

Lights On! Sustaining Light-Based Art (Berlin, 13 Nov 26)

Hamburger Bahnhof - Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart, Berlin, Nov 13, 2026

Deadline: Oct 31, 2025

Andrea Sartorius

Titled "Lights On! Sustaining Light-Based Art" the Hamburger Bahnhof – Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart will host a one-day symposium dedicated to the preservation of light-based artworks on November 13, 2026.

Starting point for this symposium is Dan Flavin's iconic light installation Untitled (1996), with its blue and green fluorescent lamps spanning both the main façade and the interior of Hamburger Bahnhof. Created on the occasion of the museum's opening in 1996, this site-specific work has become a landmark in Berlin. Flavin's artistic practice relied almost exclusively on commercially available fluorescent lamps, which have since become obsolete due to market shifts and evolving regulations in both Europe and the U.S. However, the availability of compatible materials is crucial for the preservation and ongoing presentation of works like Flavin's.

The long-term care of light-based art presents unique challenges related to sustainability, technological change, and obsolescence, all of which may impact the integrity of an artwork and the artist's intent.

In response to these challenges, this symposium will examine current strategies and future perspectives on the conservation of light-based works. Key questions guiding this discussion include:

- How can we effectively document both the material and immaterial qualities of light-based artworks, including also intangible aspects such as spatial dynamics, colour interactions, and atmospheric presence – and what strategies can collections with light-based works implement to meet these specific demands?
- How do technological obsolescence, market shifts, and regulatory changes affect the availability of materials and the long-term preservation of light-based artworks?
- How are institutions and collection stewards responding to obsolescence in light-based artworks, and to what extent can obsolete components be replaced without compromising the works' artistic integrity?
- What conservation and presentation strategies have museums and institutions implemented to address these challenges, and what practices have proven effective – or, in retrospect, require reconsideration or adjustment?

- What legal frameworks and considerations are needed to ensure the long-term preservation and sustainability of light-based art?
- How do the responsibilities of artists, artists' estates, and the rights of ownership affect the future of light-based works?
- How can sustainability be integrated into the conservation of light-based artworks without sacrificing their authenticity and artistic integrity?
- How can collaboration between institutions, estates, conservation professionals, technicians, or even the artists themselves shape this future?

We invite proposals that explore the documentation, preservation, and future of light-based art. Topics may include innovative documentation methods, the impact of technological obsolescence, and strategies for preserving artistic integrity – as well as the effects of market shifts, regulatory changes, and legal frameworks on material availability and long-term care.

Equally welcome are case studies and reflections on practical solutions, presentation strategies, and adaptive approaches that have proven effective in institutional practice. Furthermore, we seek contributions that examine how collaboration between institutions, artists, artists' estates, conservation professionals, and curators can support the sustainable care of light-based artworks over time.

Proposals for 20-minute presentations that address these questions through theoretical contributions, case studies, or practical approaches are welcome. Professionals in art conservation, art history, philosophy, as well as in science and technology are especially encouraged to submit, with multidisciplinary approaches particularly welcome.

To submit a proposal, please include:

- Title of the presentation
- Abstract (max. 500 words)
- Name and e-mail address of authors
- Short biography (max. 100 words)
- Presentations should be 20 minutes in length
- All submissions must be original and unpublished

Symposium language: English

Submission deadline: October 31, 2025

Please send proposals to: light-symposium.hbf@smb.spk-berlin.de

Notifications will be sent by the end of December 2025.

Peer-reviewed postprints are planned for summer 2027.

Abstracts will be reviewed by the symposium's planning committee:

Andrea Sartorius and Eva Rieß (Conservators, Hamburger Bahnhof – Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart),

and Prof. Dr. Carolin Bohlmann (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Department of Conservation-Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Art).

Reference:

CFP: Lights On! Sustaining Light-Based Art (Berlin, 13 Nov 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 20, 2025 (accessed Apr 6, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/49547>>.