

Light view in night view!

BY RAHILA BASHIR

Canary Wharf marked its eighth edition of the Winter Lights Festival earlier this year. Exhibiting new spectacular light installations alongside the permanent immersive art displays, a tiny spark of an idea has grown into the most anticipated event, already planning its new release of Winter Lights 2025, running from 21 January to 1 February.

The festival was a delight for hundreds of thousands of visitors engulfed in huge areas of outdoor space transformed into art, innovatively illuminating 13 interactive light exhibitions. This was an immersive walkthrough experience visualising virtual form and movement in a physical space. Amongst the visitors were ophthalmologists and eye professors walking through with their camera phones after finishing hospital shifts and teaching clinics.

Alongside participants from the UK, 2024's Winter Lights Festival hosted an ensemble of light artists from participating countries including Latvia, Spain, Netherlands, France, Romania, Germany, Portugal, Denmark and Belgium.

Welcoming the public through a trail of lit artwork, stewardesses handed out maps of the festival maze and amidst the walking trails of light, visitors were welcomed by the 'Marshmallowist' to toast special gourmet marshmallows on a woodlands fire pit, served with cups of warm hot chocolate!

Here we feature four popular light art pieces from amongst the 13. Figure 1 shows bright bamboo lights against the dark night sky, creating an illusion of mass flickering flames. Figure 2 shows a vast three-dimensional structure, which was inspired by intricate network of neural connections in the human brain. Figure 3 was another spectacular art object inspired by optical illusionary art of the 1960s – a row of 32 illuminated spinning circles formed an artistic abstract of an immersive geometric shape, which created a vanishing point at the eye level of visitors. Figure 4 was an immersive, walkthrough installation of thousands of suspending lights which transformed space into an interactive hybrid environment of virtual components with physical reality.

Speaking to people at the Winter Lights Festival over the course of the 10 days, we learned that visitors with visual impairment felt enriched to be out on a dark starry night, where large artistic light displays magnified their perception of both colour and visual brightness. The varied intensity and spectrum of lights can stimulate the retina in unique ways, potentially enhancing visual acuity and colour differentiation for those with such conditions. Using light, sound and technology, artworks combine physical space with intuitive interactions to produce beguiling environments for human senses, promoting both visual and emotional wellbeing.

“When people ask what equipment I use, I tell them my eyes” – Ansel Adams, 1902–1984.

To see more work from two of the prominent artists featured in this year's Winter Lights, visit www.squidsoup.org (*Submergence*) and the Juan Fuentes Studio – Light Art: <https://www.juanfuentestudio.com>



Figure 1: SIGN by Vendel & De Wolf, Netherlands. Canary Wharf's Winter Lights Festival 2024.



Figure 2: NEURON by Juan Fuentes, Spain. Canary Wharf's Winter Lights Festival 2024.



Figure 3: KINETIC PERSPECTIVE by Juan Fuentes, Spain. Canary Wharf's Winter Lights Festival 2024.

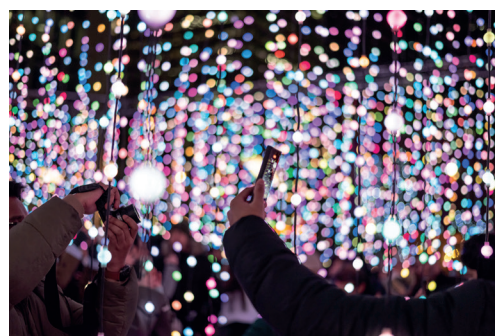


Figure 4: SUBMERGENCE by Squidsoup, UK. Canary Wharf's Winter Lights Festival 2024.

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