

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

Pasadena, California, Oct 11–12, 2024

Maggie Bell, Norton Simon Museum

In conjunction with the exhibition *Plugged In: Art and Electric Light*, the Norton Simon Museum and the Visual Culture program at the California Institute of Technology present a jointly organized symposium that considers the rich intersections between art and electric light. Held on Friday, October 11 at the Norton Simon Museum, and Saturday, October 12 at Caltech, the symposium is organized into four thematic sessions featuring talks by distinguished international scholars.

On Friday, the first panel, “Spectacle and Labor,” addresses the technology, artistic labor and conservation of public light art. The day’s program ends with a keynote lecture by Hollis Clayson, Professor Emerita of Art History at Northwestern University, entitled “Blinding or Beautiful? Modern Art and Artificial Illumination,” which explores controversies around the role of electric light in visual art at the turn of the 20th century.

The three panels on Saturday expand on the cultural significance of artificially illuminated artwork. “Electric Light and the Body” addresses the use of electric light as a means of exploring the body and mind. “New Technologies” focuses on mid-20th-century artists who entwined art and science by incorporating cutting-edge technologies—such as modulation and holography—into their work, and the challenges presented to historians and conservators when these technologies become obsolete. The conference concludes with “Darkness,” which examines artistic practice in the context of the absence, or failure, of electric light.

Attendees who register in advance for Day 1 or the Keynote address will receive free admission to the Norton Simon Museum on Friday, October 11. Day 2 at Caltech is free, but pre-registration is encouraged.

Symposium | *Plugged In: Art and Electric Light*

Organized by the Norton Simon Museum and the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena.

SCHEDULE

Friday, October 11 (at the Norton Simon Museum)

Welcome and Opening Remarks

2:00–2:30 p.m.

Maggie Bell (Norton Simon Museum)

Brian Jacobson (Caltech)

Panel 1: Spectacle and Labor

2:30–4:00 p.m.

Katherine Fein (Amherst College)

“Diana and the Pickle: Art and Electric Light in 1890s New York”

Isobel Harbison (Goldsmiths, University of London)

“Her Midnight Signs: On the Art, Light, and Legacy of Ms. Betty Willis”

Joy Bloser (The Menil Collection)

“Bending Neon: The Construction and Conservation of Chryssa’s Neon Sculptures of the 1960s”

Break

4:00–5:00 p.m.

Keynote Lecture

5:00–6:00 p.m.

Hollis Clayson (Northwestern University)

“Blinding or Beautiful? Modern Art and Artificial Illumination”

Saturday, October 12 (at Caltech)

Welcome

9:45–10:00 a.m.

Brian Jacobson (Caltech)

Maggie Bell (Norton Simon Museum)

Panel 2: Electric Light and the Body

10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Felix Jäger (The Courtauld Institute of Art)

“Light Lines as Sharp as a Knife’s Edge’: Illuminating the Mind in Turn-Of-The-Century Psychotherapy”

Hannah Kahng (University of Arkansas)

“I Come to Meet It, to Be Submerged: Carolee Schneemann in the Light of the Projector”

Lindsey Felt (Stanford University) and Vanessa Chang (Leonardo/ISAST)

“Crip the Body Electric”

Lunch Break

12:00–2:30 p.m.

Panel 3: New Technologies

2:30–3:30 p.m.

Tomáš Dvořák (FAMU in Prague)

“Modulation in 1920s Electrified Art”

Elizabeth Anne Johnson (Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University)

"Art Unplugged: Artists' Holograms and the Materiality of the Virtual"

Break

3:30–4:00 p.m.

Panel 4: Darkness

4:00–5:30 p.m.

Olivia Armandroff (University of Southern California)

"Dark Sky Reserves: Preserving Historic Ways of Perceiving Darkness"

Dan Lewis (The Huntington Library, Art Museum & Botanical Gardens)

"Overlighting the Night: The Dualities of Light Pollution and Beauty"

Anna Stielau (Caltech)

"How to Make a Work of Art in Total Darkness: Lessons From South Africa's Energy Crisis"

Concluding Remarks

5:30–5:45 p.m.

Brian Jacobson (Caltech)

Maggie Bell (Norton Simon Museum)

Reference:

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