

Flickering through Darkness in Experimental Animation

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Not Always Everywhere but Always Somewhere. As part of her Master of Fine Arts in Digital Arts at the Faculty of Media and Knowledge Sciences, Department of Digital Arts (University of Malta), Nicole Pace developed an interactive installation, experimenting with a flatbed scanner to try and record darkness and light. Why this medium? And what is the message behind it? Monika Kopčilová turns the spotlight on this illuminating art.

Questions about the exact nature of darkness and light have vexed physicists for years. But what does art have to say about the topic? Despite being something we experience every moment, darkness is often mislabelled as the mere absence of light. When faced with complete darkness or a very bright light, most people would say that they can't see anything. The artist explains, 'One might say that they cannot see anything when in a dark space, when the thing they are seeing is darkness itself.'

Showcased in June 2021 at Spazju Kreattiv as a part of a collective degree exhibition called *Ennead*, the art piece used the polarities of darkness and light – the two non-physical elements that physically affect us. The aim was to capture the presence of darkness rather than just illustrate it. Through a series of heat-sensitive sensors, the viewer becomes a part of the exhibition. Specifically, they serve as a switch that triggers darkness interrupting light, depending on the viewer's movements.


In this scenario, the observer becomes the darkness pertaining to presence, causing an interruption and interaction within the work, instead of just being a passive spectator. A dark and often forgotten alcove proved to be the perfect place for Pace's installation. The contained

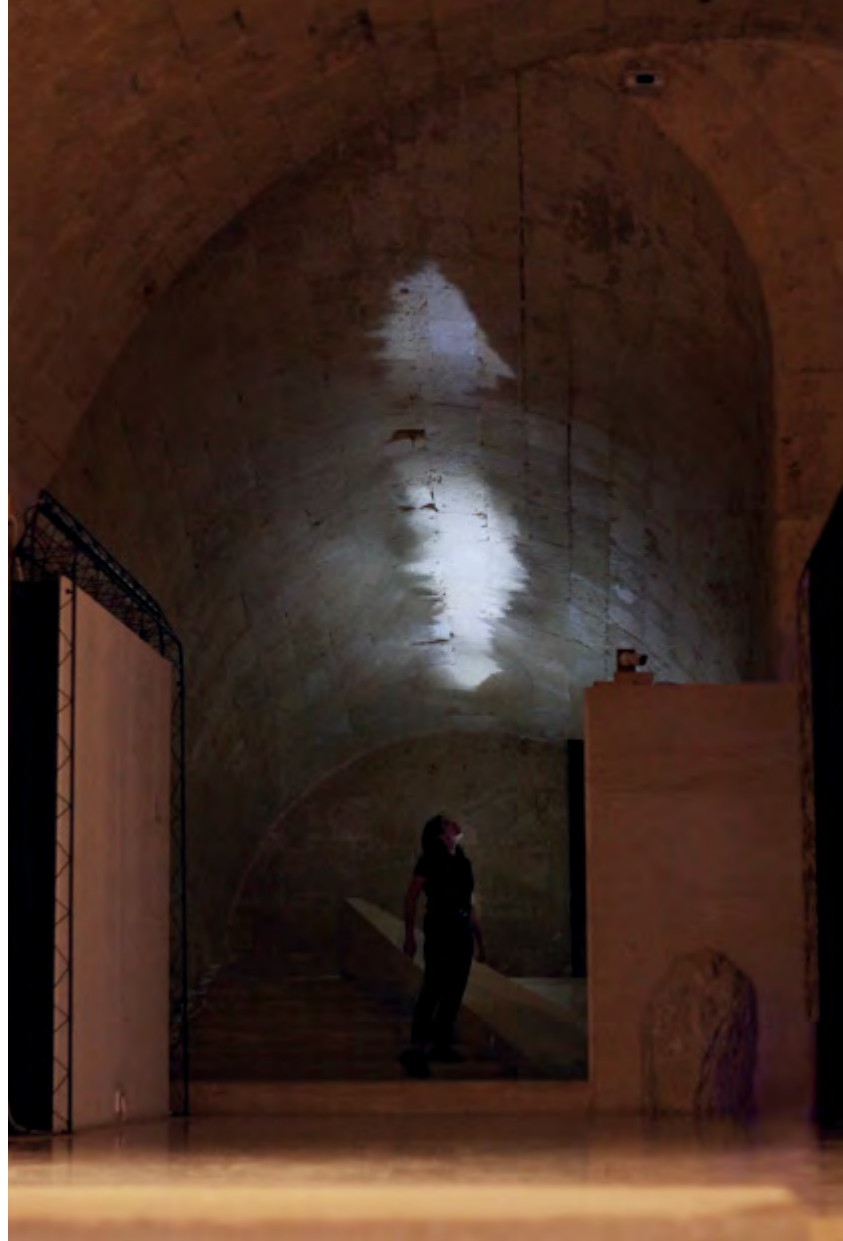
darkness, dust, and humidity paired with the intermittency of light created a ghostly layer of mould upon the architecture, adding a tactile effect to the unphysical darkness and light.

'A series of ten light scans were projected onto the sloping ceiling through ten analogue DIY slide projectors, triggered by ten delayed passive infra-red (PIR) sensors.' Each projector was made using a concealed PVC tube and a light bulb, a convex lens, and part of a scan printed on acetate film. The motion sensors detect the heat of a passing person; this turns off the lights creating an immersive effect of situational darkness.

Actually recording darkness and light, however, proved more challenging. Initially, Pace attempted to use different light sources to try and capture darkness and light. However, trailing an LED flashlight over a flatbed scanner in a darkroom proved much more effective, and she was able to capture a visual trace of darkness and light. These trails, featuring the method of scanography, were the basis of the projection installation, split into ten fragments for each slide projector.

For Prof. Vince Briffa, Pace's supervisor, the project treads the animate intersections between light and dark(ness), introspectively unearthing questions that surround the two extremes through her discerning artistic sensibility. Pace's final installation sheds light on the endless nuances that both unite and separate the two opposites, affirming Paul Klee's assertion that 'Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible.'

Pace concludes: 'The experimental aspect of animation that drove this project is often misconceived. Animation is not limited to character or commercial aspects – it is not a genre but a technique, and it can also be a fine art. I look ahead to continue working within this flickering of being and time.' 



Opposite page:
A scanography light trail
experiment.

Top left:
*Not Always Everywhere
but Always Somewhere*,
exhibited at Spazju Kreattiv,
June 2021.

Top right:
A viewer experiencing the
exhibit, turning off the
corresponding fragment
of the light trail in sync
with their movement.

Bottom:
Series of ten slide projectors
triggered by the PIR sensors.

*Images courtesy
of Nicole Pace*

