop smiling.

Andrea Kovács (Let it be! Art Agency), **László Zsolt Bordos**, and **István Puskás** as organizers, delegated the artists, who personally built and facilitated the entire show. This exciting new way of exhibition-making resulted in a community-based practice placing mutual support ahead of the competition. There has been a definitive gap in time and space between the artist and the audience in art history. Often, a great distance has been created by rigid structures, institutions responsible for displaying and distributing visual art. In the present case, the unique venue and technically complicated works required teamwork, which was not alien to the Lighthouse society; they often work in a festival context, making a significant difference compared to the art world. On the other hand, traditional media also requires time and has a definitive end, thinking of Klara Kuchta or Magdalena Abakanowicz, creating their incredible spatial fiber compositions in the sixties. No doubt, they worked with hunched backs for three months on a single piece, becoming anonymously deep in the atelier surrounded by sisal. Inevitably performance art, marked with Marina Abramović's name, brought the artist and the audience in simultaneous proximity and introduced a sort of immaterial quality to art.


HEALIUM: HEXA [2018]


LÁSZLÓ ZSOLT BORDOS: LIGHTFLOW [2018]

Art becomes an experience instead of an object-oriented representation, so this remarkable evolution further evolves within immersive art installations, often in obscure places. Not only the next level in audience engagement but also in terms of scale and diversity. For these reasons, I find the Lighthouse:ON exhibition a radically inclusive and brave proposition forecasting potential art forms outside of the white cube. I find it feasible because Lighthouse is a community of artists, engineers, creators, scientists, and academics that focus on light as a medium and introduces light-based transdisciplinary practices to the future canon of art history. It is an ambitious mission with solid roots in the Bauhaus movement updated to streamline digital culture and boost cognitive scientific research.

We are in transition. Although the assumed difficulty can be disorienting, Lighthouse has made these changes more manageable. The many experimental and interdisciplinary events obtain cumulative value and eventually form a new Art World.

15
SHARES

PREVIOUS ARTICLE
Ishi Glinsky, Monuments to Survival

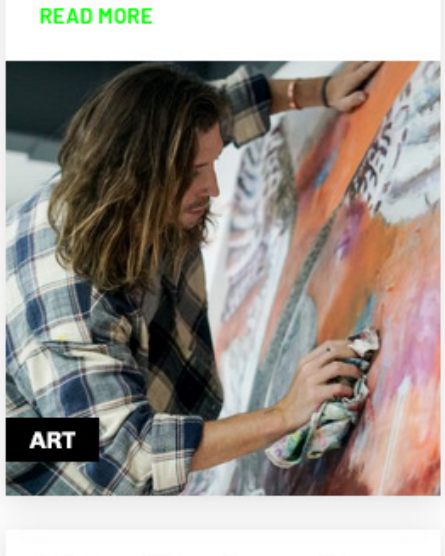
NEXT ARTICLE
Alina Frieske: Can you see me better now?

The new issue is out

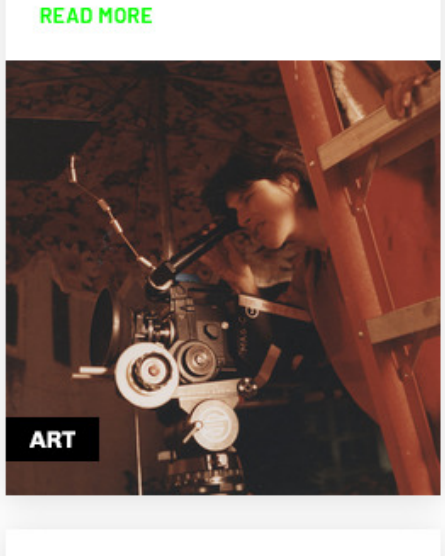
XI
BT
LISA DE BOECK

Related Posts

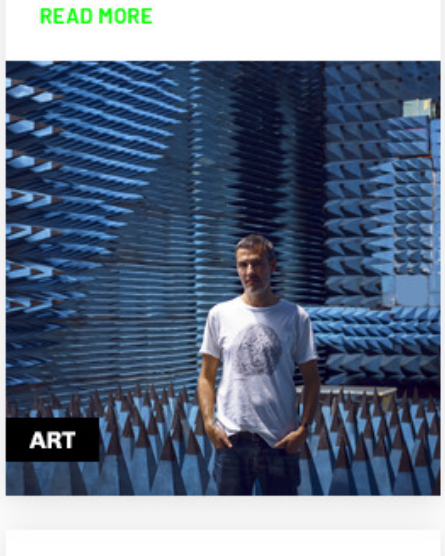
Robyn Ward in conversation with Editor in Chief Alice Zucca
READ MORE


ART

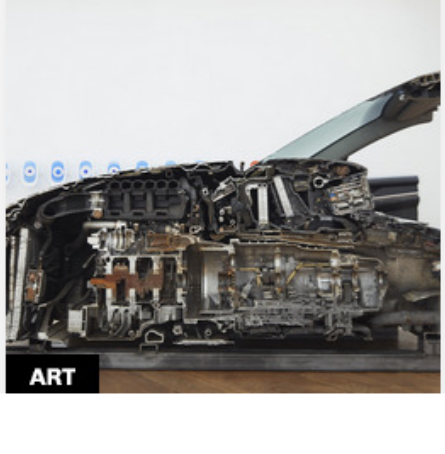
Claire Atherton on the work of Chantal Akerman
READ MORE


ART

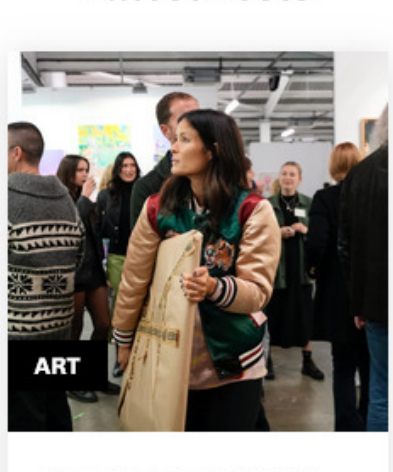
Vincent Fournier: a time traveler taking the past into the future
READ MORE


ART

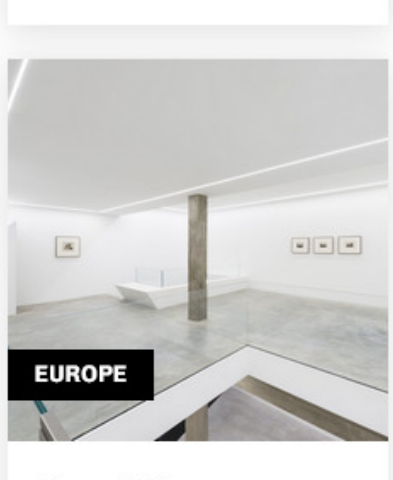
The Upside-Down world of Yngve Holen
READ MORE


ART

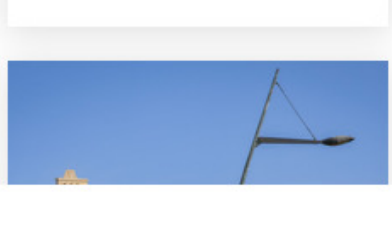
Latest Posts


ART

The Other Art Fair London 2026: Rewriting the Grammar of the Art Fair
READ MORE


EUROPE

Luca Vitone: Capricci and Other Humours
READ MORE



@xibtmag
36.8k Followers
Follow

XIBT Contemporary Art Magazine © 2024 All rights reserved