

1968: A Global Perspective

<http://www.1968conf.org>

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Light Artists: Joining the Eye and the Ear

The overlap of technology, theatrics, art and culture in the light shows and artistic environments created in the late 1960s mirrored the global cultural upheaval and revolution, and was an attempt to address perception as the central issue in art and life.

In contrast to cinematic art, the light environment is meant as an interactive experience for the viewer. In departing from the fixed "front and center" focus of attention, the artist enters into a collaboration with the audience, a symbiotic relationship that incorporates both the aural and the visual, as in the form of the light shows accompanying rock concerts, in which the tempo and direction of both music and audience help to determine the plan of the lighting designer. Artist's interventions into the space of the viewer using light as a medium have paralleled, overlapped and combined with the development of the cultural light show, creating intermedia installations and perceived environments based on sensory disruption.

The time around 1968 proved crucial for developments in environments of light. Artists such as James Turrell and Robert Irwin were united with corporate technological innovations via the Experiments in Art and Technology Program. Light shows generated by rock and roll culture reached their bi-coastal peak, extending their impact into the realm of academic art via the Light Sound Dimension and Andy Warhol's intermedia disruption of *The Exploding Plastic Inevitable*. 1968 saw the manifestation of Marshall McLuhan's edict that the "medium is the message," and the mediation of the Debordian spectacle by conscious audiences seeking perceptual disruption.