

Symposium *Plugged In:* *Art and* *Electric Light*

Presented by the Norton Simon Museum
and the California Institute of Technology

Friday, October 11

At the Norton Simon Museum's Theater

Saturday, October 12

At Caltech's Baxter Lecture Hall

Norton
Simon
Museum

Caltech

Symposium | *Plugged In: Art and Electric Light*

This two-day symposium, co-organized by the Norton Simon Museum and the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), considers the rich intersections between art and electric light. It is presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Plugged In: Art and Electric Light*, on view at the Norton Simon Museum September 20, 2024, through February 17, 2025.

Day 1:

Friday, October 11 (Norton Simon Museum)

Welcome and Opening Remarks

2:15–2:30 p.m.

Maggie Bell (Norton Simon Museum)

Brian Jacobson (Caltech)

Panel 1: Spectacle and Labor

2:30–4:00 p.m.

Speakers will explore the technology, artistic labor and conservation of large-scale light art.

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: *Blinding or Beautiful?*

Modern Art and Artificial Illumination

5:00–6:00 p.m.

Hollis Clayson, Professor Emerita of Art History and Bergen Evans Professor Emerita in the Humanities, Northwestern University

Interest in the aesthetics of light shaped the work of countless visual artists on both sides of the Atlantic in the modern era. The bond between innovative art and light was especially pronounced in France starting in the mid- to late 1800s, when different kinds of lighting (oil, gas and then electric) competed in Paris, the so-called “City of Light.” In this lecture, Clayson looks closely at paintings and graphic works by both European and American artists that grappled with the effects of both natural light and artificial illumination in surprising ways. Were the new lights beautiful or blinding? Did they belong in art or not?

Day 2:

Saturday, October 12 (Caltech)

Coffee

9:15–9:45 a.m.

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.

Speakers will discuss the use of electric light as a means of exploring the body and mind.

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.

Speakers will focus on mid-20th-century artists who incorporated cutting-edge technologies—such as modulation and holography—into their work, and the challenges presented to historians and conservators when these technologies become obsolete.

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.

Speakers will examine artistic practice in the context of the absence, or failure, of electric light.

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)

Learn more about these related exhibitions:



***Plugged In:
Art and Electric Light***
Norton Simon Museum
Through February 17, 2025



***Over: Art and Science
at Caltech, 1920-2020***
California Institute of Technology
Through December 15, 2024