

# Musée Electropolis

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## Press package

### Opening of a new area « Art and Electricity » in the Electropolis Museum, starting on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**About ten works of art** will, from now on, illustrate the field of plastic arts within the permanent exhibition space. Two fundamental aspects of the relation between electricity and art are represented: first, how electricity is depicted, and then, its use by artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Since its opening in 1987, the Electropolis museum has welcomed artists and has wished to explore the link art shares with electricity and its use since its rise within the industrial society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1986, the museum introduced its very first exhibition at the fine art Museum of Mulhouse, focusing on holography, art and techniques.

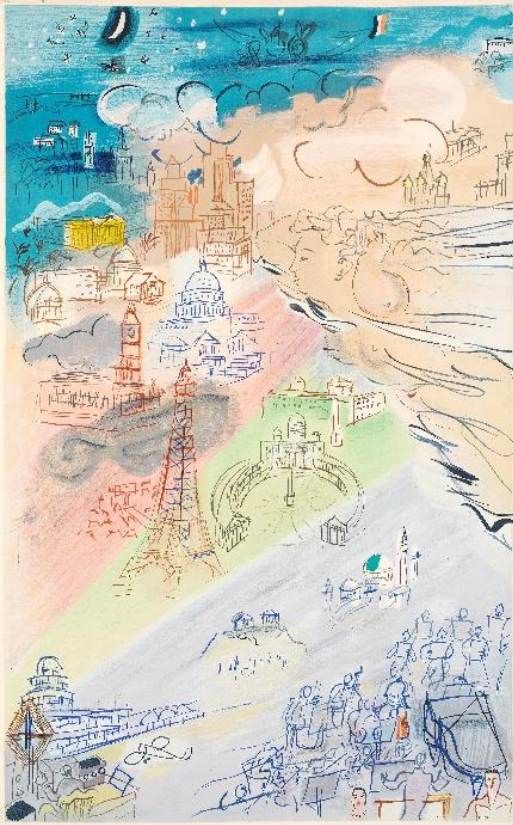
Despite its wishes to create an area dedicated to the subject, the museum lacked the pieces needed to show the metamorphosis electricity brought to our civilization. That later changed, thanks to the important donation by the EDF Foundation who shares this focus in its Parisian exhibition space.

## Representations

When electricity started to take over International World Fairs during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it also started to inspire many artists.



Statues, representing the Electricity Fairy used to embellish these fairs, **such as the one from Charles Octave Levy** or the impressive painting of the “*La Fée Electricité*” from Raoul Dufy. The pieces of art exhibited depicts artists desires to give life to this “*goddess of modern times*”.



In 1937, Paris holds the International Exposition dedicated to Art and Technology in Modern Life. To decorate the lighting pavilion of the CPDE ("Compagnie Parisienne de Distribution d'Electricité" – The Parisian supply company of electricity now turned EDF). The CPDE orders **Raoul Dufy a depiction of "la Fée Electricité"** which will be introduced as "the biggest painting in the world" with its dimensions of 60 x 10 meters. In front of this pavilion stood "Zeus" by Robert Wlérick, now exhibited in the first room of the Electropolis museum. Dufy was inspired by literature from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to pay tribute to 109 historical figures from Thales of Miletus to Pierre and Marie Curie.

In 1954, EDF donated "*La Fée Electricité*" to the *Musée d'art moderne* in Paris where it is still the masterpiece. EDF ordered a series of lithographs on it, to once again, be the biggest in the world at the time. Raoul Dufy supervised its making and added more details than on the original. Visitors of Electropolis are welcomed by this marvelous piece when entering the area.

Dufy's work is facing a selection of what **the surrealist artist Man Ray called "rayograms"**. 1931, a few years before the order to Raoul Dufy, CPDE's director Charles Malégarie, became one of the first patrons of avant-garde artists such as Man Ray. He then entrusted him with the creation of an album of ten rayograms on the theme of electricity. Prefaced by Pierre Bost, the album shows the exploitation of this brand-new technique he discovered almost by accident and gave it its name.

These photomontages are a mix of photographs and shadows of objects exposed to light, without the presence of the camera. Random shapes can be discovered at the end, which is appreciated by the surrealists.

## Experiments

At the beginning of the 20th century, artists started exploring this new application of electricity: its light, its magnetism, its sound... Avant-garde artists will especially make use of this novelty and that will contribute to the start of dadaism, kinetic art, optic art, and pop-art. Meanwhile, music, cinema, performance art and their distribution went through profound changes with the use and application of electricity.

Bought by the museum thanks to government funds (*Fonds Régional d'Acquisition pour les Musées : Ministère de la Culture / Conseil Régional du Grand-Est*), **Pol Bury's "Fountain"** introduces this part of the area dedicated to art using the effects of electricity. Pol Bury, one of the founders of kinetic art, took an early interest in new materials and technologies. In his *Fountains*, as a master of slow movement, he exploited the balance of a hydraulic device to express the flow of time in what he called: *these humble movements of immobility*.

Movement and light meet in “**Continus-light**” of **Julio Le Parc**. One of the major pieces of the EDF Foundation.

One of the main representatives of Optical Art (Op-Art) and then of lumino-kinetic art, Julio Le Parc combined electric motors and lamps to revitalize artistic language.

According to this committed and non-conformist artist *"in the traditional work of art, everything is fixed by a system of signs and keys that must be known beforehand in order to be able to appreciate it"*. Faced with this situation, Le Parc and his friends from the GRAV (Visual Art Research Group) created installations made out of simple elements (motors, lamps, belts, etc.) which, when combined, create complex effects but which are accessible to everyone.

The mention of electric effect is completed with **the two pieces by Costis**. The artist had already been introduced by the museum in 1995 during a monographic temporary exhibition. By taming thunder as a “energy sculpture” Costis creates an “alphabet of ephemeral forms”. In an unpredictable and fleeting manner Costis suggests a poetic and symbolic metaphor of this natural phenomenon.

Finally, **three algorithmic luminous crates by Bernard Caillaud** (1939 - 2004) conclude this exhibition with an opening of numerical art. Bernard Caillaud started as a physicist first, he then became a painter and later a photographer. In the early 80's, he started exploring coding and numerical art. To highlight the continuity of his work, he keeps the term “numerical painting”. His work is the result of a dialogue between the artist's algorithm and the almost unpredictable picture that appears on the screen. He describes it: *« C'est beau comme un scanner en couleur, impossible à décrire et vivement recommandé aux nuls en maths qui se sont toujours demandé à quoi pouvaient bien servir les équations variant de zéro à l'infini. »* (It's beautiful like a colorful scan, impossible to describe and strongly recommended to people bad in math that have always wondered about the uses of equations that varies from zero to infinity” (Extract from « A Nous Paris », 2001).

Most of the works of art exhibited in this area belongs to the EDF Foundation. There were acquired during the monographic or thematic exhibition since 1990 in their space in Paris. This exhibition was sponsored by Mulhouse Alsace Agglomération and EDF.

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