

Olafur Eliasson
For the New European Bauhaus Roundtable

As an artist, a European, and the UNDP Goodwill Ambassador for Renewable Energy and Climate Action, I offer my time and creativity to work on the New European Bauhaus Roundtable initiative.

Art, in my view, functions as an immune system in our societies. With a focus on felt experiences, reflection, and (self-)critical thinking, it examines crucial aspects of our lives, our societies, and our modes of co-existence today – on the planet. Art and culture are, to a large extent, what keep us alive, together, as communities and societies.

While art sometimes addresses locally specific topics, within very particular cultural contexts, I find that it can reach a broader audience by eliciting embodied experiences, for which it matters less whether you speak Hungarian, Portuguese, or English. As an artist, I seek to engage people through my work both intellectually and emotionally. By evoking wonder and enjoyment, as well as by inspiring questioning and reflection, I aim to speak to their heads, hearts, and hands. When you encounter an artwork physically, you may feel challenged, reflected, or even seen by it. To me, this is what the visual and performance arts can do. They work with empathy and with engagement at the level of both our bodies and our brains – of our consciousness, thoughts, emotions and our sense of physical presence. They work with stories that go beyond the individual to connect to social issues and, even, ecological aspirations on behalf of the planet.

In *Ice Watch* (2014), for example, a project I developed with geologist Minik Rosing to raise awareness about the climate emergency, people happened upon the large blocks of glacial ice on the streets of Copenhagen (2014), Paris (2015) and London (2018) and formed a temporary community who used their hands, eyes, noses, and ears to experience the ice and wonder at its sudden appearance and meaning. It evokes the feeling of meeting up with a distant part of nature, and it speaks in an intuitive manner to the loss that we are, in fact, all experiencing right at this moment.

In this way, art engages people across cultures and communities. What we need in Europe today is to strengthen these ties, both impromptu and long term, while struggling together to overcome the pandemic.

I hope to bring this focus on embodied engagement with our surroundings and with the world to the New European Bauhaus Roundtable. It is vital that we work with bottom-up strategies of collaboration and identification to enable the inhabitants of Europe to feel touched and moved by visionary strategies and new solutions for the built environment and for the design of objects, cities, and modes of being together. I hope to work on strategies that make the populations of Europe feel seen and recognised, at eye-level, for their contribution to shaping our future.

Olafur Eliasson
Berlin, 15 December 2020



The weather project, 2003, Tate Modern, London

The weather project, 2003

Created for the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, London, this site-specific installation employed a semi-circular screen, a ceiling of mirrors, and artificial mist to create the illusion of a sun. Aluminium frames lined with mirror foil were suspended from the ceiling to create a giant mirror that visually doubled the volume of the hall – along with the semi-circular screen mounted on the far wall, its long edge abutting the mirror ceiling. Backlit by approximately 200 mono-frequency lights, the semi-circle and its reflection created the image of a massive, indoor sunset seen through the artificial mist emitted into the room. By walking to the far end of the hall, visitors could see how the sun was constructed, and the reverse of the mirror structure was visible from the top floor of the museum.

In preparation for the exhibition, Eliasson devised a questionnaire for the employees at Tate Modern that included questions such as: 'Has a weather phenomenon ever changed the course of your life dramatically?' 'Do you think tolerance to other individuals is proportional to the weather?' 'To what extent are you aware of the weather outside your workplace?' The results were published in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, which also included a roundtable discussion about the communication of art, meteorological reports of freak weather events, weather statistics, and a series of essays on the weather, time, and space.



Riverbed, 2014, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark

Riverbed, 2014

Created specifically for the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, *Riverbed* filled the entire south wing of the museum with a rocky landscape that threaded a stream through the galleries. Visitors entered the space and walked upstream to the water's source. By placing an entirely new path onto the one suggested by the museum's architecture, the work challenged visitors' expectations and invited them to find new ways of navigating the space.



Ice Watch, 2014, Place du Panthéon, Paris, 2015



Ice Watch, 2014, London, 2018

Ice Watch, 2014

Twelve large blocks of ice cast off from the Greenland ice sheet are harvested from a fjord outside Nuuk and presented in a clock formation in a prominent public place. The work raises awareness of climate change by providing a direct and tangible experience of the reality of melting arctic ice. *Ice Watch* has been installed in three locations.

The first installation was in Copenhagen, at City Hall Square, from 26 to 29 October 2014, to mark the publication of the UN IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report on Climate Change. The second installation took place in Paris, at Place du Panthéon, from 3 to 13 December 2015, on the occasion of the UN Climate Conference COP21, and the third version of *Ice Watch* was on view from 11 December 2018 to 2 January 2019 at two locations in London – outside Bloomberg's European headquarters and in front of Tate Modern.



*The collectivity project, 2005, 3rd Tirana Biennale, 2005; U-turn
Copenhagen, 2008 and Kunsthalle Bonn, 2018*

The collectivity project, 2005

Three tons of white Lego bricks were delivered to a public square in Tirana, Albania, where people were invited to build their vision of a future city. The project was also instigated in Oslo in 2006, in Copenhagen in 2008, in New York City in 2015 and in Bonn in 2018.

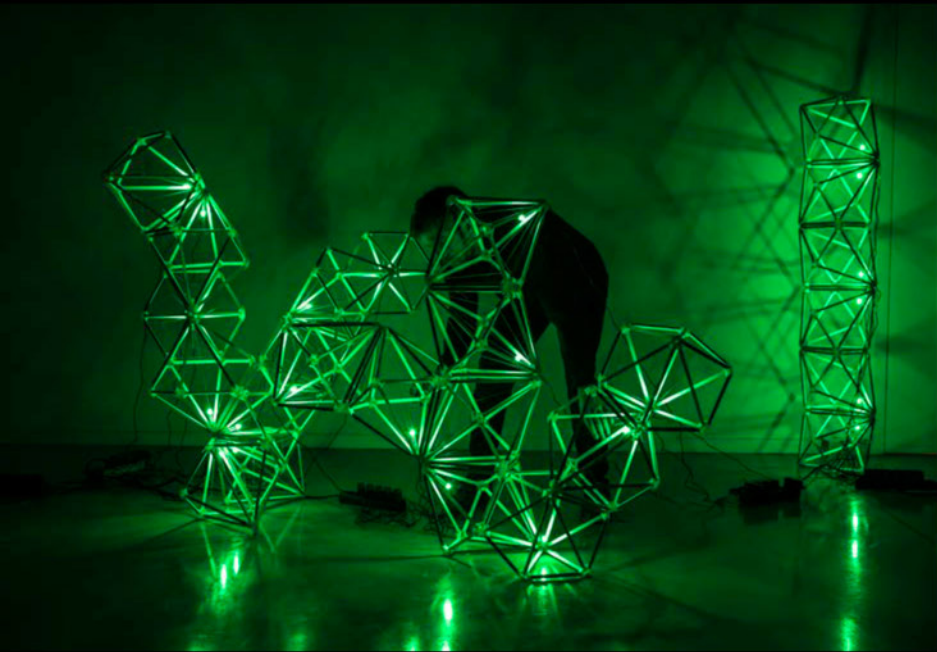


Your uncertain shadow (colour), 2010, Tate Modern, London, 2018

Your uncertain shadow (colour), 2010

Five coloured spotlights, directed at a white wall, are arranged in a line on the floor: a green light positioned next to another green light, followed by a magenta light, an orange light, and, finally, a blue light. These colours combine to illuminate the wall with a bright white light. When the visitor enters the space, her projected shadow, by blocking each coloured light from a slightly different angle, appears on the wall as an array of five differently coloured silhouettes.

In addition to the dark shadow created where all five lights are obstructed, the colours of the other shadows – one yellow, one violet, one cyan, and two magenta – reflect the properties of additive colour. As a visitor blocks light from the blue spotlight, for instance, the resultant shadow is lit by a combination of green, magenta, and orange lights, creating a yellow shadow. The overlap of the five silhouettes produces further hues. As visitors move about the space, passing closer to and farther away from the lights, the silhouettes shift in colour intensity and scale.



Green light – An artistic workshop, 2016. In collaboration with Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary 57th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia VIVA ARTE VIVA, 2017

Green light – An artistic workshop, 2016

"*Green light* is an act of welcoming, addressed both to those who have fled hardship and instability in their home countries and to the residents of Vienna. Working together in a playful creative process, participants build a modular light and construct a communal environment in which difference is not only accepted but embraced. I hope *Green light* shines light on some of the challenges and responsibilities arising from the current refugee crisis in Europe and throughout the world."

– Olafur Eliasson

TBA21 and Olafur Eliasson invited refugees, migrants, and university students to take part in a workshop at TBA21–Augarten, Vienna, together with the gallery's regular visitors in Spring of 2016. The workshop involved collaborating to assemble *Green light* lamp modules designed by Olafur Eliasson, as well as a diverse programme of seminars, performances, screenings, lectures, and artistic interventions organised by TBA21.

One could purchase a *Green light* lamp directly at TBA21, through selected partners, or on the TBA21 web shop. Proceeds from the sales supported the *Green light* project, TBA21's partner organisations Red Cross Vienna, Caritas, and Georg Danzer Haus, as well as other initiatives helping refugees in Austria.

Made from recycled and sustainable materials and designed to be stackable, the *Green light* modules functioned either on their own or could be combined into more complex structures.



Green river, 1998, Moss, Norway, 1998; Tokyo, 2001;
Stockholm, 2000; Bremen, 1998

Green river, 1998

Eliasson arranged for a non-toxic, water-soluble dye to be poured into rivers in urban and rural settings, turning the rivers green. Carried along by the currents, the dye radically changed each river's appearance, startlingly transforming it from an element in a static, postcard-like view into a potentially unsettling reminder that the city or landscape as a whole can be engaged and negotiated.

Eliasson has carried out this unannounced intervention in six different locations: Bremen, Germany (1998), Moss, Norway (1998), the Northern Fjallabak Route, Iceland (1998), Los Angeles (1999), Stockholm (2000), and Tokyo (2001).



Berliner Treibholz (Berlin driftwood), 2009, Berlin

***Berliner Treibholz* (Berlin driftwood), 2009**

In 2008 Eliasson collected about fifty large tree trunks from the beaches of northern Iceland. The wood is not native to the country – where less than one per cent of the land is covered with forest – but rather washes ashore from Siberia, carried by polar ice drift and bleached by the sun and saltwater on its way.

In the months leading up to the exhibition *Innen Stadt Aussen* (Inner city out), 2010 at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, Eliasson and his team distributed the logs around the city at night, leaving them in plazas and side streets, roundabouts, parking areas, and other in-between spaces, as if they had simply drifted into the city and become entangled in its mesh. Some of them remained in place for months, while others were quickly removed.



Cirkelbroen (The circle bridge), 2015, Copenhagen

Cirkelbroen (The circle bridge), 2015

Cirkelbroen is a bridge for pedestrians and cyclists that spans Copenhagen's Christianshavns Kanal and completes a bicycle route in the city centre.

Its five circular platforms vary in diameter and are arranged to create a staggered, zigzag path that slows cyclists and pedestrians down as they pass over it. The bridge is lit at night, and one section can swivel to allow large boats to pass into and out of the canal.



Studio Olafur Eliasson, Berlin

Olafur Eliasson's biography

Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967) works with sculpture, painting, photography, film, installation, and digital media. His art is driven by his interests in perception, movement, embodied experience, and feelings of self and community. Not limited to the confines of the museum and gallery, his practice engages the public through architectural projects, interventions in civic space, arts education, policy-making, and climate action. Eliasson is internationally-renowned for his public installations that challenge the way we perceive and co-create our environments. In 2003, he made *The weather project*, a glowing indoor sun shrouded in mist at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in London. In 2008, Eliasson constructed four expansive artificial waterfalls along the Manhattan and Brooklyn shorelines for *The New York City Waterfalls*. He has also explored art's potential to address climate change: for *Ice Watch*, he brought large blocks of free-floating glacial ice to the city centers of Copenhagen in 2014, Paris in 2015, and London in 2018. Passers-by could touch fragments of the Greenlandic glacial ice and witness its fragility as it disappeared before them. In 2019, Eliasson was named UNDP Goodwill Ambassador for climate action and the sustainable development goals.

As a professor at the Berlin University of the Arts, Eliasson led the *Institut für Raumexperimente* (Institute for Spatial Experiments; 2009–14), a five-year experimental programme in arts education located in the same building as his studio.

In 2012, Eliasson and engineer Frederik Ottesen founded the social business *Little Sun*. This global project provides clean, affordable energy to communities without access to electricity, encourages sustainable development through sales of *Little Sun* solar-powered lamps and chargers, and raises global awareness of the need for equal access to energy and light.

Eliasson and architect Sebastian Behmann founded Studio Other Spaces, an international office for art and architecture, in Berlin in 2014. As an architectural counterpart to Studio Olafur Eliasson in the same building, Studio Other Spaces focuses on interdisciplinary and experimental building projects and works in public space.

Located in Berlin, Studio Olafur Eliasson comprises a large team of craftsmen, architects, archivists, researchers, administrators, cooks, art historians, and specialised technicians.

www.olafureliasson.net

www.soe.tv

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