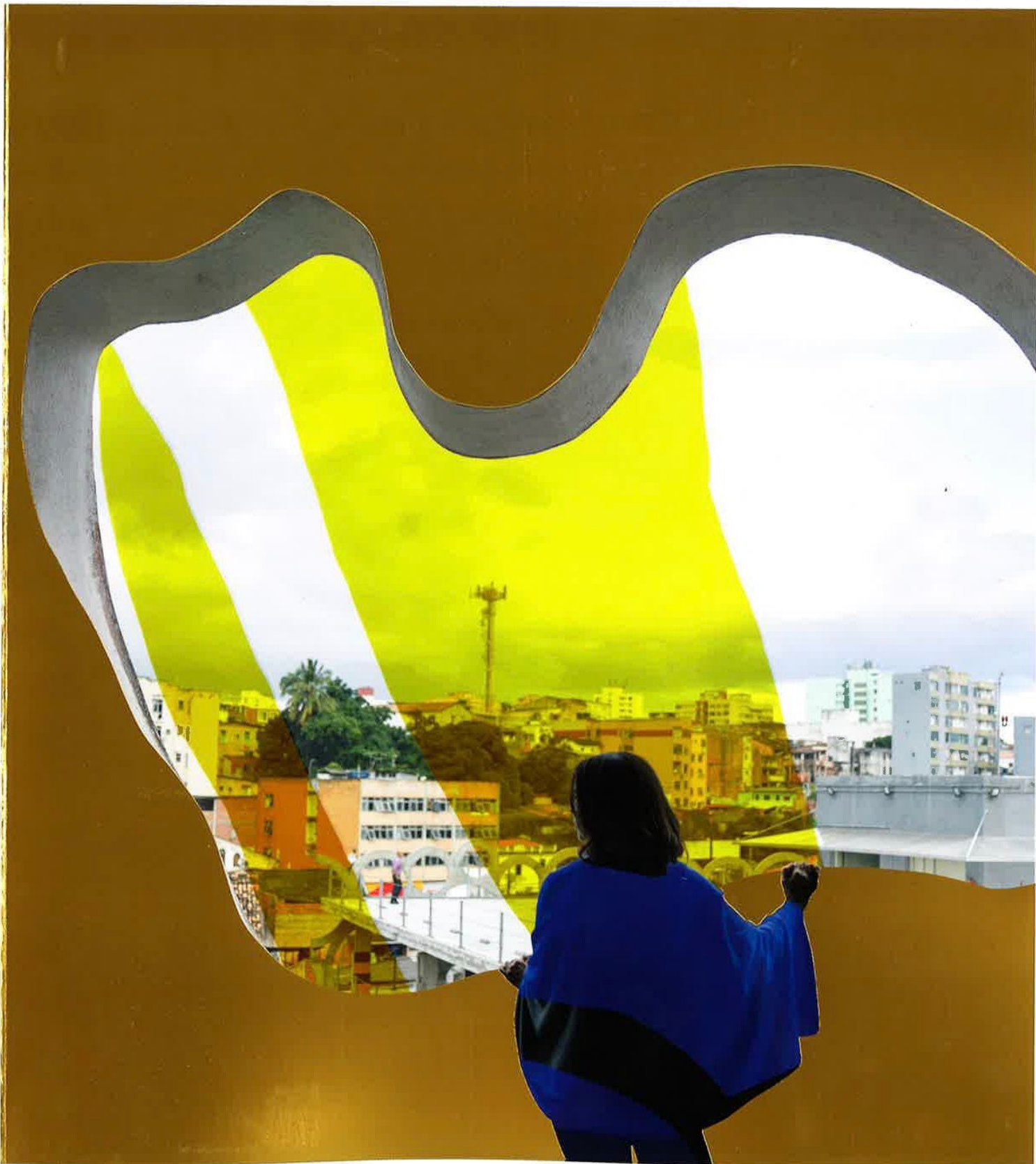


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LIMITED EDITION COVER
BY ISAAC JULIEN



River of light

An illuminating new art project sees London's bridges shine

Once a river so polluted it was declared biologically dead, the Thames has become an inspiring example of how liquid infrastructure can be detoxified and turned into a popular tourist destination and a source of civic pride. Now the historic London waterway is to form the backdrop for an ambitious public art project that will see 15 of its bridges lit up in a unified scheme by the artist Leo Villareal, who has collaborated with local architects Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands.

The Illuminated River project's first four completed crossings – London Bridge, Cannon Street Bridge, Southwark Bridge and Millennium Bridge – are being unveiled this July, while the remaining bridges will be revealed in four phases over the next few years.

ARTIST LEO VILLAREAL WITH A PROJECTION OF HIS LIGHT INSTALLATION FOR LONDON BRIDGE. THE PROJECT'S COLOUR PALETTE REFERENCES IMPRESSIONIST AND ENGLISH ROMANTIC PAINTINGS, AND DRAWS ON THE HUES OF THE LONDON SUNSET AND THE CITY BY MOONLIGHT

The project aims to create visual cohesion between the Thames' multiple crossings, built between 1862 and 2002, replacing the bridges' currently disparate lighting with a more energy-efficient system, while supporting the river's ecology and encouraging public interaction.

Villareal and Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands were announced as the winning team in 2016, beating more than a hundred other submissions in the process. Both have notably worked on bridges: Villareal had lit up San Francisco's Bay Bridge with 25,000 LED lights in 2013 (known as *The Bay Lights*, the installation has since become permanent), and Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands had designed the 2002 Golden Jubilee >>



LEFT, LEO VILLAREAL IN HIS NEW YORK STUDIO
 ABOVE, A VISUALISATION OF THE PROJECT, WHICH WILL LIGHT UP 15 BRIDGES ALONG THE THAMES

Bridges, a pair of pedestrian footbridges that flank London's Hungerford railway bridge.

'I think we were selected due to the simplicity of the idea, that really respected the history and nature of the bridges and tried to enhance them,' recalls Villareal. 'In London, there are so many different types of bridges. Some are very humble, like rail bridges that just do their work, others are more ornate, and then you have the iconic bridges like Westminster and Tower and Albert Bridge. Each one has its own qualities.'

Together, the duo's respective expertise has helped shepherd *Illuminated River* into being. Not only does each bridge have architectural and historical features that require careful consideration, they also lie within the jurisdiction of seven different city councils, and involve rail, port, conservation and city authorities. Of their working relationship, Alex Lifschutz says, 'We came at things from slightly different angles: we're interested in the effect we're trying to create, and the technicalities, while Leo is interested in the poetry of light. His art doesn't just use the bridges as an incidental backdrop. He understands that the bridge isn't just a plain canvas, it has its own texture.'

Villareal's concept for *Illuminated River* highlights each of these structural links in all of their idiosyncrasy. Each bridge exhibits an individualised sequence inspired by the social activity at that specific site. The patterns, which will be created using LED bulbs fixed onto each bridge's structure, range from the organic to the abstract, the stationary to the kinetic, respecting its architecture, even revealing oft-overlooked features, while moving in a gentle, progressive rhythm. Villareal will finalise the programming of each sequence when he's on site. 'I'm not English, I'm an outsider, so I approach this in a very humble way. It's about working

'The Thames itself is the inspiration. It's almost like a living thing'

with what's existing and shifting the way people see the bridges through a simple gesture.'

The artist's designs for the inaugural bridges include enhancing the ironwork on the underside of Southwark Bridge, and creating a blade of light along Foster + Partners' Millennium Bridge. The industrial aspects of Cannon Street Bridge, a rail bridge, will be enhanced with colour, while the monochromatic line of light already raking down the sides of London Bridge will be supplemented by a colour and lighting scheme placed under its concrete form. Villareal says, 'We're focusing light really only where it should be; the precision of the new LED fixtures is amazing.' Lifschutz agrees: 'In many cases, the bridges were poorly lit or overlit, the lighting was falling into the water, which has a negative effect on the creatures living there.'

For those who use the bridges, *Illuminated River* is set to cast the familiar structures in a new light. 'You'll notice them in a way you've never seen before,' says Lifschutz. 'You're going to be looking at the next bridge along, rather than the one you're on. Leo's work is mesmerising.'

'The Thames itself is the inspiration. It's almost like a living thing, that rises and falls five metres twice a day,' says Villareal. 'It's amazing to observe. I'm not sampling things, or using sensors; it's not interactive. It's very much based on observations and about me responding to the site, in the same way that artists have for hundreds of years.'*

illuminatedriver.london; villareal.net; lds-uk.com