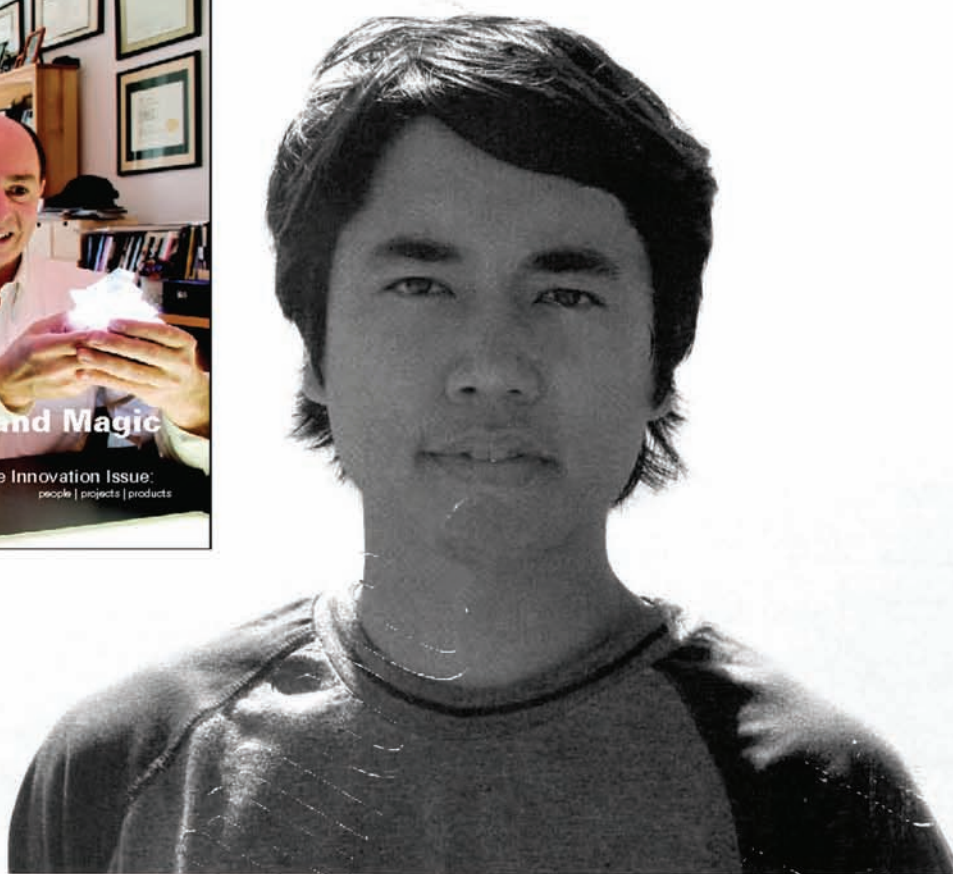


James Clar

M E R G I N G L I G H T A N D V I S U A L C O M M U N I C A T I O N



MEDIA ARTIST JAMES CLAR CONTINUALLY CHALLENGES HIMSELF TO CREATE NEW VISUAL SYSTEMS, products, and environments that marry technology with art. Clar received his master's degree from New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program in 2004, and then opened his own firm in New York City—James Clar & Associates. The six-person studio has developed a wide-ranging portfolio of light pieces and interactive installations. Current projects include a public art piece titled "Tunnel Vision" in collaboration with New York City-based Vito Acconci Studios, and the Habitat Hotel in Barcelona with Barcelona-based architecture firm Cloud 9 (See "Elementary Particles," *Architectural Lighting*, Apr/May 2006, p. 40-45). *Architectural Lighting* caught up by phone with Clar, who is in Dubai working on several projects this year before returning to New York.

INFLUENCES

MSC: How would you characterize your work? Is there a person, artwork, or installation that has influenced you?

JC: My work is about media and communication. Marshall McLuhan's ideas were fundamental in my transition from film and animation into art, light, and architectural light installations. His idea, "the medium is the message," helped me analyze visual communication and its direct relationship with light.

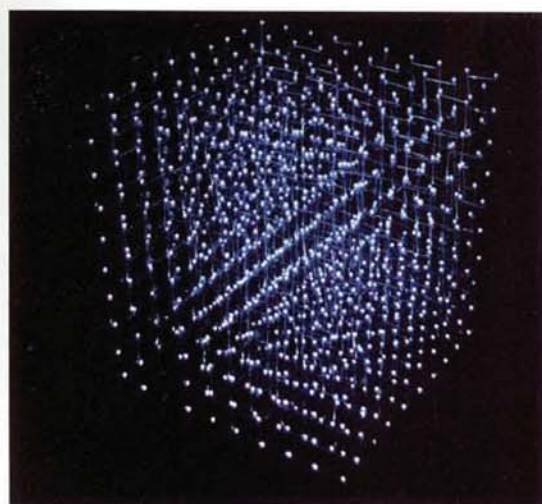
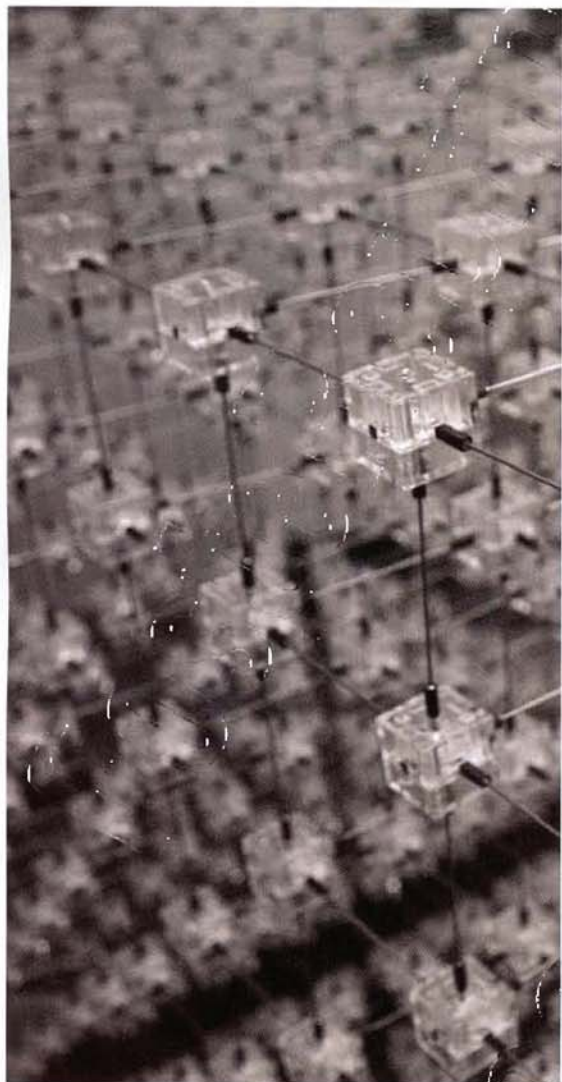
Later on, I started getting into pattern recognition and how robots use it for artificial intelligence. The idea is similar to symbolism in art or movies; that you can suggest meaning not literally, but through what the object symbolizes. This is important for architectural lighting because the viewer's perception of the space is based largely off of what they see.

MSC: Why is light the method you have chosen to use to convey information?

JC: I grew up with computers, video games, and the Internet. It has always amazed me that when you look at a computer screen there is a seemingly infinite amount of possibilities and information staring back at you. But if you break it down into its simplest form it is just light that is entering your eye. This is one of the key ideas that struck me when I started to get into media theory—as you look at light your brain is interpreting it as shapes and colors. Over time these are combined to become storylines that begin to evoke an emotional response. That's a powerful tool.

ENVIRONMENT

MSC: Your work conveys a sense of spatial depth. What are the challenges in achieving this when working with new and visual media?



The work of media artist James Clar explores any forms of visual communication merging art and technology. *Boom Box* (above) is a 4-foot by 8-foot interactive light object that analyzes sound levels to create dynamic light animations. The *3D Display Cube* is a work that Clar continues to refine (left and top right). It uses a patented LED system to create three-dimensional imagery. Clar created a working scale model of the Habitat Hotel in Barcelona and its "energy mesh" (top middle)—a project by Barcelona-based architect Enric Ruiz of Cloud 9 Architecture.

JC: When you start adding depth, or interactivity, it means you are giving up some sort of control over what the user is seeing. In turn, it lets the individual become immersed in the piece or space and lets them take control of what they are seeing. This enables the user to be more emotionally involved in the work, which is something architects are dealing with when they create spaces and buildings. You always have to consider where the person is going to be and how they are going to see the scene you have created.

PROJECTS

MSC: You are now on your fourth iteration of your *3D Display Cube*. What is it about this project that keeps drawing you back to continue working on the piece?

JC: I started this project because I was interested in analyzing information. As I attempted to transform these pixel representations from two dimensions into three dimensions, it occurred to me that they were never going to look "real" on a flat screen. That's when I started to investigate a way that I could exploit basic properties of

light, mindful of how the human eye picks up and processes spatial information, and then integrate that into an art or installation piece. The 3D cube directly relates to the challenge of representing actual 3D information. That is in part why there have been so many iterations. It is also because I believe it has commercial possibilities, and I've wanted to develop it to a point where other people could use it easily and update it quickly.

VISUAL COMMUNICATION AND SYSTEMS

MSC: Your work merges art and technology to create new visual systems and creates solutions to problems. What are the problems you see happening and how are you trying to solve them?

JC: There is always something missing and it is the job of a designer or artist to generate things that are new; to think outside the common structure. I am observing everything that is around me and am trying to develop a new way of looking at things. The possibilities with light are just so much more than what is being produced today. **MEGHAN SMITH-CAMPBELL**