Fairyland at the V&A

Taking a walk in the forest has become high-tech, as **Geny Caloisi** discovered

THERE IS A magic forest in which tree trunks light up and sing as you walk along them. Its location? The John Madejski Garden at London Victoria & Albert Museum. Its creators? United Visual Artists (UVA). Its purpose? To celebrate creativity and interaction as part of the V&A's Playstation season. Its name? Volume.

Volume is a sculpture of light and sound, an array of 46 LED columns positioned right in the centre of the garden. At the top of each column there is a speaker, which produces harmonic tones as the columns are activated by visitor's movements.

the installation 'replay' their actions at play. The movement of their energy fields throughout the space triggers a brilliant display of light and sound. It's a 3D screen that allows you to be part of it.

The visitors' movements are detected through infra red receptors and a camera placed above the display. This information is fed into a computer that contains a special software created by UVA, which commands the light/sound display.

The columns are Barco LEDs, which UVA rented from XL Video. They have 192x11 pixels per column, a total of 506 pixels in a volumetric screen which produces 1,000 nits of light at peak white.

This is not the first time that UVA has shown off its creativity at the V&A. Back in February 2006 UVA was invited to participate on one of the museum's late night openings. It created a one night piece called Monolith, also located in the garden, which was made out of LEDs that responded to the public's presence.

Volume, in contrast, will be active for almost two months, until January 28, 2007. But to ensure the installation is visitor and weather proof, there were several issues that needed to be taken into account.

The floor is a hard non-slip platform that hides and protects the electric connections.

Getting the right power supply was an issue, comments UVA's Chris Brid: 'The power supply had to be at certain distance from each column, so we had to get special cable supplied by Barco to strengthen the strings of OLites back to power supply. There is a power supply between each pair of columns.'

Another challenge to the project was to get standard OLite tiles into a vertical column, which had to be thin but with enough space to incorporate the tiles and the cabling, which also run up to the speaker. These columns needed to be designed in such a way so that they would not over heat over time. 'These screens are not supposed to be enclosed into an aluminium case,' points out Bird.

Then the next issue was how to supply 46 channels of audio simultaneously for each individual column.

All the sounds are complementary. The music was composed as separate units that work as a symphony when put together. The colours match with the mood of the music, so the synergy between the two elements has to be precise.

Shaun Cole, curator of contemporary programmes in the V&A, revealed that the museum is working with a choreographer from the Sadler's Wells for the grand finale of Volume. Set for January 26, a group of dancers will display their art amongst the magic forest of lights.

But an interactive dance session poses a question – will the dance be to the rhythm of the light and music, or will the movements of the dancer create the music and lighting? □

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