

Stuart Williams: Luminous Grid Collection IAE2603

Introduction/Abstract

“Luminous Earth Grid” by artist Stuart Williams, was installed over an expanse equal to eight American football fields in the rolling hills fifty miles north of San Francisco. The glowing green grid of 1,680 energy-efficient four-foot fluorescent lamps conformed to the fluid contours of the terrain.

Biographical Note: Stuart Williams

Williams graduated from the College of Architecture at the University of Michigan, where his degree in architecture included studies in urban planning, art history, sculpture, structural engineering and cultural anthropology. After graduation he became interested in site-specific environmental art, particularly the land artists of the 1960s. His most ambitious installation, “Luminous Earth Grid,” was created in 1993 fifty miles north of San Francisco. Cosponsored by the New York Foundation for the Arts, and Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco, the project drew international critical acclaim.

Another installation — sponsored by the New York Foundation for the Arts — opened in Dresden, Germany marking the 70th annual observance of the bombing of Dresden in the closing days of World War Two. In homage to the city’s survival and renewal, and to honor the remembrance of an iconic event in the horrors of war, Williams installed “Lebensatem/Dresden” (“Breath of Life/Dresden”) at the Dresden Cathedral (c. 1738), transforming the facade with waves of light rising and falling at the pace of human breath, causing the Cathedral to appear to breathe. For nearly four years, Williams worked hand-in-hand with Dresden city officials in pinpointing the Cathedral as the ideal site for the project, and with a team of engineers in solving the formidable technical challenges of the installation, while also embarking on a challenging years-long trek to obtain an array of permits from the Cathedral, from the Dresden Department of Monument Preservation and from the Provincial Government of Saxony. “Breath of Life/Dresden” drew words of praise from the White House, from Buckingham Palace and from the United Nations.

Williams has been the recipient of grants and commissions from a wide variety of organizations, among them, the U.S. Embassy in Berlin; The City of Dresden, Germany; Pacific Gas & Electric, San Francisco; the LEF Foundation, St. Helena, CA; the Rene and Veronica di Rosa Foundation, Napa, CA; the Osram Sylvania Corporation; Anheuser Busch; the Cockayne Fund, Louisville, KY; Columbus Public Art 2012; and an anonymous foundation in New York. Williams has been an invited speaker at numerous venues including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the San Francisco Art Institute, the University of California, Davis, the Global Fine Art Awards in New York, and at the United Nations at a seminar titled “Unlearning Intolerance.”

The artist’s work has been published around the world in art journals, newspapers, art blogs, fine art books, and numerous other publications including *Art in America*, *Public Art Review*, *Abitare* (Milan), *LIFE Magazine*, *France Soir* (Paris) and *Kunstforum International* (Cologne). Williams’ most monumental installation, “Luminous Earth Grid,” was recently featured in “Art Installations: A Visual Guide,” Roads Publishing (Dublin). In 2022, the artist’s work was featured in a large format hardcover book titled “Volume Three,” a co-production of ERG Media, (London); *L’Art de L’Automobile*, (Paris); and Porsche, (Stuttgart). The book presents in-depth curated stories with a detailed exploration of fine art, architecture and design.

Scope and Content

“Luminous Earth Grid” by artist Stuart Williams swept over an expanse equal to eight American football fields in the rolling hills fifty miles north of San Francisco. The glowing green grid of 1,680 energy-efficient

four-foot fluorescent lamps conformed to the fluid contours of the terrain. Located on an active cattle ranch, "Luminous Earth Grid" was prominently visible from Interstate 680 which links the San Francisco Bay Area with Sacramento. Thousands of visitors came to the site daily, and 250,000 motorists drove by every 24 hours in full view of the project. Widespread critical acclaim came from around the globe along with extensive media coverage.

Said Williams, "I see this project as a poetic vision of technology & nature in harmony." Peter Selz, renowned art historian, MoMA curator and founding director of the UC Berkeley Art Museum, said in his review in "Art in America:" "It emanated a sense of the romantic sublime with its aura of surprise and wonder...a fusion of nature, technology and art."

"Luminous Earth Grid" was an artist-initiated, artist-driven artwork. Acquisition of all permits and funding, as well as publicity and promotion were spearheaded by the artist. Co-fiscal sponsors were the New York Foundation for the Arts and Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco, although they provided no funding. The total cost of the project was approximately \$500,000 of which more than 80% was in the form of in-kind contributions of goods and services. Ultimately, there were no funds for an artist's fee. Planning, fund raising, and acquisition of the many challenging permits for the temporary installation of "Luminous Earth Grid" took five years. It was installed for a duration of one month. Upon its de-installation, the 1,680 lamps were donated to a local elementary school, and all other components were recycled or given to businesses and citizens in the surrounding communities.

Pre-fabrication of all the components occurred in an off-site warehouse during the month of February 1993. Completion of the on-site installation procedure occurred during the month of March 1993. During those two months nearly 200 individuals and 20,000 person-hours of labor — including a team of electricians — were required for its realization. Before on-site assembly began, a temporary 2,500 foot long solar-powered electric fence was erected surrounding the exact installation site. Powered by a single solar cell the size of a lunch box, the fence was composed of two thin-gage wires strung between temporary fence posts and was virtually invisible from even a short distance. The fence kept the cattle from entering the immediate project site where they would have tripped over the lamp array, the entirety of which was elevated 18 inches above the surface of the ground. After everything was disassembled and removed — including the fence — the cattle once again had access to their full grazing range.

Materials include a project proposal, concept sketches, project preparation and installation photographs, professional documentary photographs of the completed installation, a book proposal, sample sculpture components, letters of support, volunteer information, maps, video, interviews, reviews, newspaper clippings, presentation materials, and social media links.

This archive is currently in process.