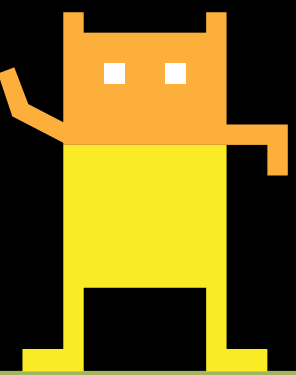


AARHUS BY LIGHT

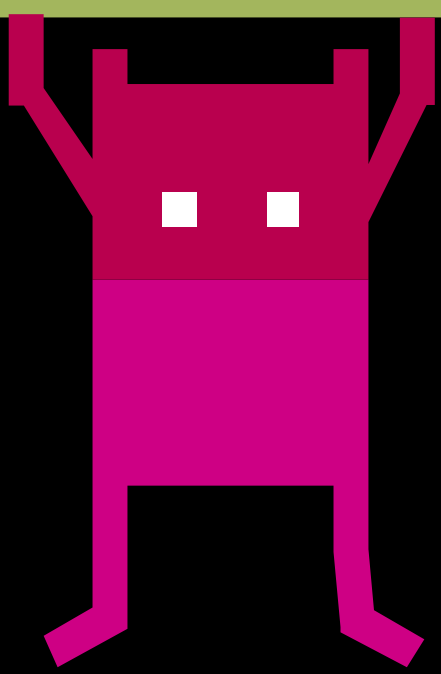


INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 2008, the concert hall of the danish city of Aarhus was augmented with an interactive media facade, engaging local citizens in new kinds of public behavior in order to explore new possibilities of digital media in urban life.

The large glass facade on the building was fitted with 180 square meters of semi-transparent LED screen that was distributed in a non-rectangular pattern behind the surface of Concert Hall Aarhus towards to adjacent public park. Visitors in the park were met with the spectacular view of animated creatures crawling around the structure of the glass facade along with a constantly moving outline of the skyline of Aarhus. When visitors walked through the park, they passed through three interaction zones marked with coloured carpets. Once on the carpet, a sensor picked up the outlines of your body and hereby creating a silhouette on the screen. This silhouette encouraged a curious and playful investigation of the expression among the users, while enabling them to interact with the creatures by pushing, lifting and dropping them.

During the two month period, thousands of citizens walked past the installation. A great part of them engaged in investigating, socializing and acting out in front of the media facade. Regardless of age and gender, people were intrigued by the unfamiliar, yet seemingly understandable, representation of themselves on the screen. This resulted in lots of strange and unusual behavior while interacting with the facade, marking a departure from traditional codes of urban behavior.



A SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

The purpose of Aarhus by Light was to create a media facade which was engaging both the people passing by as well as contributing to the visual qualities of the architecture and surrounding urban space. Therefore, the facade was an experiment in both visual expression and experience through interaction.

During its almost two months of activity, the installation became quite an attraction for citizens of all ages, and it found its way to national and international media. Not only were children drawn to the mirror-image interplay with the enormous facade and the pink, blue, and yellow carpets. Their parents, teenagers, elderly, workers, disabled people ... were all attracted to the facade and to the interaction zones, both to watch and to explore. Just as importantly, the regular visitors and staff of the concert hall enjoyed and engaged in the interactive experiment to a very high degree.

One of the biggest challenges in creating Aarhus by Light was designing the interaction, since the facade should offer an experience to everyone in the large urban space in front of the concert hall.

Concert Hall Aarhus is situated in central Aarhus with other cultural institutions as neighbors: The ARoS art museum, the town hall, and several cultural venues and organizations. In front of the concert hall is a park with paths leading up to the large glass foyer, and this is the route most visitors follow. On the far side of the park is a busy street connecting to the city's central square.

Our goal was to address the situation of people simply passing by on the street on their way to buy groceries, only glancing at the facade more than 150 meters (500 feet) away; others would follow the main path through the park towards the concert hall, not going in but simply passing by; and some would attend a regular show, stay awhile in the foyer before and after as well as in the break. As a consequence, the audience was very heterogeneous in many ways, e.g. in a physical sense, because some were close, some were far away; in terms of engagement, since some were engaged in other activities which did not leave much attention to the facade while others would have come to be entertained and perhaps even challenged; and in terms of experience with technology. This was no simple task.

Aarhus by Light addresses this heterogeneous audience in several ways. First of all, the facade always offered something intriguing to look at. It had a certain aesthetic quality, somewhat resembling that of an early computer game because of the coarse resolution of the LED panels (each pixel was offset by 4 cm (1.5 inches). But up close, especially the creatures had a finer quality due to the underlying vector-based animations. Furthermore, the facade was clearly visible from any distance whether there were people on the carpets interacting with the creatures (or each other) or not. If no people were around, the creatures would go about with their lives and the skyline would rise and fall.



THE MEDIA FACADE

A central point throughout Aarhus by Light was to break with the traditional rectangular form of a "screen", so the 180 m² (1938 sq ft) LED panels were set up in an irregular configuration especially adapted to the design of the large glass facade of the concert hall.

The panels were mounted on the inside of the facade, and being largely transparent, they created a "screen" that blended in with the existing architecture. This allowed transparency from the inside out during daytime. But when it was dark outside, the screen was visible from both sides (due to the reflection in the glass).

In addition to the main installation, an interactive dance performance, Running Sculpture + Aarhus by Light, was especially staged for the facade. By using cameras in front of and above a stage inside the foyer, the bodies of two professional dancers were blended with an interactive, graphical video scenography and pumping music, presenting the audience with multiple perspectives on the performance, both inside the foyer and outside in the park in front of the concert hall. This performance showed the facade's abilities to create different kinds of spaces within and around the building and the surrounding urban space, and, furthermore, it gave us an occasion to play with and try out the aesthetic possibilities of the technology.



FACTS

Time period: February 7 to March 31, 2008.

Location: Concert Hall Aarhus, at the heart of the city of Aarhus, Denmark.

Screen: 90 Martin LC 2140 panels covering a total of 180 square meters. Total rectangular resolution of 1250x150 pixels.

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Partners: CAVI, Martin Professional, Wall of Pixels, The Animation Workshop, Concert Hall Aarhus

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