

Lluèrnia, Light and Fire

Scenographies in the Public Space

Pep FARGAS

fargasolot@gmail.com

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Pep Fargas is currently Managing Director of *Lluèrnia, festival del foc i de la llum*, held since 2012 in Olot. He was manager of *Transversal, xarxa d'activitats culturals* from its foundation in 2005 to 2011, and Arts Councillor at Olot Town Council between 1999 and 2005. As a cultural activist he has promoted several initiatives such as the *Fòrum de Teatre*, the *Factoria de les Arts* and the *Artista del Mes*. As actor and theatre director he has formed part of several companies such as *Zootrop Teatre*, *Pimpampum*, *Foc!* and the *Cia. Pepa Plana*.

English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

Lluèrnia, festival del foc i de la llum, is an event held annually in Olot on the second Saturday of November that invites creators from diverse disciplines to suggest a new approach to the urban spaces of the town with fire and light centre stage.

Formally it features ephemeral installations designed by visual artists, architects, set and lighting designers... that for five or six hours transform the streets, squares and other public spaces into scenographies in which people can move around, some of them interactive, through effects produced by light and fire. The article seeks to introduce the festival and present it as a real environment to experience the projects designed by students of schools of art and set and lighting design.

Keywords: art, street, fire, light, ephemeral, creation, participation, city, schools, nature

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The Natural Framework

Olot is a medium-sized town, of 37,000 inhabitants, located in La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park. The urban environment, poor in architectonic heritage after having been destroyed in two earthquakes in 1426 and 1427, is, in contrast, highly permeable in terms of the natural environment, with a marked volcanic character. The municipal district has several craters and volcanic land quarries integrated as urban spaces with recreational uses. The Fluvià River crosses the town and also forms urban landscapes with a great deal of vegetation. Basalt, a black stone due to its igneous origin, is part of the buildings of its old neighbourhood, which is experiencing a clear process of degradation. It is, therefore, an urban landscape that continuously evokes its origin in fire and nature.

The Social Framework

Since the mid-1980s, as has happened in other middle-sized towns in Catalonia, Olot has reclaimed the street as a space for popular events and culture, whether by popularising its main festival – the Festes del Tura –, holding its absolutely ground-breaking Carnival, programming an international seminar on contemporary architecture or, very particularly, from 1985, by holding the Fòrum de Teatre, which gradually programmed visual arts installations with the Factoria de les Arts. It was followed, in 2002, by Panorama (PNRM), a festival that for 11 years showcased the most innovative initiatives in the field of performing and visual creation, many of which were site-specific. The festival culminated with the holding of Panoràmica, a big yet brief show that, with the participation of many citizens, was an ephemeral initiative related to land art and that inspired the first edition of Lluèrnia on 10 November 2012.

The festival

Lluèrnia is a short festival, lasting from sunset to midnight, which in 2018 was held on 10 November. For six hours, artists from diverse disciplines – architects, lighting, set and interior designers, visual artists and video creators, as well as students from some of the university art and design schools of Catalonia, cultural associations in the town, residents, retailers, and primary and secondary school students in the area – fill the streets and squares of Olot with their ephemeral installations, performance art actions or shows, which have as a common element the use of fire and light as raw material and seek to make us rediscover everyday spaces by lighting them with a contemporary creation approach.

Lluèrnia seeks to become a participatory festival based around fire and, in this way, to take root in the volcanic natural environment of the region while emphasising light as the element resulting from the technological taming of fire. To this end, the festival's programme seeks a balance between two types of events: on the one hand, those self-produced such as *L'Hort de la llum*, in which vegetable gardeners are asked to represent their vision of the taming of fire to turn it into light, and the *Contes a la vora del foc*, evoking the transfer of knowledge from the cave to today; and, on the other, the artistic projects submitted to an open call. Moreover, it also seeks to offer a real environment of creation for initiatives conceived in the art and design schools.

Formally, it is a short yet very intense festival, which exploits the good weather of the Indian summer, just when the time change lengthens the nights and the first cold days of the end of autumn invite us to come closer to the fire and rediscover its virtues. In its first six years of existence **Lluèrnia** has become a real citizen event that attracts a large number of visitors,



Lluèrnia 2018 Photo: Andrea Bocato / Rooster, hen or chick – Lola Solanilla.



Lluèrnia 2018 Photo: Pep Sau / Llu(m)èrnia – EASD d'Olot. ESDAP Campus Olot.

estimated at over 20,000. It programmes around fifty ephemeral installations of unquestionable quality, as proven by the numerous external prizes awarded to some of them, and it is recognised at a national and international level as one of the benchmarks of ephemeral creation with the use of light and fire.

The festival is organised by **Lluèrnia, associació cultural**, which brings together diverse cultural agents and associations in the town and has the economic support of Olot Town Council, Girona Provincial Council, the Government of Catalonia and several private sponsors. The festival is managed under the artistic direction of the architect Xavier Bayona Camó and a small production team, and with the collaboration of many volunteers who make it possible.

Programme Make-Up

The programme seeks a balance between the installations that give the festival its character, the emergence of new talent, the excellence of the work of established creators, and space for experimentation of the school projects in a real environment.

Therefore, since the second year it has been structured as follows:

Open Call for Projects

Usually, from late March to 15 June there is a call for projects to participate in the festival. Anyone interested can send their project with the sole condition that its main element is fire and/or light. These projects are examined by a jury comprising professionals from the field of architecture and lighting design and members of the organisation of the festival, which delivers its verdict before 30 June. The quality, originality and both technical and material feasibility of the productions are assessed, as well as their suitability.

The organisation of the festival coordinates with each one selected to assign them a specific site and determine, if appropriate, the investment for the production, the technical record, logistical aspects, and so on.

Commissioned Initiatives

These give the festival a distinct profile:

- a. L'Hort de la llum (The Vegetable Garden of Light)** is entrusted to a vegetable gardener and announced in mid-June. The vegetable gardener reflects on the taming of fire to turn it into light as in a vegetable garden nature must be controlled to transform wild plants into vegetables. Each year's vegetable gardener is chosen by a board formed by the vegetable gardeners from previous years and a recognised creator is appointed.
- b. Els Fogons de fra Sever (The Kitchen of Brother Sever).** Every year the Penya AOAPIX is responsible for the design and preparation of this space, traditionally in plaça del Campdenmàs. Formally it is suggested that their installation should evoke fire as a central element of the kitchen and meals as points of meeting, exchange and social cohesion. Fra Sever was a Capuchin friar from Olot who wrote the first cookery book in Catalan.
- c. Pim Pam Pum Foc!** An appropriate space is reserved for the installation by the local street show company, which started the festival. They are always installations where fire is prominent and are very well received. In 2014, under the direction of Marcel·lí Antúnez, they presented the show *Farga Budell*, with an interesting piece on the reinvention of the popular bestiary based on the mythological origin of fire.



Lluèrnia 2018 Photo: Lluís Martínez / Origami Lava – David Oliva, Anna Juncà.

- d. Contes a la vora del foc (Tales by the Fire).** Fire as a cathartic element, as early as in pre-historical times, around which we have passed on knowledge, experiences, legends... in short, culture, from one generation to the next. Every year it is entrusted to people or groups linked to the performing arts world who usually use shadow theatre or objects. We work with the IF Barcelona festival, which selects the most suitable company.
- e. Primary schools.** Primary schools in Olot and La Garrotxa region are invited to participate in a joint installation, designed and produced by the festival, with the collaboration of teaching staff teams and the parents associations in the schools. A prominent space is found in the festival and it is given the greatest relevance possible to highlight the importance of the creative participation of children in an event for the whole town.
- f. On és el drac? ? [Where's the Dragon?]** This is a game in which one must discover the location of the burners of the aerostatic balloons that the company Vol de Coloms kindly provides for the occasion. The children and adults visiting the festival enjoy looking for the flames that the festival's dragon breathes and that every year we hide in a different rooftop.
- g. Lluèrnia Kids.** A space aimed at children so that they experiment with light, shadows, screenings and black light.

Space for Experimentation

From the outset, Lluèrnia has provided a real environment for showcasing the work of students of architecture, art and design schools, university master's degrees in lighting design and any other discipline such as set design or ephemeral creation related to fire and light.



Lluèrnia 2015 Photo: Santi Palomé / Crater – Xavi Bayona Camó.

We believe that the festival can be a good living lab in which to produce the projects prepared in the classroom, and that it has taken on the risk of programming those proposals that the teachers consider appropriate in the framework of the events.

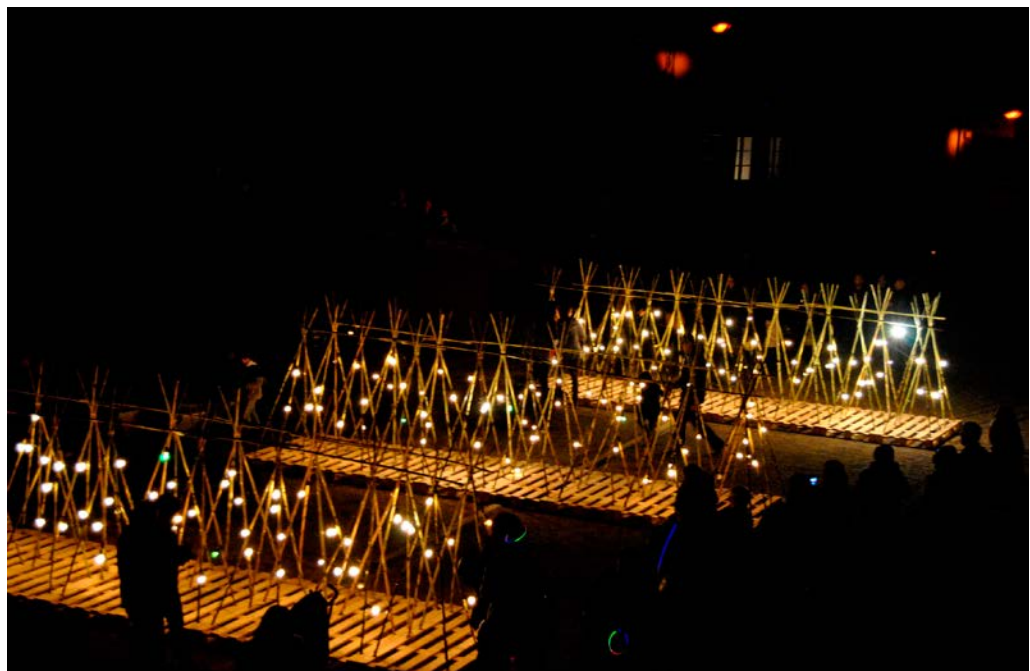
Although other collaborative systems can be assessed, generally the project supported by the teacher is accepted and the festival provides a small budget for production expenses, mainly materials and transportation.

During the morning of the day of the festival, the school students themselves set up their creations in the space previously assigned to them. The technical teams of Lluèrnia provide, if necessary, an electrical connection point. The festival begins when it is dark, by 6.30 pm, and ends at midnight, when the installations are dismantled.

Although Lluèrnia is held in the early days of November, when the schools have only recently started the year, good planning by teaching staff and hard work by the students have so far yielded quite notable results. However, we agree with the teaching staff that the work process is much more important than the final result, as shown by the continued participation of the schools.

Festival participants:

- **Olot Higher School of Art and Design**
- **Terrassa Municipal School of Art**
- **EINA, Barcelona University School of Design and Art**
- **Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Barcelona**
- **EADR Reus School of Art and Design**
- **EDRA Rubí School of Art and Design**
- **ELISAVA Barcelona School of Design and Engineering**



Lluèrnia 2014 Photo: Eloïna Millan / The vegetable garden of light – Maria Güell Ordís.

Fifteen days earlier, on Saturday 27 October, all the participating creators are invited to the Vermut dels Enlluernats, where the projects are briefly introduced in a public session with the presence of all the other professionals and students.

It is an experience highly valued by all artists, who have the opportunity to meet and share their projects in a relaxed atmosphere.

Collaboration with Other Institutions

Lluèrnia seeks to be an event closely linked to its environment, which enables reflection and practice on relations between the urban public space and ephemeral art. To this end, it has the participation and collaboration of several institutions, specifically:

- **Museus d'Olot.** Both at the **Museu dels Sants** and the **Museu de la Garrotxa**.
- **Transefimers.** It is a project led by the Xarxa Transversal d'Activitats Culturals, which promotes the exchange between creators that have participated in several street art festivals in some towns of the Network.
- **Landscape Observatory of Catalonia.** A conference linking landscape and light or fire is organised. The management of the Observatory is responsible for selecting the speakers and we include it in the programme to give it more visibility.
- **Architects' Association of Catalonia (COAC) – La Garrotxa and Ripollès Delegation.** The collaboration with the local delegation of COAC results in an academic session, open to the general public, on ephemeral architecture and the treatment of light and fire in architecture.
- **Soy Cámara – CCCB.** The collaboration with this documentary film programme of the Centre Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona provides a session prior to the festival on the use of light in the public space.
- **Sismògraf.** In the framework of the fringe festival, Sismògraf programmes a series of “replicas”, one of which will be co-programmed by Lluèrnia. However, this replica could be held during the week prior to the festival or, even, as a prelude, in summer.
- **Institute of Photonic Sciences (ICFO).** This year we would like to start working with the ICFO that could somehow continue in the programme, whether with the creation of an award or a special mention for the installations, promoting some kind of guided participation or any other initiative that could link science with the festival.
- **Binari, Associació Cultural.** For the second year we will co-produce an installation with this association, whose aim is to promote contemporary creation. It will be exhibited at the Banyal and at Lluèrnia, with the corresponding adaptation to the space of each festival.

The Spaces of the Festival

In essence, Lluèrnia is a street festival, precisely to search for new forms of lighting, new approaches to the everyday space. Nevertheless, there are some proposals that use closed venues such as the hospice, some shrines and some entrances of the houses.

We endeavour to rediscover everyday spaces to meet the need to distribute the flows of visitors so that the town centre is not overcrowded. Two years ago, we started setting up installations on the Fluvià River banks, specifically on the left bank, the closest to the centre of Olot, in order not to lose the link with the streets of the historic centre that also accommodates many projects. This year we will repeat this route and, if necessary, we will enlarge it down river, towards the neighbourhood of Sant Miquel. We will also try to get closer to the Montsacopa volcano, particularly the volcanic land quarry occupied by the Pim Pam Pum Foc! and on the site called Les Estires.

People's Participation

Organisations and Associations. The aim expressed by the festival to become a participatory and popular event around fire and light fosters the participation of all citizens, whether individually with the decoration of house balconies and windows or shop windows, or collectively through willing associations and organisations.

Càritas Garrotxa. We will continue with the work started two years ago that enables the social organisation to sell small candles called *lluèrnies* and that we ask the residents to light on their balcony or window. All profits from sales go straight back to the campaigns of this social organisation.

Management Team. Lluèrnia, festival del foc i de la llum, is managed by Lluèrnia Associació Cultural, a non-profit association founded in 2013 by private individuals and the group AOAPIX (Associació d'Olotins Amics del Porc i del Xai), the street show company Pim Pam Pum Foc! and the Teatre Principal d'Olot.

The **Organising Board** works for free throughout the year on the design, coordination, production and promotion of the festival. It is currently made up by: Marta Aumatell, Ferran Bassaganyes, Xavier Bayona, Aniol Coll, Pep Fargas, Anna Juárez, Edu Martín, Esteve Planella, Joan Riera, Neus Serrat, Lola Solanilla and Jaume Tané.

