

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

LIGHTING DESIGN

PARSONS

SCHOOL OF DESIGN

2015



# Polarity

## LIGHT SPACE & ART

Light-Space Art is an elective course that combines seminar and studio learning methods to provide a better understanding of phenomenal relationships between light, material, and space and how these interconnected dynamics affect the viewer's perception.

POLARITY was a student-led installation that grew out of the Light-Space Art course and part of the Light Years:1985-2015 public event held at Parsons on October 22, 2015.

## Light-Space Art

is an elective course that combines seminar and studio learning methods to provide a better understanding of phenomenal relationships between light, material, and space and how these interconnected dynamics affect the viewer's perception. The course has three primary objectives: (1) examine precedent art works that explore parallel topics of perception and light phenomenon, (2) introduce and explore a range of theories relevant to the field of lighting design, and (3) investigate perceptual issues of light and space through full scale, hands-on exercises. The Primary focus of the fall 2015 coursework was the realization of a collaborative student-led design intervention which was installed as part of Light Years, a public program celebrating the 30 year anniversary of the Master of Fine Arts Lighting Design program.

## The Light Years Event

To celebrate 30 years since the first cohort of students graduated from Parsons School of Design's Master of Fine Arts in Lighting Design program, Parsons presented Light Years: 1985 - 2015 - 2045 on October 22, 2015. The conference addressed the changes in lighting technology, socio-cultural conditions, and the evolution of the lighting design profession and education between 1985 and 2015. It also provided a student led discussion of projected changes in thought and practice in the lighting industry over the next 30 years between 2015 and 2045.






# Chapter 1

SITE RESEARCH

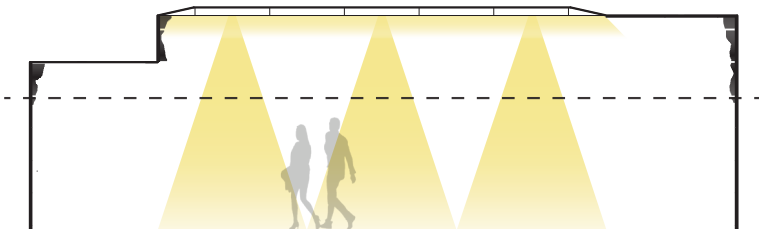
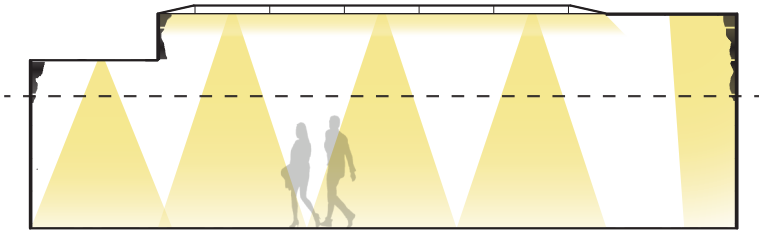
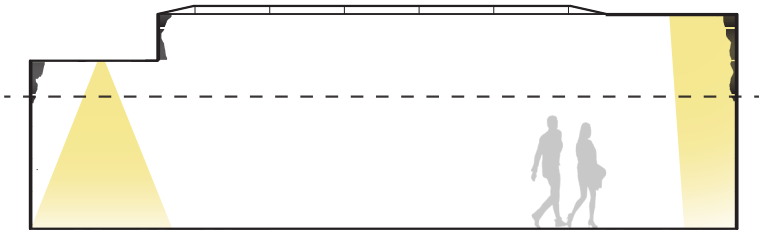
*The subject of light-space art stemmed from the discovery that viewer perception was a vital aspect of the creative production and experience of space.*



The 1818 square-foot rectangular space used for our installation was entirely enveloped with wooden acoustic wall panels. The resulting effect was a merger of walls and ceiling that formed a single monolithic material skin. Adding to the visual texture of each wood panel was more than 1000 acoustical apertures arranged in a gridded array. The combination of the ordered panel arrangement and material uniformity throughout all five surfaces yielded a complete immersive environment. In contrast to this uniformity, the electric lighting was designed in multiple layers and asymmetrically in the space which offered unique compositional opportunities to differentiate surfaces. The areas where the most distinct illuminance variations took place were the two longitudinal walls which became the primary focus areas for our installation.

The architectural lighting and spatial geometry for these two focus areas offered unique circumstances for our project. The wall adjacent to the entrance was framed by a lowered ceiling soffit and illuminated indirectly by downlights oriented toward the adjacent floor. The perceived compression from this reduced ceiling height of the soffit aided the entry transition. By contrast, a uniform, linear wash illuminated the opposite wall, which grounded the room and was the primary focal surface. Due to these intrinsic relationships, this wall evolved to be where we concentrated our installation effort. which grounded the room and was the primary focal surface. Due to these intrinsic relationships, this wall evolved to be where we concentrated our installation effort.

*The site possessed striking inherent characteristics, which defined the project's approach.*









# Chapter 2

## PROCESS

Students explored the intrinsic properties of the site along with the phenomenal relationships between light, space and material. The objective with this working process was to better understand the unique traits inherent to the place, from which an intervening response could be conceived. This anthropological-like study of place assumed that the resulting work would have richer meaning and be more directly tied to the site. This was important to the central creative intent which was to introduce a response-based intervention that would alter the viewer's perceived understanding of the site.





Early exercises allowed students to explore personal interests of light and material in response to the intrinsic characteristics of the space. These small scale sketch studies were conducted through physical maquettes so that the actual material and light conditions were experienced. A brief written conceptual intent also accompanied each proposition. Classwide discussions took place over the beginning weeks of the semester. Conceptual intent and validity of each proposal was critiqued. Through an iterative process, individual discoveries and conceptual interests were born after which commonalities were identified and group mergers took place. This synthetic convergence of ideas led to a single cohesive concept and scheme.






A minimalist intervention would evoke nature's complex making processes, the symbiotic relationship between the individual and the whole. Ultimately it would create one's unique, ephemeral experience of being.

# Chapter 3

## CONCEPT

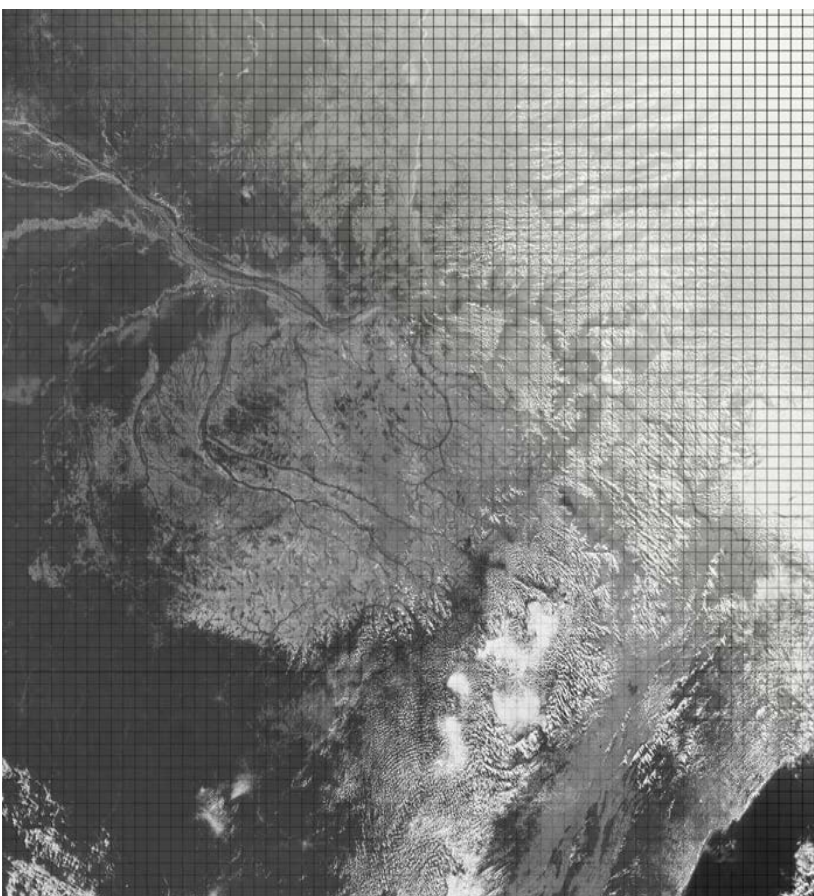
*“Abstraction is always an abstraction of nature, a process that creates nature’s double, a second nature, a space of human existence in which collective life dwells among its own products and comes to take the environment it produces to be natural.”*

*--McKenzie Wark, A Hacker Manifesto.”*



In order to enhance existing traits of a given place, opposition is introduced as a contrasting agent against which comparison is made. A literal interpretation of this perceptual phenomenon took place by overlaying an undulating topographical landscape onto an otherwise flat and highly ordered planer surface.

Details affiliated with scale, pattern, and material were carefully considered in order to ensure clarity of the comparison being made and the response objective from the user. Controlling these selected components was balanced by a willingness for each student to explore personal variation in pattern and surface.



# Chapter 4

## INTERVENTION

With interest in embracing the monochromatic nature of the space, the installation introduced a single material (wooden dowel) as an extension of the existing surface and as an intervening agent that revealed the unique light and shadow patterns of the two opposing longitudinal walls. Using the regularity of the acoustical holes as an artistic platform, dowels of different lengths were inserted as an antonym to the void that it filled. This action, multiplied thousands of times created a perceived unified mass. Apertures that were once perceived as individual negative voids transcended to positive mass - darkness turned to light. The flat manufactured wall surface shifted to a flowing organic three-dimensional relief.

Exploiting the dichotomous lighting conditions on either side of the room, the experience of these floating landscapes and the perception of positive and negative space were directly affected by the installed location and the corresponding light and shadow relationships. This resulted in a uniquely attuned experience that was also impacted by the viewer's position in the room as perception of depth and scale changed in relation to viewing angles.









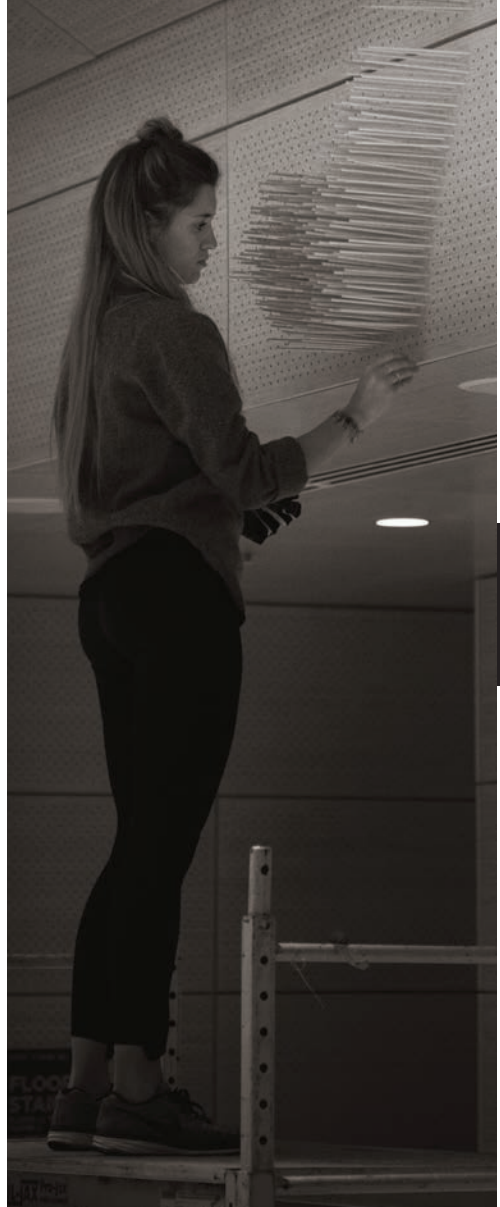
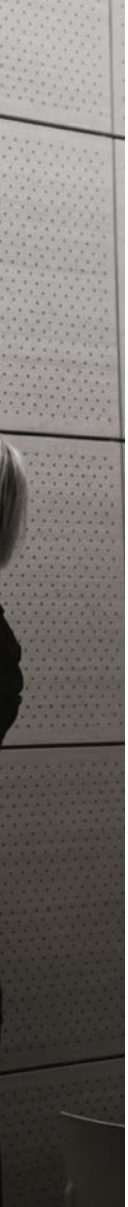
*“(...) While this is true that nothing would be visible without light, light also makes it possible to express and show to the mind’s eye things that elude the physical one. In helping redefine the relationships of people with the environment and with themselves, a world of phenomena is being created which shares an emphasis on being rather than seeing, and upon which every percipient is invited to inscribe his or her own experience – a world that is intensely human precisely because it only takes shape through a person’s creative imagination.” -*

Henry Plummer, *The Architecture of Natural Light*











*"...Distinctions broke down between a mere "thing" and sheer "stuff" as quantity became entity and the inordinate became ordinate."* -Jen Mergel and Nicholas Baume, *Second Nature* (an essay from the monograph titled *Tara Donovan*)





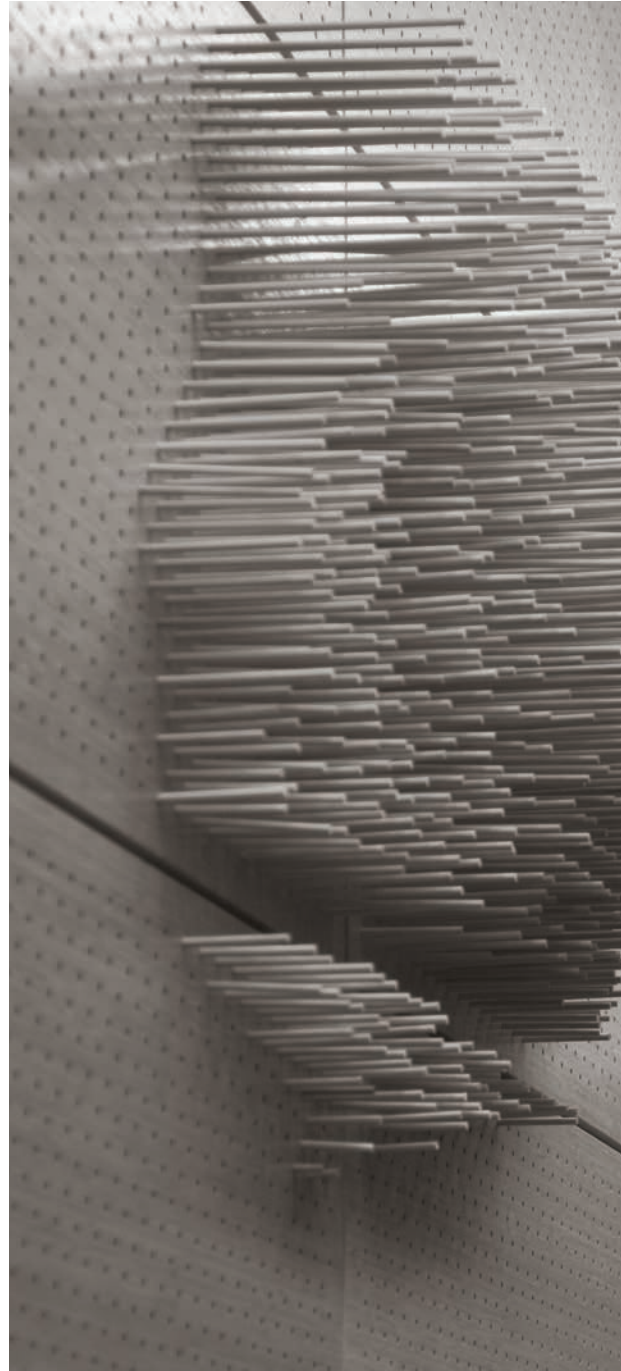








Through multiplicity, individual banal components (the dowels) transcend normal identity to configure a new whole that is at once a composite of its component parts and a landmass of light and shadow configured through the viewer's perception.



*"A lot of art making comes from just paying attention to accidental discoveries."*

-Tara Donovan











*“As repetition becomes  
metaphysical, obsession  
and process become  
transcendental, and magic  
happens.”*  
– Charles Baudelaire









# Chapter 5

## THE INSTALLATION

*"Light plays a crucial role in helping us become fully conscious of our existence in the world, and provokes interaction at an immediate, visceral and pre-cognitive level with the light we encounter."*

-Henry Plummer *The Architecture of Nature Light*.









































Parsons Lighting Design students come from a vast range of cultural and professional origins, with one of the highest number of international student populations of any program at The New School. Professional and educational backgrounds of these students range from Fine Arts, Photography, Architecture, Engineering, and theatrical design to topics such as Psychology, Economics, and Mathematics. Parsons believes that the collaborative work between students of diverse backgrounds enables interesting and innovative solutions to complex design problems of the future.

Graduates of the lighting design program are prepared for careers as architectural lighting designers or specialists in architecture, engineering, and interior design firms; or as research experts in equipment design and manufacturing enterprises.

Derek Porter, associate professor

Gabriela Cerro, MFA Interior Design '16

Selin Ergeneli, MFA Lighting Design '16

Aditi Govil, MFA Lighting Design '16

Anqi Huang, MFA Interior Design '16

Samuel Hewett, MFA Lighting Design '16

Pei-Ying Lin, Masters of Architecture '16

Ashley Mathews, dual degree, Master of Architecture and MFA Lighting Design '17

Abeer Nowailaty, MFA Lighting Design '16

Sergio Taveras, dual degree, Master of Architecture and MFA Lighting Design '17

Elisa Rothenbühler, MFA Double Major in Interior Design and Lighting Design '17

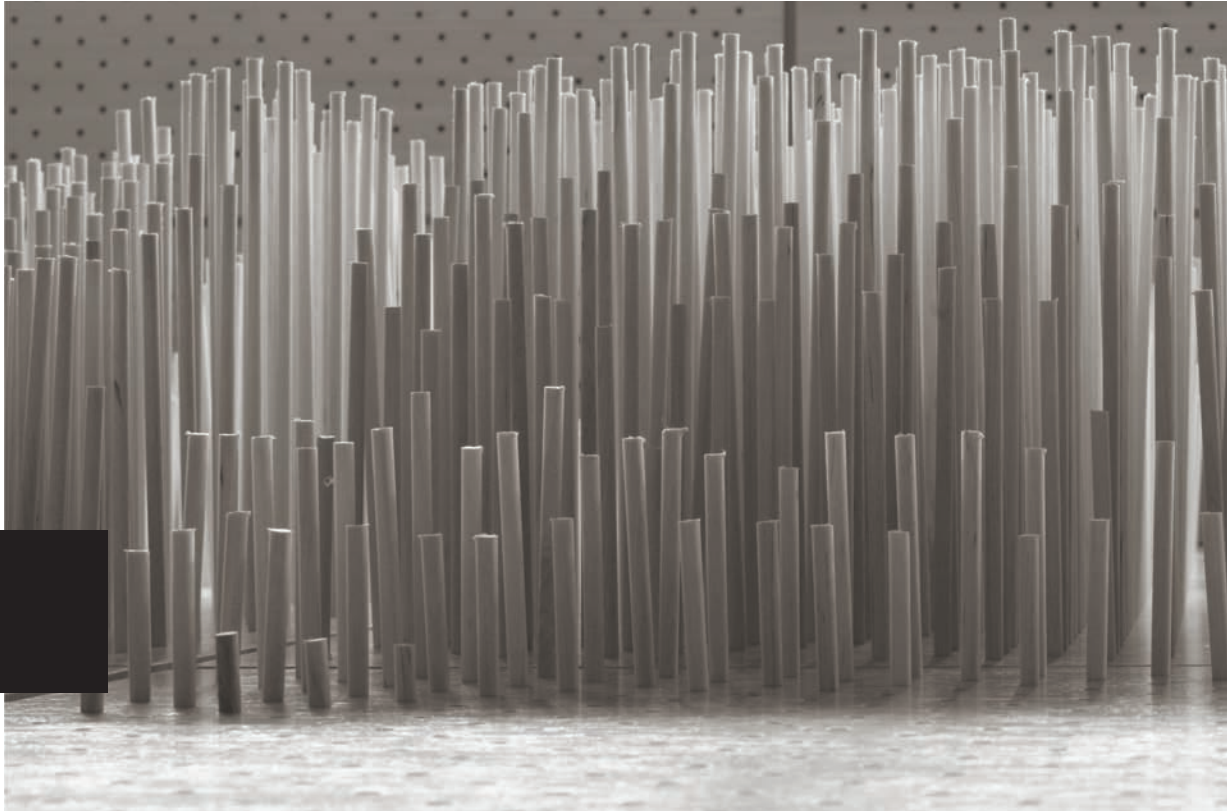
Nura Venta, MFA Lighting Design '16

Billy Wong, dual degree, Master of Architecture and MFA Lighting Design '18

Kama Wybieralska, MFA Lighting Design '16

Yunong Zhang, MFA Double Major in Interior Design and Lighting Design '16

Odile Liu, MFA Interior Design '16



Parsons MFA lighting design program examines the relationships between theory, technical application, energy conservation, and social and environmental factors in both electric and natural light. Its unique focus on aesthetic design, human physiological and psychological factors, and sustainable practices make it the only graduate lighting program to emphasize both design and civic responsibility.