

design WEEK

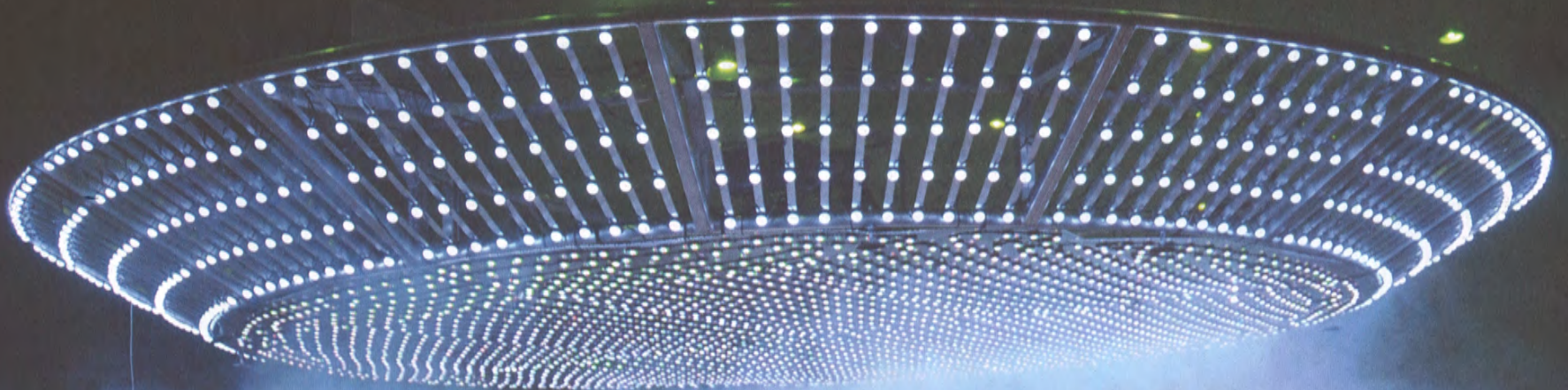
Casson Mann
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Space oddities
projects that light the skies



Aerial antics

There's a luminous UFO suspended over Gdansk, and a beam of light rises from the BBC in London – what's going on? **Clare Dowdy** goes skygazing with three lighting designers to solve the mysteries of their striking new installations

THIS SUMMER, architects, artists and light designers have turned their attention to the night sky. Three of the most intriguing projects include one for the BBC, one for a west London gallery, and one for the Baltic city of Gdansk in Poland. Architect MacCormac Jamieson Prichard has created a sculpture for Broadcasting House in London; an installation in Ealing pays homage to the midsummer skies; and a strange UFO will hover over Gdansk.

Perhaps the most poignant of the trio is the BBC's commission. MJP joined forces with Catalan artist Jaume Plensa to create the light sculpture *Breathing*. The glass and steel inverted cone, which was opened by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 16 June, rises 10m over Broadcasting House and shoots a beam of light 1km high into the night sky. It's poignant because it's switched on for half an hour every evening, to coincide with the Ten O'Clock News, as a memorial to journalists and news crews killed in the field.

Meanwhile, the PM Gallery in Ealing is hosting *Solstice*, a marrying of film and music to celebrate the summer's longest night. The installation sets out to explore time, memory and the cyclical patterns of nature, and comprises two high-definition video projections and an orchestral soundtrack.

Artist Neeta Madahar shot *Solstice* in rural Wiltshire on the solstice of June 2007. Hers is an exercise in maths as much as art. She pointed a fixed camera at the sky, with the North Star, Polaris, in the centre of the frame. Then a team of camera operators worked shifts to record for 24 hours from midnight to midnight, with the camera on time-lapse mode shooting 25 times a minute. Each hour was then condensed into a minute of footage, so, in total, the solstice's 24 hours were captured in 36 000 stills and translated into a 24-minute film. The images are accompanied by composer Miguel d'Oliveira's

orchestral soundtrack, performed by the 22-piece City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra.

But the most eye-popping light play involved a visit to Gdansk. This is another creative collaboration, this time between artist Peter Coffin and designer Dominic Harris. Their efforts were for the city's cultural Festival of Stars. 'I was approached by Coffin to bridge the gap between technologies, project management and design requirements,' says Harris. 'He had a vision of a UFO flown by helicopter over the art festival, but hadn't found a way to progress that.'

Harris, who combines lighting design with architecture, set to work to make it happen – no mean feat. 'We've done it using a lot of bits of equipment and forcing them to work together, and flying them at an altitude that they're not meant to be at.'

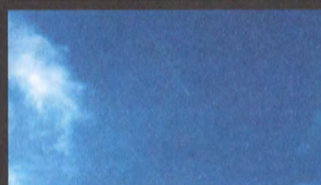
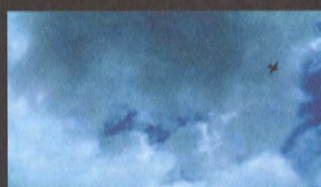
The aluminium 'saucer', 7m in diameter, is covered with 3000 individually controllable LEDs. When it 'orbited' on 4 July, it might have been one of the biggest exercises in airborne LEDs, Harris speculates. It's powered by an on-board petrol generator, which shares space with a 'solid state' control system, meaning there are no moving parts.

Harris describes the UFO-style content as 'quite dynamic. There are light patterns and patterns of colour paying homage to some of the UFOs in those 1960s and 1970s Hollywood films', he explains. Its flying saucer features include strong colours, randomly blinking lights and a blurred appearance. All this will dangle from a single steel cable over the Polish city.

Harris says he's always been drawn to light. Even at high school in the US he became involved in lighting design for school theatre productions. And then at the Bartlett School of Architecture, 'We were encouraged to look at things that run parallel with architecture,



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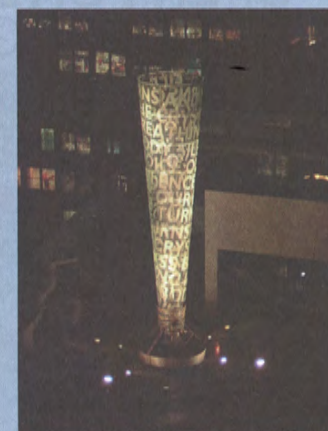


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1 and 2 An LED-laden UFO-style creation, a collaboration between Peter Coffin and Dominic Harris for Polish city Gdansk's Festival of Stars

3 Solstice, an installation at the PM Gallery celebrating the midsummer skies, created by artist Neeta Madahar

4 and 5 Breathing, a light sculpture on the roof of Broadcasting House in London, created by architect Mac Cormac Jamieson Prichard and Catalan artist Jaume Plensa for a commission from the BBC



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more than just forming spaces through physical objects,' he says. When he got to Future Systems, where he did his Part 3, 'the lighting just kept coming back', he says. He found himself not only working on elements of lighting, but introducing whole new objects, so that the light became a presence rather than background.

Before setting up Cinimod Studio last year, Harris spent three and a half years at Jason Bruges Studio, which is known for its interactive light sculptures. 'There, I was operating more as an artist and lighting designer, and the clients we had were architects like Make and Foster & Partners,' Harris explains, pointing to the 3D chandelier he worked on for City law firm Allen & Overy.

Cinimod's biggest project to date is the frozen yogurt outlet Snog in London's South Kensington, which demonstrates Harris's integration of architecture and lighting (DW 19 June). This project featured more than 3000 individually controllable LEDs sitting behind a Barrisol stretched plastic ceiling to create a lightbox video surface. It creates an almost magical effect. 'Digitally captured and manipulated clouds move gently across the store, with their colour and speed determined by the time of day,' says Harris.

From sculptures to installations, lighting is becoming increasingly sophisticated. ●

The Breathing memorial at Broadcasting House, London W1 is a permanent landmark

The Solstice exhibition is at PM Gallery, Ealing, London W5 until 20 July

Gdansk Festival of Stars runs until 31 July