

GLOW: illuminating icons

interviewed by: Michiel de Boer (Moesasji)

Seven kilometres of light sculptures, unprecedented projects, experiments mixing science, technology and art: the 10th edition of GLOW promises to be spectacular. Five enlightening questions to Jan Mengelers, President of TU/e and Chairman of Stichting GLOW (the GLOW Foundation).



Jan Mengelers

Why do you take part in the organization of GLOW?

Jan Mengelers: "I owe my chairmanship to my outspoken opinion. When they once asked me what I thought of GLOW, I said: Why doesn't every GLOW edition leave one permanent light sculpture in the city? That way we would by now have ten lighting icons in Eindhoven. My grumpy answer derives from the feeling that we are hardly profiling our city from our core... We have a heritage that is strongly rooted in technology and light. Oddly enough, you will hardly experience that when walking through Eindhoven. I had this same feeling years ago, when I saw that Philips had decorated the Empire State Building with a spectacular LED light show. It just was beyond my comprehension: why don't we have this in Eindhoven? Speaking about my sentiments has eventually led to my appointment (October 2015) as chairman of Stichting GLOW, and I very am happy to be part of it."

Is GLOW a city marketing tool?

With 750.000+ visitors last year, GLOW is clearly a festival that adds to our image. We are currently carrying the label 'Brainport' in Eindhoven and its surroundings, which is fine and suits certain purposes perfectly. But to me, light is much more tangible. For anyone!

Some time ago there was a city-slogan-beauty-contest in which the slogan 'Eindhoven Allicht' emerged. I found it a perfect, iconic fit. Light as a part of our history and our future. However, the slogan was abandoned because it is hard to translate it adequately into other languages (Eindhoven Allicht is a combination of the phrases Eindhoven All Light and Eindhoven Evidently). I think that light art and light experiments can be valuable assets to our city marketing. Light associates directly with technology, science, innovation, the future. We should use it more permanently."

What will the 2016 edition bring?

"This edition of GLOW will bring two loops, 3,5 km each. We need this length to be able to handle the large number of visitors. One route runs through the city centre, the other along TU/e Campus. Since it is a free festival for a wide and diversified audience, we have selected works that reflect a broad taste and shows and projections with lots of spectacle. The projection at Catharina Church, for instance, will be a traditional highlight. However, this year, we are trying to raise the bar even more. The Campus Loop will show about 10 works with an exquisite experimental and scientific character. With performances such as the 'Exploding Wire' and 'Photonic Modulation' we leave 'standard practice' and bring the visitors unique experiences to discover and reflect on."

In what way is TU/e involved in GLOW projects?

"The featured projects are exclusively of Eindhoven origin. Artists are from the region or collaborate with local professionals. The TU/e and its students are well represented in GLOW. Throughout our faculties, Electrical Engineering, Applied Physics, Industrial Design, Built Environment, Industrial Engineering & Innovation Science and Mathematics & Computer Science people are also involved in projects and

organization. With regard to science, I can say that several projects will feature trailblazing applications of technology and knowledge. And of course the Intelligent Lighting Institute (ILI) is involved. ILI is currently conducting different studies on the influence of light on human behaviour. They make use of what we call 'living labs' to perform their studies. And of course, GLOW is an excellent research

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environment. During GLOW, ILI will look further into the influence of specific lighting conditions on the behaviour of crowds. An actual topic that may deliver interesting results for crowd management during events and for applications like prison control or waiting room comfort. In MetaForum, ILI has a permanent set-up of research equipment for data collection and analysis."

What does the future of GLOW look like?

"How far can we go? I think one million visitors is about the maximum. After that it will be extremely difficult to manage in terms of public safety and experience. In the next years we will shift to a smaller and more diversified GLOW. Putting our effort into quality instead of quantity. In side festivals such as GLOW Next, for instance, and more permanent projects.. If all goes well, the Ceres-project will remain a permanent light sculpture at the TU/e Campus. This project features a grid of LEDs, positioned around the chimney of the Ceres building. The grid is dense enough to display all kinds of compositions and even images. It will be a true eye catcher for Eindhoven. And with a permanent sculpture I will have lived up to my promises!"