

Plugged In: Art and Electric Light (Pasadena, 11-12 Oct 24)

Pasadena, California, Oct 11-12, 2024

Deadline: Feb 2, 2024

Maggie Bell, Norton Simon Museum

Call for Papers: "Plugged In: Art and Electric Light".

Jointly organized by the Norton Simon Museum and the Visual Culture program at the California Institute of Technology, this symposium will consider the rich intersections between art and electric light. We ask, how did electric light become an important 20th-century medium, and what implications did this have for relationships between science and art, and for broad public understandings of artificial illumination?

In the 1960s and '70s collaboration among artists, scientists and fabricators became increasingly formalized, giving rise to work that explored the aesthetic, conceptual and affective possibilities of electric light through technological innovation. At the same time, artists adapted mundane objects like fluorescent lamps and incandescent lightbulbs to evoke phenomenological resonances, sometimes to disturbing effect. These practices, born from experimentation that began soon after the advent of electricity in the late 19th century, persist today as artists engage with new light-emitting technologies. Taking a long view of the 20th century, this convening addresses art's power to unlock the imaginative potential of essential and ubiquitous electric light. We invite submissions for 20-minute papers that bring forth new perspectives on artificial illumination, including but not limited to questions about access and equity, impacts on perception and the human body, and the often-hidden infrastructures and ecological costs that electric light requires.

The symposium will include tours of two exhibitions connected to the Getty-led initiative PST Art: Art & Science Collide: the Norton Simon Museum's "Plugged In: Art and Electric Light" and Caltech's "Crossing Over: Caltech and Visual Culture, 1920-2020," both opening in September 2024. Speakers will be offered a modest honorarium, and host institutions will cover the costs of travel and lodging.

Please send abstracts no longer than 250 words and short bios to: Brian Jacobson (brj@caltech.edu) and Maggie Bell (mbell@nortonsimon.org) by February 2, 2024. Notifications will be sent out by March 5, 2024.

Reference:

CFP: Plugged In: Art and Electric Light (Pasadena, 11-12 Oct 24). In: ArtHist.net, Dec 15, 2023 (accessed Jun 26, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/40835>>.