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New York Festival of Light Clicks On, Big-time

TOPICS AT THE FRONT



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Photos: Nicolas Lemery Nantel

New Yorkers, typically jaded by the announcement of yet another free public event taking place around town, exceeded preliminary attendance estimates for the New York Festival of Light and turned out en masse to trek to Brooklyn to view its initial mounting. So many people thronged to the site in DUMBO (acronym for Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass) on Saturday evening November 8, the final night of the three-day event, that the city ordered it shut down for safety reasons, two-and-one-half hours before its previously scheduled 11:00 PM closing.

The New York Festival of Light (NYFOL) now joins Lyon, France, where the first such urban light celebrations was staged, along with Berlin, London, Montreal and Sydney. Held in partnership with the DUMBO Improvement District, NYFOL featured lighting installations created by local and international lighting designers, visual and performing artists, and light technologists. Site was the archway known as the Anchorage under the Manhattan Bridge that spans the East River connecting Brooklyn with the lower end of Manhattan island, and in the surrounding plaza space.

A total of 20 participating artists included: Tupac Martir, visual artist, production designer, and lighting director; Howard Ungerleider, Canadian designer of architectural lighting, stage lighting, and set design; and 3_Search for the projection-mapped video series.

The team that introduced the idea to mount a light festival in greater New York

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included Liam O'Braion, producer of large-scale entertainment events, and Ira Levy lighting designer and entrepreneur, both based in New York City. "Nothing had been done previously to celebrate the capabilities of light to the nearly eight-and-one-half million residents of New York's five boroughs," said O'Braion. "We felt New York was an open landscape with tremendous possibilities to bring lighting and light art to the residents of the city and surrounding communities."

The lighting installations interacted with and animated the Plaza Tringle area and the historic massive stone infrastructure of the Anchorage of the Manhattan Bridge, a 6,855-ft-long suspension bridge first opened to traffic at the close of 1909. Projected images were shown on the facade of the Anchorage that became a massive outdoor canvas. John Ensor Parker and Leo Kuelbs co-produced the installation that was created by a process called projection mapping.

Parker said he has been projecting onto the bridge for years, showing views of turning gears and images of city buildings, but there were new sets of visuals for the festival. "The bridge is something I see every day and I have for quite a few years," Parker said. "When you projection-map on something, you really transform it. You see it in a totally different way." A three-dimensional laser show that was programmed to change to music from the DJ's station inside the arch was prepared by Howard Ungerleider. "People can walk through the entire installation," he said. "Sometimes it will be static, sometimes it will be animated. It can be very exciting to the viewer, or make them quietly study the effects they are witnessing," he observed. Ungerleider said he and his colleagues had been working on the show for the last month and called the final result "surreal."

Presentations included custom clothes imbedded with LEDs designed by students from LIM College, a fashion school in Manhattan, and Scratch Box, a lighting "sounding board" where visitors were able to inscribe their thoughts in light. Artist Tupac Martir believes that people are becoming more aware of the possibilities of light in their environment. "They are starting to realize how important light is," Martir said. "This festival is one way to open viewers' eyes to the many possibilities that can be achieved with using light. Few of today's lighting design practitioners are known to have been overheard saying that "I want to grow up to be a lighting designer unless they happen to have known a lighting designer or had one in the family," said Martir "All of us involved with the planning and staging of this event hope that with the great public response, it offers a convincing opportunity for young people to start thinking, 'I'd like to become a light artist.'"

NYFOL sponsors for 2014 included: DUMBO Improvement District, SATCO, NUVO Lighting, ColourOne LED Technology, ETC, Acclaim Lighting, Levy Lighting NYC, illuminate, Designers Lighting Forum of New York, IALD, and IES.



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