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Elation Lights Help LD Tom Azoulay Solve Challenges of Pont Neuf Art Installation

Lighting designer employs a precision lighting approach for an unpredictable architectural canvas

When French artist JR transformed Paris's Pont Neuf into a monumental inflatable cave this summer, lighting designer Fabrice "Tom" Azoulay faced a challenge as unusual as the artwork itself: make a constantly changing inflatable architecture read as a cave, illuminate a 120-meter structure while working with extremely short throw distances and environmental constraints, create distinct focal points for AR interaction, and do it all without revealing the technical infrastructure behind the experience. Elation lighting fixtures became the tools he selected to help solve those challenges.



Created by JR with Camille Pajot to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's iconic Wrapped Pont Neuf, the installation transformed the historic bridge into an immersive environment open to the public from June 6–28. Visitors entered a cave-like passage beneath a giant inflatable mountain, encountering a combination of sound, scent, and augmented-reality experiences, and interacting with the installation via three Snapchat activation points.

The lighting and electrical distribution were handled by CANAL LED with support from a team of technicians. For Fabrice, director of CANAL LED and the project's lighting designer, the challenge was to give the cavernous interior depth and definition while creating carefully controlled



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areas for the installation's digital experiences. Working with lighting programmers Antoine Planchais and Basile Leclerc, lighting assistants Olivier Zaffran and Romain Louvier, and technicians from Dushow, Fabrice built the lighting system around a range of Elation LED fixtures.

Lighting Unpredictable Architecture

The unusual structure meant that conventional lighting approaches were not an option. The inflatable cave, designed by Air Toiles Concept, was continually subject to movement and changes in shape, while the available space between the tunnel and the outer structure left the lighting designer with extremely short distances for fixture placement.

Full-scale lighting tests were carried out in a hangar at Orly Airport before installation on the bridge. Those tests helped determine fixture selection (Chorus Line 16, Proteus Rayzor 760, Proteus Maximus, Artiste Picasso) and positioning while allowing Fabrice to explore how reflected light could reveal the contours of the fabric.

"I chose these fixtures and their positions following our tests in Orly, while remaining flexible during installation when certain options proved more interesting," Fabrice stated. "On average, we had only one meter, or even 50 centimeters, of throw distance for our floor-mounted equipment."



Inside the Cave

Inside the cave, Elation **Chorus Line 16** pixel bar wash luminaires were positioned in the technical gap running between the cave fabric and the mountain structure. Their motorized 4°–40° zoom and 220° tilt range gave Fabrice the flexibility to cover the extensive 120-meter-long surface, while working within the limited space. The fixtures were used both for general illumination of the cave and for backlighting the inflatable mountain canvas.

Elation [Proteus Rayzor 760](#) wash fixtures added another layer, while Elation [Artiste Picasso](#) LED profile fixtures provided the concentrated intensity required at the installation's three Snapchat zones.

Rather than simply illuminating the fabric, Fabrice used light to shape the cave visually. Carefully positioned beams picked out sections of the fabric, emphasizing stalactites and stalagmites and



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adding depth to painted crevices. Maintaining constant tension on the fabric was essential to keep it from getting too close to the fixtures and creating hot spots.

A key part of the approach was indirect illumination. By striking the white rear surface of the fabric and allowing the light to reflect into the cave, the designer could create intensity and contrast without exposing the fixtures or producing visible beams.

“I was happy with the result because you couldn’t see any of the fixtures or even their beams, thanks to the rear-projection technique,” he says. “The lighting became part of the architecture rather than something you looked at.”

Precision Lighting for Augmented Reality

The lighting design guided visitors toward Snapchat zones, areas that presented an additional lighting challenge. Each area needed considerably more illumination than the surrounding cave so visitors could interact with the augmented-reality content and smartphone applications, while maintaining enough contrast to preserve the overall atmosphere.

At each zone, a small rock marked the interaction point, where visitors could scan a QR code to access digital animations including a dancer, approaching bats, and visualizations that respond to the movements of people around them.



For these areas, Fabrice opted for overhead lighting. Light levels had to be just perfect so the contrast with the rest of the artwork wasn’t too strong and to ensure the augmented reality glasses didn’t stop working. To find a balance and create contrast, intensity, and depth within the overall lighting environment, the designer also lit from above using reflected light.

Fabrice used a combination of Chorus Line 16, Rayzor 760, and Artiste Picasso fixtures to build these focal points. The Picasso profiles supplied the higher intensity needed for the AR experience, while the Chorus Line and Rayzor fixtures contributed reflected and surrounding light to maintain continuity with the rest of the cave.

“The light levels had to be just right,” Fabrice explains. “We needed enough intensity for the augmented-reality experience, but the contrast with the rest of the artwork couldn’t be too strong.”



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The deliberate use of a white surface on the rear of the structure helped maximize reflected light, allowing the designer to create bright areas without resorting to excessive direct illumination. As for the color of the projection, Fabrice describes it as a white-plus-RGB mix with a subtle emphasis toward red.

The interior lighting also benefited from the low heat output of LED technology. With temperatures soaring during an exceptionally hot Paris summer, minimizing the heat generated inside the enclosed inflatable structure was an important consideration.

Outside the Cave

After dark, the exterior of the mountain-like structure took on a different presence. Two 10-meter towers positioned on platforms near the Seine each carried eight Elation [Proteus Maximus](#) LED profile fixtures, providing the power needed to illuminate the artwork across its large exterior surfaces.

Fabrice also made extensive use of the fixtures' integrated prism effects, adding another dimension to the nighttime presentation. Additional Rayzor 760 fixtures positioned in the bridge's recessed alcoves provided exterior reinforcement.

The location presented limitations on where and how light could be projected. Trees blocked access to the ends of the structure, requiring a cross-lighting approach, while the busy Seine, nearby buildings, and residential areas demanded careful control of spill. Fabrice used the framing shutters on the Proteus Maximus to precisely contain the output and prevent unwanted light.

A Natural Part of the Artwork

The Elation lights were available in sufficient quantities from Dushow, and Elation is a brand that CANAL LED itself has distributed for several years. The lighting was programmed over six days and two nights, and despite weather-related challenges that forced the teams to dismantle and reinstall the equipment in order to replace fabric torn by the wind, and then redo the programming, the project was a great success.

"For me, the success of the design came from making the lighting feel a natural part of the artwork. Everything had to serve the architecture, the interaction, and the atmosphere, and when all of those elements came together, the lighting became part of the experience."

Elation gear:

137 x Chorus Line 16

24 x Proteus Rayzor 760

18 x Proteus Maximus

12 x Artiste Picasso

About Elation

At Elation, we collaborate with leading professionals in the lighting industry to help bring extraordinary experiences to life. As a designer and manufacturer of a wide range of high-



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performance entertainment lighting products, we're proud to be a trusted partner to top lighting professionals and production/rental houses around the world. Our commitment to quality, innovation, and creative solutions has made us a go-to resource in the industry. We also offer an advanced line of lighting control products through Obsidian Control Systems, and a full range of dependable specialty effects called Magmatic. Elation serves clients worldwide through offices in Los Angeles, Mexico City, Canada, and the Netherlands. We invite you to take a closer look at elationlighting.com

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