

The 2017 LewesLight Festival



Next month's LewesLight festival in Lewes in East Sussex is unusual in being about more than just attractive installations and artworks. It is about showing local communities the role and power of public realm lighting, raising awareness of environmental and dark skies issues, and inspiring future generations

By Graham Festenstein



The LewesLight Festival, in my home town of Lewes in East Sussex, is entering its third year and going from strength to strength. This year the festival will run from 13-15 October (from 7am to 11pm each day), and we have invited more designers and artists to the fold, as well as introduced sound, music and poetry to the mix.

For those unfamiliar with the event, LewesLight is a lighting festival but, unlike many other festivals, it is design-led, with all of our installations context-based and site-specific. This means they feed into a wider range of integrated threads, incorporating narrative and storytelling, as an exploration of the town its people and history.

Whilst the festival aims to draw visitors to the town, so raising its profile as a tourist destination and benefiting the night-time economy, it is also very much a community event, engaging with local people and business and working extensively with local colleges and both Sussex and Brighton universities.

For example, we partner with the town council and are supported by Lewes District Council. We collaborate with the South Downs National Park Au-

▼ An installation by Neil Marsh from last year's LewesLight. LewesLight is different in that all installations are both context-based and site-specific



thority to raise awareness of dark skies and environmental issues and best practice in lighting within the South Downs Dark Skies Reserve.

COMMUNITY FOCUS

So, how are we different? Many festivals are art commission-based and, whilst some installations may be site-specific, many are not; they may work in context of the place in which they are located, but they don't necessarily resonate with their surroundings on more than a superficial level, or at such a high level that, intellectually, the concepts behind the work make them less accessible to a wider audience.

That is not to say this type of installation cannot be truly beautiful, dramatic or carry significant intellectual meaning – I don't wish to diminish such work in any way. But, as a designer, I like to see something that works differently.

At LewesLight, therefore, we aim to deliver, and celebrate, a narrative about Lewes, its history and its people. We provide attractive and interesting installations but also deliver much more, by way of storytelling. We bring an exploration of history, in particular, to younger people in a stimulating and exciting way.

This year we have an even greater number of designers and artists taking part. Lighting designers and artists include Ellie Coombs and a team from Nulty+, Claire Hamill, Karen Van Creveld, Chris Beasley, and Susan Lake.

There is a team from Studio Fractal, plus Jack Wates, and James Duffin. Also throwing themselves in will Margareth Sunjoto from Studio 29, Pedro Pinto, Guyan Porter, Maggie Lambert, Mick Hawksworth, Art Lewry and Jack Beccegato, Leora Honeyman and Neil Marsh.

We are this year working with the poet and writer John Agard and composer Ruth Kerr. Again, we are supported by a team of local historians, who are advising us and who will help to develop our guided walks.

SHOWCASE FOR LIGHTING DESIGN

You may ask how we are able to put together such a large and diverse team who are all prepared to contribute their time and effort pro bono?

First, there is the attraction of having the freedom to work on a creative project with minimal client intervention. Our brief is wide and, whilst the event is curated, it is our ethos that designers and artists



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Paul Pyant from last year's festival. LewesLight is a showcase for lighting designers to demonstrate how lighting can affect public space and contribute to a narrative

should (as much as possible) have a free reign to deliver what they feel is right within the theme and context of the festival.

Second, there is the issue of professional profile. LewesLight is a showcase for designers to demonstrate how lighting can affect public space and contribute to a narrative, as well as a promotional tool to market the town, tourism and local business.

Finally, we are very clear in wanting to demonstrate best practice and raising awareness of the environmental issues of lighting, especially in the context of the dark skies reserve. For all of us, as a community-based event (and as many of our team have a local connection), it is about putting something back, giving something back.

This also means education has played an important role in the ethos of LewesLight from day one.

We are partnered with the local further education college, Sussex Downs. In fact, the festival is embedded into both its Production Arts and Digital Arts courses, with students' work on the festival contributing to their final grades. Providing this age group, 16-19, with access to work with professionals, to be exposed to the design/creative process as well as valuable STEM-related skills, is a fantastic opportunity.

'TRADE, INDUSTRY, AND COMMERCE'

The over-arching theme for LewesLight this year is 'Trade, Industry and Commerce', with stories and ideas explored touching upon topics as diverse as alchemy, the stars, scientific genius (or fraud/'fake' news!), harpsichords, religion, social and economic change and literature. As well as the main festival, there will be a short se-

ries of talks discussing some of the ideas explored and the wider impact of light and lighting.

We are all very excited about this year's festival; as it grows we can apply lessons learned over the first two years. I feel confident that, with the skill and enthusiasm of our team, it can only get better.

We are still operating with minimal funding and on a shoestring budget, and therefore I need to draw particular attention to our industry sponsors who provide equipment free of charge and in some cases also financial contributions.

At the time of writing, these were: ACDC Lighting, Architainment, Commercial Lighting Systems, Encapsulite, iGuzzini, Kingfisher Lighting/Arcluce, LED Linear, Light Graphix, Light Projects, Meyer, Rosco and SORAA.

Finally, of course, I very much hope you – and as many ILP members as possible – will come along to LewesLight this year and support the work we're doing to promote the role of lighting, and lighting design, within the community and public realm, and within the hearts and minds of students and young people. I look forward to seeing you there!

A full list of our supporters and more information on the festival in general – including event listings and timings and how to find us – can be found at www.leweslight.uk ■

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