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Playing with Light: Interview with Amsterdam Light Festival Artist, Vibhor Sogani

ART FEATURED



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By Zara Flavia Dmello

In an annual spectacle that has graced Amsterdam's city centre since 2012, the Amsterdam Light Festival unfolds as a 53-day exhibition, illuminating the urban landscape with bespoke light artworks by accomplished artists. This grandiose event, orchestrated by an independent non-profit foundation, has become a hallmark celebration, captivating residents and visitors alike.

The festival's 12th edition delves into the intersection of artificial intelligence and technology within the realm of art. Against this backdrop, the luminary maestro Vibhor Sogani, celebrated for his mastery of steel, presented a dazzling creation titled "Pool of Dreams" as an integral part of the festivities.

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This installation comprises 100 meticulously fashioned stainless-steel orbs, each mirror-finished and arranged to form a captivating ensemble. What sets Sogani's piece apart is its strategic placement, seamlessly blending with the terrestrial landscape while delicately gracing the water's surface. Through this ambitious endeavour, Sogani achieves a harmonious convergence of art, light, and technology, resonating with the overarching theme of the festival. "Pool of Dreams" stands as a testament to the symbiotic relationship between artistic expression and the cutting-edge innovations that define our contemporary age, offering a mesmerising glimpse into the future of artistic exploration at the nexus of creativity and technology.

Tell us about how you got into installation art?

I studied at NID and specialised in product design for five years. After 10 years of practicing as a consultant I decided to start my own collection of works; a signature line. The process of building my name and body of work took a bit of time so the initial years were tough as it is for everybody. But the journey was always pleasant and there was a lot of excitement, work-wise, that kept me going.

Why did you decide to make that transition into a more creative space?

I wouldn't call it a more creative space per se because any kind of design requires an element of creativity. I just wanted to transition into a more personal space. With my job in product design, I was working with a brief from a client so while there was creativity, there was also a restriction to freedom and personal expression. The art that I make now allows for a lot more expression and personalised style which was the driving force for me.



Image by Janus van den Eijnden

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I found it very interesting that the art works were spread across the city rather than placed in one contained area all together. Typically, in biennales and other art exhibits, the art is consumed only by the visitors of that exhibit. Children, for instance, will rarely ever be seen at a serious art exhibition. But with this festival, the audience includes the entire city population; anyone who may pass by your work is a viewer reacting to your art. In that sense, the artwork is not limited to certain demographic. There is a wide spectrum of people that are engaging in your art, at least in some capacity. That to me, was very exciting.

The theme for the 12th edition of the festival addresses the rise of artificial intelligence and technology and its role in the world of art. Tell me about how your piece reflects that theme.

There is a lot of fear people experience with regards to rapidly changing technology. We tend to be mistrusting of it due to how uncertain it feels. Because of this, I believe, we frequently veer to a dark, dystopian imagery of technology. But there is also an alternative possibility; an ideal society in the future where technology ultimately leads to a more comfortable life for everyone. On being briefed on the theme, my mind immediately explored the latter. In essence, "Pool of Dreams" aimed to capture a dream of utopia where knowledge, technological advancement, and the evolved intelligence makes the world dramatically beautiful.

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Can you describe some elements of your piece that, in your opinion, capture the essence of this utopia?

I've always had an affinity for metal, as every artist grows to prefer certain specific materials. So, it helped that I was comfortable working with materials that are visually cognisant with technology and the future. I aimed to create a piece that looked both futuristic and dreamy. I created bubble forms in mirror-finished stainless steel. I also used blue lights below to play with light and reflection.

And incidentally, the representatives from the festival suggested to situate the installation in both land and water to make it even more dynamic. Ultimately, it is the light, reflections and rippling of water working in tandem which concocted a surreal, dreamlike effect.

Certainly. Light is often regarded as the fourth dimension in art so it's great to see how you have made use of it in Pool of Dreams. Are there any other ways you played with light in your piece?

Of course! I used a contemporary concept in architecture and lighting design to inform this piece. The concept of 'Daylight' is used when creating office spaces such that the main source of light in the building during the day is daylight and there is no unnecessary waste of energy. So, I tried to apply this concept to "Pool of Dreams". I wanted my installation to not just come alive at night but also be appreciated and equally attractive through the day.

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Can I ask why you decided against representing the darker side of technology and AI and instead chose to focus on an optimistic approach?

There's no reason really. I usually brainstorm before I begin working on a piece and I found my mind steering towards an optimistic perspective on the theme. Although even generally, I do think my works tend to be rather positive. I don't delve into dark art much. So, in that sense, I never saw this project going in any other direction than completely hopeful and positive.

Where will "Pool of Dreams" be permanently stationed, if at all?

Every year, the festival selects a few pieces from the lot that become a part of their permanent collection. Mine has been chosen for their collection so they will probably be lending it to other countries for upcoming festivals around the world. Eventually, there is also a possibility of it becoming a permanent feature somewhere in Amsterdam.

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As someone actively practicing in the art world, where do you see art intersecting with technology?

Technology is very much reflected in the art we make. Installation art especially, is a highly experimental genre. You can choose a plethora of materials and each of these materials are experiencing development through technology. Personally, as someone who extensively uses light play in my works, I have seen light evolve beautifully because of technology. LEDs, for example, have become extremely popular because of how compact and aesthetic it is; it lends itself wonderfully to visual art because of its colour changing mechanisms and whatnot. All of this can be used to create dynamic, immersive and interactive artwork in ways that haven't been possible before. And it is nothing but technological development that has allowed for these changes. I only see the role of technology growing in abundance in future years.

Are there any new projects in the works for you at the moment? When can we look forward to seeing more from you?

I usually work on 3-4 projects at any given point of time so there are a few things I'm working on that are underway. I can't reveal them as of yet but maybe in another two or three months!