



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Public art // News

Spectacular Lumiere art festival lights up UK city of Durham

The latest edition of the popular event includes work by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Ai Weiwei

Maev Kennedy

Black Friday weekend: get 70% off our annual digital subscription. [See offer](#)



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Pulse Topology* will involve thousands of pulsing light bulbs strung across the cathedral's nave

Lumiere 2023, produced by Artichoke

For four nights, from Thursday 16 to Sunday November 20, the cold dark streets of Durham in the UK will blaze with light, as the free biennial Lumiere festival returns to the cathedral city, bringing spectacular light installations by artists from 15 countries, including Ai Weiwei and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. This year sees 18 new commissions and seven UK premieres, as well as the return of some old favourites. Some pieces, including the French studio Tilt's giant desk lamp, have become permanent fixtures.

The festival is now so popular—with it being estimated to have drawn well over a million visitors and generated many millions for the local economy since the first Lumiere 14 years ago

—that at the peak times of 4.30pm to 7.30pm entrance to the narrow medieval streets around the castle and cathedral is by timed ticket only. The success of earlier festivals literally brought the entire city centre to a standstill, before the tickets were introduced.

The whole site is free to all, unticketed, after that, and there are many works in the less crowded areas as each festival spreads glowing tentacles further into the city. There are also installations for the first time in nearby Bishop Auckland, part of the Auckland Project campaign to revive the fortunes of the former mining town through art and culture.

The installation by Ai Weiwei is expected to attract much interest, particularly since Lisson Gallery has cancelled his London and New York shows after the artist posted a statement relating to the Israel-Hamas war on social media. His installation—titled *Illuminated Bottle Rack* (2018) and comprised of scores of antique chandeliers—will be shown in the cathedral's medieval chapter house, which will also open for several daylight hours each day in anticipation of the crowds.



Ai Weiwei's *Illuminated Bottle Rack* (2018) incorporates scores of antique chandeliers

Lumiere 2023, produced by Artichoke

The interior of the cathedral itself will be dominated by *Pulse Topology*, a 2021 piece by the Montréal-based Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, previously shown at Superblue Basel and Miami. It will see thousands of light bulbs strung across the nave pulse, activated by the recorded heartbeat of visitors.

Lumiere is created by Artichoke, renowned producers of spectacular public art, commissioned and funded by Durham County Council with additional support from Arts Council England, Durham University, County Durham Community Foundation, and other supporters. The Bishop Auckland celebration is produced in partnership with The Auckland Project and supported by the Stronger Towns Fund.

[Public art](#)

[Biennials & festivals](#)

[Ai Weiwei](#)

COOKIE SETTINGS