

design WEEK

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Visionary project Canopy in Toronto, Canada by United Visual Artists 2010

British-based collective United Visual Artists switched on Canopy – an interactive public lighting system in the city of Toronto, Canada – this week. Inspired by walking beneath a forest canopy of leaves, light and shadows play on the floor, reflecting the movement of dappled light above. The permanent installation, which is suspended above a public pathway, was commissioned by Public Art Management as part of the ongoing development of the city's waterfront.

Canopy consists of 8000 identical polygonal modules, each representing an abstraction of a leaf, which reflect and refract both sunlight and artificial light. The 90m x 5m canvas of lights is programmed with D3 software, allowing it to recreate itself over time. It can also respond to many variables, including the time of day, seasonal changes and the patterns it creates.

'Canopy is a reflection of nature in an urban environment,' says Ben Kreukniet of UVA. 'After dusk, particles of artificial light are born, navigate through the grid, then die. Their survival is determined by regions of energy sweeping across the structure. This ensures that the branches of light will always be different.'

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