

Musée Electropolis

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Press pack Electropolis Museum The adventure of electricity



January 2023. © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA

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The Electropolis Museum

the history

The **Electropolis Museum** opened its doors in October 1992 in Mulhouse, with the support of EDF. It all began with a steam engine and an AC generator which had been in use since the early 20th century and didn't want to die ...

1978

The Dollfus Mieg & Cie (D.M.C.) company in Mulhouse wanted to save a Sulzer steam engine which powered a BBC AC generator. The two were built at the beginning of the 20th century and had been standing idle for 25 years. The company got in touch with the Town of Mulhouse, the *Société Industrielle de Mulhouse*, the Chambre of Commerce and Industry and EDF. Various people in these organisations mobilised and started to think about what could be done to save what they considered to be a part of Mulhouse's industrial heritage. This led to the museum project and the beginning of a long story.

1980

The *Association pour le Musée de l'Energie Electrique* (AMELEC) was founded.

March 1983

Construction work began on the museum.

18 November 1985

With the help and advice of a British specialist in the restoration of steam engines, the generating set was started up again. A few months later, it was presented to the political and industrial organisations who were to provide the financial backing for the museum.

30 May 1986

The museum was named Electropolis.

6 June 1987

The building housing the BBC-Sulzer machine and a small number of other museum exhibits was temporarily opened to the general public.

1987-1990

Part of the museum was revealed to the public and a number of cultural events were held. During this period, plans were laid for further work on the museum and on 21st April 1990 the covers which had been raised on what was to be the Museum of Electricity were lowered.

October 1992

On 3rd October, the museum, whose mission it was to enlighten the public on all aspects of electricity, was finally opened.

1996

The museum was granted the status of "Musée contrôlé", today "Musée de France", by the French Museums Administration, thereby officially recognising the quality of the museum's collections.

July 2001

On 7th July, over 600 m² of entirely renovated permanent exhibition space was opened to the public, which tells the story of electricity from Antiquity to the 19th century.

September 2002 - May 2003

The museum was closed for extension work. On 28th May 2003, the museum reopened with over 1000 m² of permanent exhibitions entitled "Electricity in the 20th century".

December 2006

New permanent exhibition area "Electricity. What's behind the socket?" especially for children and parents. This exhibition was co-produced by the Cité des sciences et de l'industrie and EDF.

April 2007

New temporary exhibition area.

December 2009

New permanent exhibition: "Divine wrath".

Bronze statue representing the Greek god Zeus by Robert Wlérick (1937), an extraordinary work of art, donated by the EDF Foundation.

Visitors can discover an 11-metre high wind turbine in the garden.

2012

The documentation centre was renovated in order to accommodate 8,000 additional volumes of documents from the former EDF collections.

Part of the collection's items were transferred to a new storage building which meets the standards for preserving collections.

October 2015 – January 2016

The museum is closed for repairs from 1st October 2015 and reopens on 27th January 2016.

15th November 2018

After closing for 3 weeks to carry out works, the museum opens a new space entirely devoted to innovation as well as energy and digital transition, with part of the tour having been modernized.

12 June 2021

Opening of the Energy Garden: a new educational and fun circuit revolving around the challenges of energy and energy transition.

26 October 2023

Opening of an exhibition space dedicated to the theme of art and electricity.

The Electropolis Museum: a whole philosophy

The ambition of the **Electropolis Museum** is to "display the invisible" by bringing it into the limelight. The idea is to interest, amuse and educate visitors in order to give them a chance to better understand and appreciate their technological environment so that they feel more at home with it.

The museum tells the great history of electricity through the relationship Man has had with it, by following a chronological thread. It starts with the birth of the great ancient civilisations which treated lightning, the main natural manifestation of electricity, as a symbol of divinity or as an instrument used by the Gods to express their wrath. Then we move on through the main steps in its appropriation by Man through to the present day, where electricity is at the heart of so many human activities.

This well-known and much-used chronological approach was a deliberate choice. In contemporary museological practise, the process is far from unique. At the **Electropolis Museum**, the visitor follows a thematic path, which is simple and easy to decode. Surprise, innovation and invention stem on the one hand from the attempts to contextualise the subject, and on the other hand, from a totally original museographic and scenographic approach.

The scenography takes the visitor into atmospheres that evoke the methods of spreading knowledge at various periods in history: the curiosity room, world fairs, the arrival of digital... Elsewhere, the objects are presented in certain contexts: a middle-class drawing room from between the wars...

The Electropolis Museum : a whole architecture

Built on a 20,000 m² site, the initial building – a cube measuring 25 metres by 25 by 25 - houses the BBC-Sulzer machine. A new building with a dynamic shape now winds itself around the cube. Four semi-cylindrical pavilions form the technological garden.

Designed by local Mulhouse-based architectural firm AEA and Fanuele in Paris to provide a communication space, these buildings contain the permanent and temporary exhibition areas as well as all the museum departments. The aim of the architecture is to provide a fine setting for the story of electricity.

The renovation work from 2001 to 2003 on over 1,600 m² of permanent exhibition space was the fruit of close cooperation between the museum's own staff, two Canadian firms Plani-Museum (museological design and programming) and GSM Design (museographic design) as well as the Mulhouse architects, AEA.

You know the history, you can see the decor, now we invite you to follow the history of electricity through the ages from Antiquity to the present.

The Electropolis Museum an exciting journey

Entrance hall

Ample volumes and an original decoration whet the visitor's appetite. An impressive anamorphosis representing the Greek god Zeus questions the visitor. The museum shop offers educational toys and books for all ages. The visit begins with an immersion into an atmosphere of light and sound which invites the visitor to think about the source of electricity in nature and the energies of tomorrow.

The great model with sound and light

The discovery of all the wonders of electricity begins with an 80-metre long model, featured in a new light and sound show. Visitors are carried along electricity's own path, from a seaside town to a power station high in the mountains. They are guided along this unusual itinerary by a dialogue between two teenagers pondering the sources of electricity production, its new uses and the transformations of our towns and cities which are becoming increasingly smart.

The discovery of electricity, from Antiquity to the 19th century

Four main areas deal with the following themes, staged in decors inspired by the periods visited, present a very lively approach to the history of electricity, through audiovisual projections, animations and new technologies:

- **divine wrath.** In the ancient civilisations, lightning was always a source of fear and mystery, whence numerous interpretations, beliefs and superstitions: certain plants, such as sweet bay, were thought to protect Man against lightning, which was also thought to be divine as it was believed to be a creation of the gods... The visitor comes upon a bronze statue almost 2.50 metres in height, representing the Greek god, Zeus, which is a donation to the museum from the EDF Foundation. A work of art commissioned by the Compagnie Parisienne de Distribution d'Electricité from the French sculptor, Robert Wlérick (1882-1944), the statue of Zeus was presented for the first time in Paris in 1937 at a gigantic international exhibition, "Arts and Techniques in Modern Life".

- **first sparks,** area dedicated to the pioneers of electricity (Thalès de Milet, William Gilbert). Here we are in the 17th century, in the hushed atmosphere of a curiosity room whose display cabinets are filled with treasures such as stuffed animals, fossils and amazing machines. So many questions ! Does the way amber attracts feathers when you rub them mean it has a soul ? Do all bodies conduct discharges ? Many extraordinary items have been added to the collections of machines and instruments belonging to the pioneers of electricity, thanks to loans from other regional museums and collections.

- **worldly electricity** with experiments with static electricity. In a fine 18th drawing room that a demonstrator shows visitors, just as the abbot Nollet did, the extraordinary powers of electricity. Few fields of knowledge have been built up with as much pleasure as that of electricity. There are so many strange phenomena to be observed: the wind effect of the

convective discharge, the point effect, the machine that makes your hair stand on end... The bravest of the visitors are awarded the 100,000 volt diploma !

- **discoverers of the invisible** with Volta, Ampère, Faraday and Gramme. The 19th century saw a scientific and technological revolution with the work of Galvani and Volta. The times of amateur *electricians* merely showing off were over. Knowledge was progressing thanks to the rigorous observation of phenomena and debate between learned colleagues. The visitor is told their astonishing story, admires the objects born of their work, even hears them explaining their discoveries thanks to the magic of sound or holovision.

Electricity revolutionises industry and society in the 20th century

In a display where live presentations, collections of extraordinary objects and domestic items alternate with special and interactive effects, four themes are illustrated in scenes inspired by the periods visited:

- **the World Fairs era (1875-1920).** The arrival of electricity in society profoundly changed the idea of and the need for comfort. It made its first public appearance in 1881, at the Paris World Fair. The visitors were fired up with enthusiasm for this new form of energy, which fascinated as much as it frightened. But progress was to be slow, and private homes were not immediately changed by electricity. First of all, industrialists needed to be able to produce, transport and distribute the new energy. Dynamos, alternators, transformers and electric motors would progressively revolutionise industry. A revolution then took place in transport, communications and lighting. At the end of the 19th century, electricity was synonymous with pleasure and enchantment. Even the ballerinas at the Opera wore luminous jewellery on stage!

- **the electric light: the incandescent lighting (1879).** The development and the industrialization of the incandescent lighting by the American Thomas Alva Edison revolutionize the world of the lighting, at the end of the 19th century. The electric light finally enters homes. At this end of the 19th century, electricity rhymes with pleasure and enchantment. Up to the ballerinas of the Opera, who carry bright jewels on stage !

- **the electric servants: the arrival of electrical appliances in the home (1920-1945).** Although France was electrified in the 1920s, subscribers were conspicuous by their absence. Similarly, household electrical appliances, although they seemed indissociable from modernity, remained inaccessible to most French homes. When sitting comfortably in Art Déco armchairs visitors can view an early example of advertising, extolling the virtues of electricity and excerpts from the silent movie "The Electric House" made in 1922 by Buster Keaton and Edward F. Cline.

Young and old alike can play "Ribouldingue", a predecessor of the pinball machine or test their perspicacity by trying to identify some peculiar objects !

- **a new show revolving around the big Sulzer-BBC machine**, which provided a large part of the energy supply of the Dollfus Mieg et Cie (DMC) factory in Mulhouse, from 1901 to 1947. A new panoramic projection of three sequences lasting three minutes each, takes the visitor on a journey back in time. "The electric century", "Deep within the great machine" and "A machine and men" are told like a historical testimony, illustrated with humorous touches. The moment when the machine is lubricated by a museum technician is then visible in bright light every hour.

The future is electric : the energy challenges of the 21st century

This new space for discovering and engaging in reflection is dedicated to the energy-related challenges of the 21st century and the electricity consumption of tomorrow. The scenography revolving around the digital world takes the visitor into the heart of innovation, as thought today. Objects are becoming rarer to leave room for questions about major technological advances in the field of electricity. The visitor is invited to play and wonder about the links between electricity, the climate and our societies' future way of life.

- The passer-through-walls

The visitor is invited to observe a projection of often familiar objects, whose evolutions have consistently marked their time. From the floppy disk to the cloud, from the first computers to ultra-flat screens, from the incandescent lamp to the LED, these everyday objects mark the symbolic passage into the 21st century.

- A digital big bang

New objects, new uses, new worlds, the digital revolution is under way! A large mural presents four societal themes which connected objects will profoundly transform: the city, the home, health and mobility. Among other things, the visitor discovers a smart gaming robot which accompanies autistic children, the internet using light, a flying car project, a smart mirror ... These themes and connected objects will be renewed regularly.

- Planet energy

Planet energy invites visitors to consider our collective responsibility in terms of electricity production and consumption and their impact on the future of the planet. What future solutions for low-carbon electricity generation? What impacts for the climate? Located in the heart of the new space, this mosaic of screens appeals to the visitor through the display of grandiose images and alternating historical and scientific data.

- Smart Sky

Here, the visitor is invited to curl up in large, generously sized seats facing a constellation of screens. The animated film Smart Sky features "innovative actors" who are inspired by history, nature, ancestral techniques or even tests or mistakes to innovate. The paths of creation are the result of projects based on teams, who interact and combine complementary skills. The Smart Sky is an invitation to think and collaborate. It is a message sent to the inventor, the creator in each of us.

- The games of light

Several small islands allow children and their parents to have fun with light and think about the challenges facing electricity through animations and interactive games.

Kids' corner (3-5 years, non readers). This theatre of illuminated images depicts electricity in everyday life and displays the activities of people living in a neighborhood as Chinese shadows. The young visitor chooses the season and the magic happens.

The artist Patrick Suchet designed the **Firefly** installation, an artistic photo booth which reinvents the forms of graffiti and invites the visitor to have a photo taken using the light

painting technique. Upon leaving the booth, they can send their light creation by e-mail from a tablet and share it on social media.

I draw with light invites the visitor to write or draw with LED lights on a phosphorescent paint wall.

Energy puzzle : an interactive game board challenges primary and secondary school children to find the right combination of sources of production used to produce the electricity required to meet the needs of a city or a country, at any given time.

The Energy Garden

The revitalized 12,000 m² outdoor route, opened in 2021, is intended to be as much an exhibition area as a place of life and cultural adventures, around the various methods of production and new uses of electricity. The museum offers a new visitor experience with three alternative approaches:

- **a walk in a natural landscaped area**: The route, redesigned and decorated with vegetation which respects local diversity, is home to over 82 species of native or local plants. Comprised of trees, shrubs and climbing plants, it will be enriched over the seasons with a vast flowery meadow, with paths and mowed plots which invite you to relax and stroll.

- **a unique collection of machines from our industrial heritage**: Around fifteen machines - including a gigantic rotor which is nearly 10 metres long and weighs 144 tons - illustrate the diversity and wealth of electricity's industrial heritage. Find out all about their history and how they work.

- **a game for 8-12 year olds, the awakening of the sleeping machines and the Smart City**: The Energy Garden is also a playground for children. Thanks to a connected bracelet and game stations, come with your family to experience the "sleeping machines" in augmented reality to understand how they worked and also project yourselves into the future of energies and the Smart City.

Another permanent exhibition complete the discovery of electricity:

Electricity. What's behind the plug?

This play area is devoted to 5 to 12-year old children, and offers several experiments to discover the various aspects of electricity. Interactive exhibits, games, real or over-sized objects and video displays illustrate what is behind the plug. It is co-produced by Cité des sciences et de l'industrie and EDF.

The Electropolis Museum at the heart of the industrial history of Mulhouse

Mulhouse, at the heart of Western Europe, close to the Rhine and flanked by the twin mountain ranges of the Vosges and Black Forest, has always made the best of its geographical location, in the immediate vicinity of Germany and Switzerland.

As early as the second half of the 18th century, Mulhouse laid the foundations of its future economic and industrial growth. The industrious and enterprising middle classes had created an industrial boom, thanks to printing on cloth. Amongst them, Jean-Henri Dollfus, Samuel Koechlin and Jean-Jacques Schmalzer, three pioneers of industry who would enable Mulhouse to enjoy a remarkable period of expansion.

In the 19th century, the town's infrastructure developed and in 1839 the first railway line was laid. As a result of this industrial expansion, the city developed a particular interest in all things technical, technological development and social progress.

An early example was the founding in 1826 of the *Société Industrielle de Mulhouse* (SIM), an association whose aim was to promote progress for people, in culture and the economy, and which even today wields considerable power and influence.

Mulhouse has always been a city of science and progress; it was here that the first Engineering schools were founded, Chemistry in 1822 and Textiles in 1861. This lively context of scientific and technical culture also led to the creation of a number of technical museums such as the Museum of Printed Fabrics, the Wallpaper museum, the Automobile and Railway museums... which together make Mulhouse the European capital of industrial heritage museums, welcoming 650,000 visitors every year.

This unmatched potential and Mulhouse's rich industrial heritage made the city the ideal site for the **Electropolis Museum**, which provides an overview of insights into 19th century industry, the transformations seen in the 20th century and the latest technologies.

The Electropolis Museum thanks its partners

EDF, major sponsor

Since 1980, EDF has provided its support in operating and investing in the Electropolis Museum. The company has offered exemplary patronage from the outset and has made it possible to create, develop and sustain the museum exploring all aspects of electricity.



Principal partners

The museum benefits from corporate sponsorship and the support of public partners, united alongside EDF (the major sponsor) in the *Association Gestionnaire du Musée Electropolis* (Electropolis Museum Management Association).



The Electropolis Museum in figures

Opened

3 October 1992.

Surface area

3,600 m² opened to the public including permanent exhibitions: 2,765 m²

A 20,000 m² garden.

Collection

A unique collection in Europe, boasting 12,000 objects, 1,000 of which are on display.

Reserves

2,786 m²

Documentation centre

Specializing in works and periodicals on electricity and its applications since the 18th century, the documentation centre open to researchers, is the most comprehensive library in France in this field:

- 9,500 volumes on electricity, science and technology,
- over 3,000 images,
- nearly 300 periodical titles.

Seminar room

Capacity: 45 people.

Staff

14 employees

Visitor numbers:

2019: 43,360 visitors

2020: 13,594 visitors (closed in January; from 7th March to 15th June and from 30th October to 31st December / Covid 19)

2021: 18 113 visitors (closed from 1st January to 18th May/Covid 19)

2022: 35 164 visitors (closed January)

2023: 44 243 visitors (closed January)

Press contact

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The Electropolis Museum opening hours

2024

The museum is open from Tuesday to Sunday, from 10 am to 6 pm.

Closed:

- From 1st to 31st January,
- Mondays,
- Good Friday, 1st May, 1st and 11th November, 25th and 26th December.

A trilingual museum

The texts and audio comments are translated into German and English.

Accessibility

For several years, the museum has been working to improve accessibility for disabled visitors.

Contact us

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The Electropolis Museum ticket prices for 2024

Individual ticket prices

Adult	€ 10
Child from 4 to 17	€ 5
Child under 4	free
Family (2 adults + 2 children)	€ 25
Reduced price	€ 8
Student until 26 years / Job seeker / Disabled /Teacher	

Group rates

(over 20 people)

Adult	€ 8
Child from 4 to 17	€ 4

Guided tours available by appointment in French, German or English

(maximum 30 people)

Adult	€ 48
School group	€ 36
Disabled	€ 28

Combined ticket with “La Cité du Train” (for individual or groups).

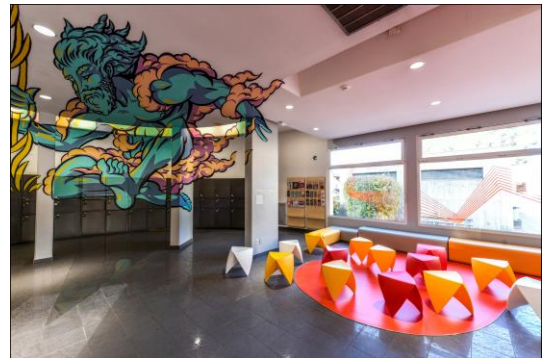
Combined ticket with “Le Musée national de l’automobile” (for groups only).



Electropolis Museum in pictures



Electropolis Museum © Marc Barral-Baron



Anamorphosis Zeus par Truly Design © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



The great model © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



The great Sulzer-BBC machine (1901) © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



The electrical servants © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



The electric light. © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



What's behind the plug ? ©Cyril CRESPEAU



Electrifying experiments ©Cyril CRESPEAU

Electropolis Museum in pictures New area « The future is electric »



The future is electric © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



The future is electric : planet energy © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



The future is electric : planet energy © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



The future is electric : a digital big bang © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



The future is electric : energy puzzle © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



The future is electric : a digital big bang © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



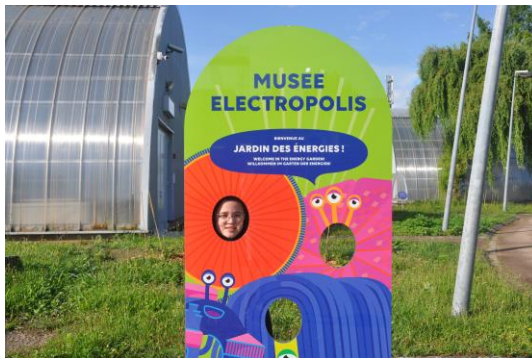
The future is electric : smart sky © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA



The futur is electric : kid's corner © EDF/Xavier Popy-REA

Electropolis Museum in pictures Energy Garden

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