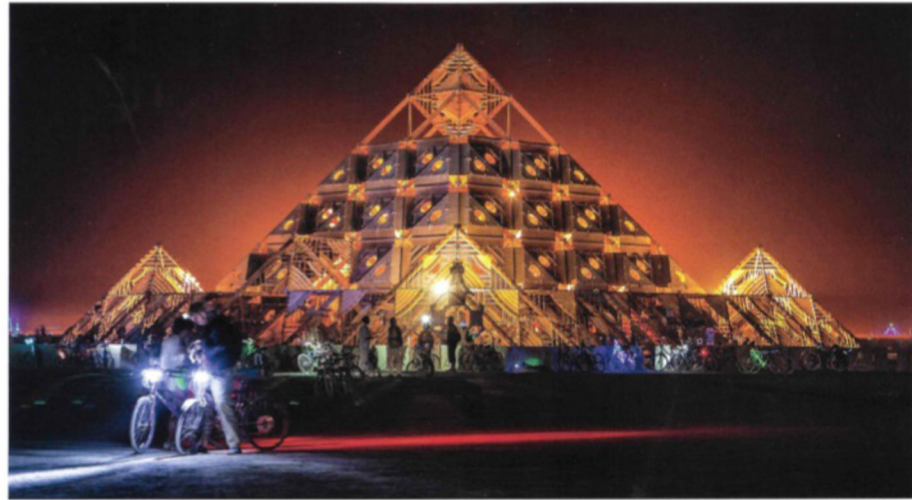


ART



The Temple of Whollyness at Burning Man

BENTLEY MEEKER LET THERE BE LIGHT

BY ISALAH NEGRON



Lighting Artist Bentley Meeker

BURNING MAN

What is considered a Holy Grail pilgrimage to some and the party of a lifetime to others, the Burning Man festival has attracted over 75,000 people at a time to the Nevada desert. Lighting artist Bentley Meeker was among those attracted to the celebration and its main focal point, the "Temple of Promise." What began as an artistic escape became a surge of inspiration, as the designer took on the challenge of helping illuminate this iconic installation in 2011 and 2013. Meeker returns to Burning Man this September to light The Temple for the third time. "I just landed on that temple. If I could have that, I wanted everybody to have that," he confides. "I wanted to make it visible enough so everybody would want to go there. And it happened. More people went to last year's temple than had ever gone before." Like the festival's eponymously named "Man," the Temple is burned to the ground at the week's end by thousands of partygoers high off seven days of art, music, revelry, and personal reflection. "For me, light has always been something to not only create effects, but also show beauty and command emotion," Meeker says. "Light is the most powerful tool we have to create any feeling and my love and respect for light is one of the myriad reasons why I chose it as a medium."

THE SOUTHAMPTON ART CENTER

As an artist, Meeker is on fire. He was a featured artist this summer at the Southampton Art Center in August with his *Flame*

ART



The Temple of Promise at Burning Man

to *Now I* exhibition, a conceptual look at light and its differing effects on us as well as a look at personal consumption and its byproducts. “My work has always centered on the thesis that different kinds of light affect us in unique ways. The journey is a consistent exploration into the nuances of light and the reaction, tacit or explicit, that it engenders within us,” says Meeker. The New York-based artist has also illuminated everything from Chelsea Clinton’s and Melissa Rivers’ weddings to state dinners at the White House. Growing up in the United States, the Bahamas, and Canada, Meeker was exposed to various forms of light from around the world. When he was 14, he moved to Manhattan. “I remember thinking of all the ways you could play with and manipulate light when I first felt the pull to it,” remembers Meeker. “The things I’ve discovered over the years that can be done with light have blown my mind, and as I dig deeper it never stops evolving.”

THE WHITNEY MUSEUM

The Whitney Museum of American Art invited him to exhibit a five part light installation *Flame to Now IV*. The exhibition was motivated by the extraordinary architecture of the fourth floor gallery when it was completely open space with no exhibition walls. “It allowed the viewer to experientially be in each of the five prevalent types of light that we have used in domiciles since the beginning of electricity. Before that there was only gaslight, hence the *Flame*,” Meeker explains.

THE NATIONAL ARTS CLUB

Bentley’s new solo exhibition *186, 282* at the National Arts Club on Grammercy Park South, will feature his latest series, *Bongeliers*, an installation of light frames and his unique take on the chandelier. The exhibition opens on October 26 and will showcase 24 sculptures of different dimensions displayed alongside three contemporary chandeliers made of repurposed hand-blown glass pipes titled *Bongeliers 1, 2, and 3*. “Every piece in the show explores the space between our visibility and sensibility through the use, or absence, of spectrum. Multiple light sources converge onto one single point within a very recognizable frame to remove any unfamiliarity from the otherwise highly conceptual sculptures,” explains Meeker.

THE H IN HARLEM

One of Meeker’s latest projects caused waves through an entire neighborhood, bringing Meeker’s art and Harlem’s culture together like no one thought possible. Meeker conceptualized and created *The H* in Harlem in the culturally rich community of West Harlem. This area has had a major impact on the city’s and the country’s arts scene. *The H* in Harlem provided a bold creative statement that became a city-wide beacon for everything that makes West Harlem, and Harlem at large, great,” remarks Meeker. Over the past several years, the area has seen a rapid expansion of art, design, and business. A Harlem resident himself, Meeker witnessed the transformation firsthand and was ap-

ART



The H in Harlem

proached by community leaders seeking his involvement to help celebrate the vitality and cultural strength of the area and honor its legacy. Meeker's project illuminated the area with a giant letter "H" surrounded by an oval, aluminum truss and suspended from the viaduct at 12th Avenue and 125th Street. The oval comprised 30 white LED lights while the "H" itself was lit by white, full-spectrum, plasma lighting fixtures. "Of everything this project brought, most importantly it brought attention to a community that is eager to embrace economic growth and positive social change while still celebrating its cultural heritage, diversity, and strength," Meeker muses. "The gift that it was intended to be was, thankfully, the gift it was received as."

FLAME TO NOW

Meeker's *Flame to Now* show was exhibited at gallery nine5, an edgy SoHo gallery. It explored the transformative power of light and its effect on our emotions. The titles of the installations echo the chronological progression of man's use of illumination from fire to the most recent forms of electric light. Meeker's aim was to underscore his opinion that all light is not created equal. "Lighting plays a greater role in our emotional response to the world than we often realize," says Meeker. "It's part of our everyday functioning and exists in almost everything we do."

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Meeker's love affair with light eventually led him to establish, in addition to his career as a sculptor, his own company, Bentley

Meeker Lighting and Staging, Inc., which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Meeker has built the company into one of the leading lighting firms in the world and he and his team have lent their talents to some of the city's most distinguished venues, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Natural History, and Lincoln Center. "When we light events, we don't just create atmosphere, we affect lives. We create a lot of environments where really big things happen," Meeker says. "What is felt by the individuals in any given environment directly affects what comes out of it. Billions of dollars have been raised under our lights."

NEW YORK FASHION WEEK

Be it the weddings of Robert De Niro to Grace Hightower or Catherine Zeta Jones to Michael Douglas, New York Fashion Week runway shows, movie premieres, or gala benefits for the American Ballet Theater, Metropolitan Opera, or the New York Philharmonic, Meeker and his team create unforgettable lighting that makes a big difference in the way things happen in New York. Bentley says, "The growing demand to reduce costs and increase efficiency affects every aspect of our lives, and light is no exception. Light has a deep and lasting impact on us, and while artificial light has allowed us to see as we would during the day, we aren't able to connect in the same way as we do to natural light. My work looks to explore the space between light with spectrum and light with no material spectrum and the feelings, however subtle, that we experience within each."

bentleymeeker.com

SOCIAL LIFE MAGAZINE

ART



Flame to Now IV exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art



186,281 at Gallery 151 in Chelsea