

THE ART OF LUMIA LIGHT SCULPTURE

By Louis M. Brill

I am an artist who works with light as a sculptural medium, and through careful manipulation of the light beams, have created a series of compelling magical visual destinations ready for visitation. The foundation of my lightscapes is a form of light art known as Lumia, which is the result of light being reflected from a polished surface or refracted through glass optics, creating an image reminiscent of textured smoke. The result, a visual composition of varying geometric and organic colored light forms that ebb and flow against and through each other. The imagery when set properly moves in a unique fashion where its motion is almost undetectable but always changing in appearance.

Lumia - The 8th Art

Lumia was discovered and named by Danish artist Thomas Wilfred (1889-1968). He began his light explorations as a child when he built his first light box using cigar boxes with holes cut in them, electric bulbs, and pieces of colored glass. Wilfred continued to perfect his Lumia techniques and eventually developed a projection system he named The Clavilux (meaning light played by key). It was a live performance instrument comprised of a light-projection mechanism and a keyboard and levers that manipulated the projector's optics to create moving Lumia compositions.

Wilfred began to tour the United States and Europe giving Lumia recitals to a curious public. In 1922, Kenneth MacGowan reviewed a recital for *The World* newspaper, Wilfred's first public light art concert, "This is an art for itself, an art of pure color; it holds its audience in the rarest moments of silence that I have known in a playhouse." Even today, audiences sit in rapt attention, watching in awe, still with the rarest moments of silence as the Lumia imagery flows across the screen.

As Wilfred created the Lumia process, his efforts were focused on compositions

of light moving through time. He titled each composition an opus and created countless different compositions in his live performances. He described Lumia "as an aesthetic concept that incorporated form, color and motion, within a dark space, expressing a visual music, unfolding in infinite space." As his work progressed, he made it a personal quest for Lumia to be recognized as the 8th fine art which he was not able to have acknowledged within his lifetime.

The Lost Light Returns

The art of Lumia has gone through numerous evolutions. Over the years since Wilfred's death in 1968, Lumia has been absorbed and transformed by a range of analog and digital technologies and artists. In the late 1960s, it captured the public imagination with light shows and video synthesis. Since then it has been eclipsed by computer graphics. In competition to these other visual medias it has become "The Lost Light."

At times because of Wilfred's incorporating of Lumia in theaters, in museum exhibitions and public recitals, he has also been known as "the Godfather of the modern lightshow." Certainly Lumia had a dramatic enough effect on various professional communities it helped create. As a visual effect, its presence in planetariums and in movies is prominent. Lumia also reinforced the idea of visual music. It's also been impactful as a "consciousness expanding" trigger. In its final form its visuals are very evocative and have proven to be a useful visual stimulus tool for a range of psychological therapies. Quite the reaction to a simple, animated illumination.

Today, Lumia is on the upswing. It has emerged as an art medium that is being re-discovered as a meditative light of mystery. Lumia is a transcendent art form without material presence. In color or monochromatic illumination, its images exude a fascinating presence. There are several levels of explanation for Lumia light ranging from the technical to the poetic. For me it's the poetry of Lumia art that captures my imagination where your mind absorbs and interprets the image freely, without constraint. While Lumia is an organic representation of reflected light, it also occurs as a cosmic phenomenon in nature. In the northern latitudes it's the Aurora Borealis, a cosmic illumination that hangs across the sky as it slowly undulates as curtains of light.

Lumia - A Window To Dreams Past and Future

Why am I fascinated with Lumia? Lumia imagery presents abstract, cloud-

like patterns that are transcendent and very interpretive in how they appear. In multiple viewings of the same image it appears as a different image every time you study it; and likewise in its animated form, the more you watch its evocative movement, the more its imagery is transformed. A Lumia viewing is very experiential as it's not what you see, but more of what you feel you see.

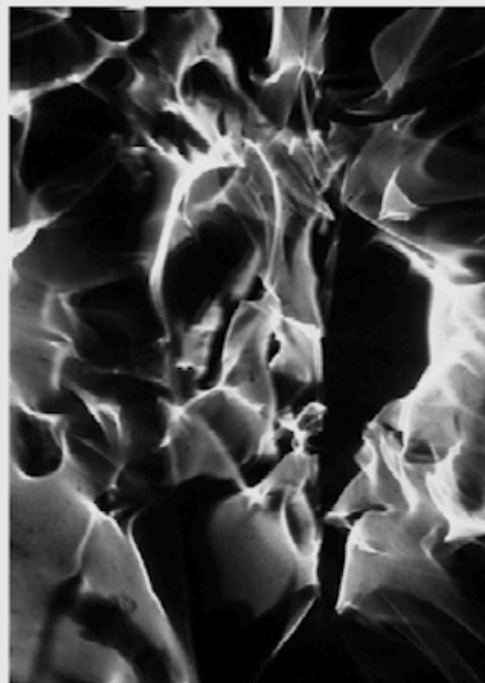
This freeform interpretive-Rorschach dimension became my inspiration to explore Lumia art. I began to custom build Lumia projectors to display these visionary gateways. Once animated, the Lumias evolve into evocative visions of various three-dimensional landscapes. As the Lumia light unfolded I began to see hills and valleys of textured light that evoked a symphony of images of human shapes in various costumes; of morphing faces, and other worldly landscapes of strange dimensional gateways. It was a world that could be seen but only visited through the mind's eye.

In presenting these visual experiences I have integrated a musical accompaniment to control the brightness and hue by fluctuating the light to beat of music. The music-Lumia combination expands into a synesthetic experience of visualization and transcendence that stimulates a narrative that fills your mind with a world of spirit and presence fueled by your imagination.

Watching a Lumia recital is like entering Alice's rabbit hole for a trip to Wonderland. One Lumia viewer described his observations as a psychedelic experience. "In the beginning I felt I was looking at a sunrise or smoke wafting through the air. Eventually the light was transformed, manipulating its imagery into recognizable shapes and I saw a spider web, then a Jelly Fish. Soon I no longer felt like I'm looking at something, but rather looking through something. The Lumia screen suddenly became a window which opened up and suddenly I felt like I'm inside of it and the Lumia is all around me."

Lights, Cameras, Lumia

Hollywood has seen Lumia as a mysterious transforming visual narrative and uses it as a visual effect to present mysterious and other worldly spiritual concepts. In cinema, Lumia effects have been featured



in *Brainstorm* (1983), *Life Force - Space Vampires* (1985), *Solaris* (2002), and recently one of Wilfred's Lumia works, "Opus 161" was used as a key visual in Terrance Malick's *Tree of Life* (2010).

Lumia is all about the mysterious spectacle of sculptural light. It awes viewers, as much today as when it was first introduced in the 1920s. It may not be recognized and accepted as the 8th art that Wilfred envisioned, but it has become a compelling medium of expression that captures the imagination of audiences just as it did ninety years ago.

Bio: Louis M. Brill is an artist who works with sculptural light and currently most of his artistic explorations is furthering Lumia's development and public presence as an art medium. To do so Brill has an on-line art gallery to share his Lumia art: http://sacredlumia.com/lumia_vista.html For those interested in collectable Lumia art, they may visit his on-line gift shop: http://sacredlumia.com/shopping_cart.html

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To experience a Lumia in motion: view Wilfred's "Opus 147" composition: <https://vimeo.com/71871932>

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Top right: A Busy Day in Heaven

Left bottom: Lux Portal

