



OGHOST
INTHE
MACHINE

Written by Stacy Seiler
ART EDITOR

STUDIO DRIFT

Shylight in the Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Shylight photos courtesy of Studio Drift.



Bringing Shylight to fruition was a labor of love that required 5-years of research. The process included the development circuit boards and software, along with roughly 60 paper prototypes

Just as a child giggles with excitement when chasing lightning bugs on a dark summer's evening, with Shylight we understand that we are no longer alone in the darkness

Maybe the experience comes from our childhood fears or having watched one too many scary movies, but as you walk into an unfamiliar room shrouded in darkness and fumble for the light switch, there exists a moment of uneasiness in which we feel vulnerable. Such an experience poses the question, what is missing? Look around you. How many products or environments do we interact with that fail to address our emotional needs? Possibly too many to count!

However, it is within these gray areas of tension that the Amsterdam-based design firm Studio Drift addresses the psychosocial needs of humans in relation to the technology that surrounds us in our daily lives.

For Studio Drift, it was a mechanism of nature that inspired their approach to changing the transition from darkness to illumination. Their invention, entitled Shylight, permanently resides within a Baroque staircase of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Shylight is a performative sculpture made up of five kinetic silk lamps that mimic 'nyctinasty', a response brought on by darkness wherein flowers close for self-protection and resource conservation. However, to experience Shylight is to experience a blurring of lines between where nature ends and technology begins. Shylight's movements, which can be programmed down to the millimeter, allow each lamp to uniquely descend, open and illuminate, then spontaneously rise, contract and return back to a state of darkness in an unpredictable

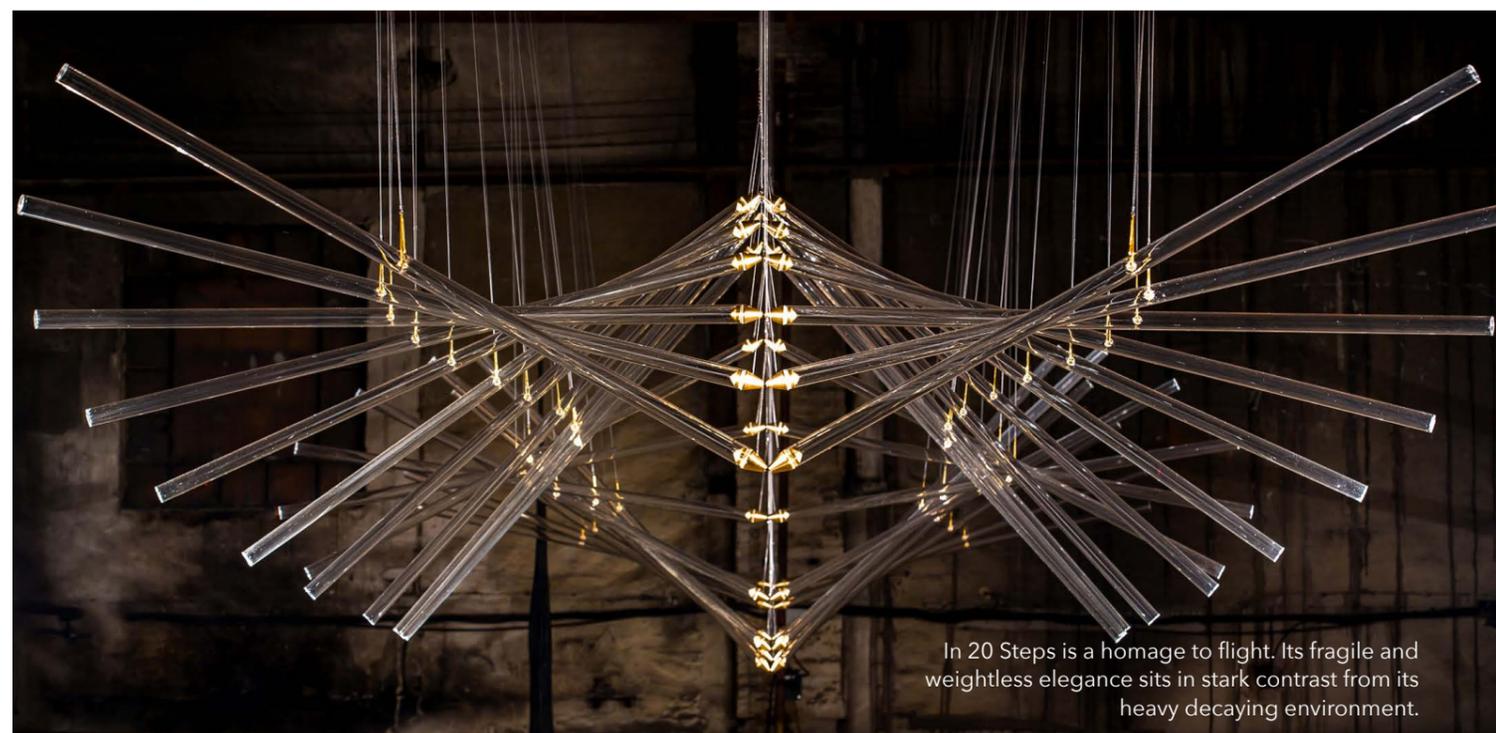
manner. Yet the true magic appears as Shylight floats downward filling its layers of precisely constructed silk facets with air. The expansion of the silk simulates the ephemeral experience of a flower transitioning to full bloom before your very eyes.

Bringing Shylight to fruition was a labor of love that required 5-years of research. The process included the development circuit boards and software, along with roughly 60 paper prototypes used to determine a mathematical pattern that would allow the layered pieces of silk to open. Yet, as technical as Shylight appears to be on paper, to experience Shylight is to witness an intangible medicine that heals the disconnect between man and machine. By offering the viewer a sense of comfort in unfamiliar surroundings, the darkness of a new space becomes friendly, even welcoming, as you wait in anticipation to witness the magical, spontaneous dance that takes place in Shylight. Just as a child giggles with excitement when chasing lightning bugs on a dark summer's evening, with Shylight we understand that we are no longer alone in the darkness. Any tension of the unfamiliar disappears and we wait patiently for the extraordinary moment when the flowers come alive and blossom into illumination.

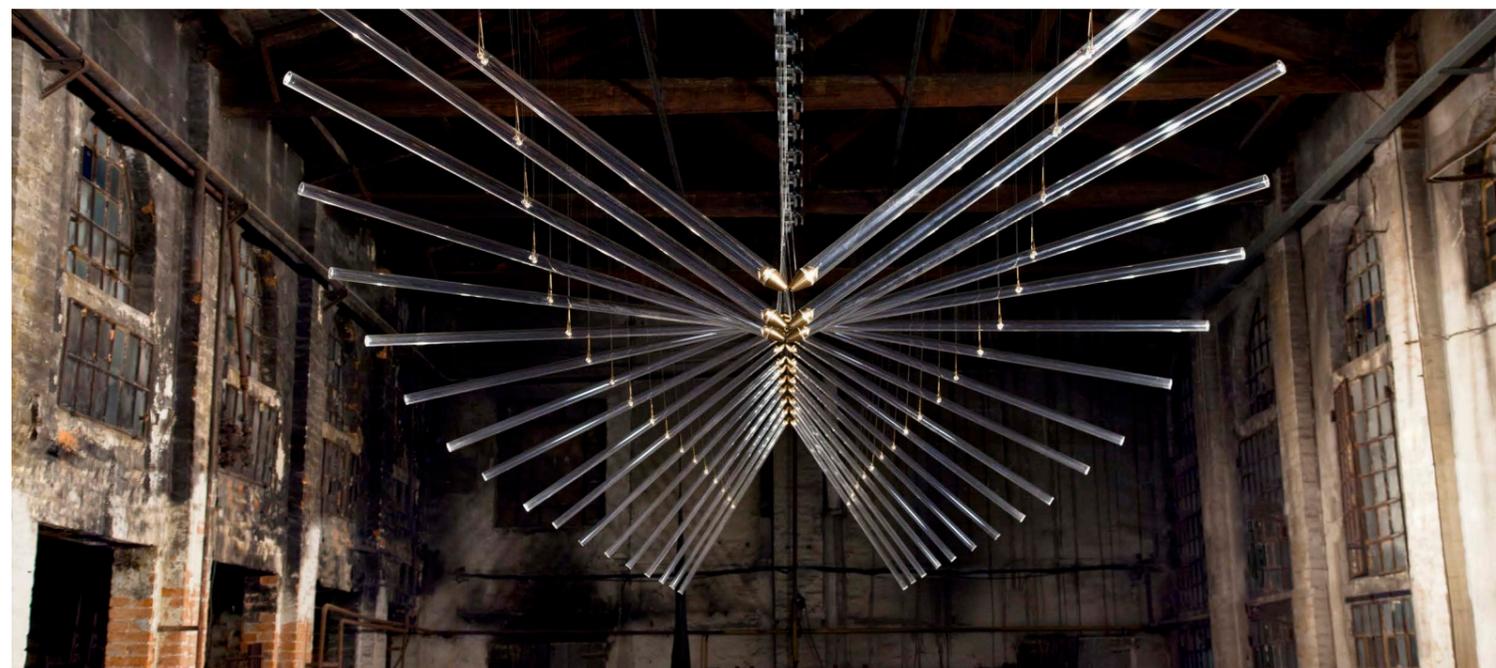
Site-specific works like Shylight are just the tip of the iceberg for Studio Drift. Founded in 2007, Studio Drift is the brainchild of Lonneke Gordijn and Ralph Nauta, who met while attending the Design Academy Eindhoven. Part of their unique approach to design can be attributed to the Academy's departure from majoring in a single field of study. Instead, their multi-disciplinary education was framed by the relationship between humans and their environment: Gordijn majored in Man and Wellbeing while Nauta's focus was Man and Leisure.



In 20 Steps from Glasstress 2015 Gotika, Murano, Italy.



In 20 Steps is a homage to flight. Its fragile and weightless elegance sits in stark contrast from its heavy decaying environment.



Shylight & In 20 Steps photos courtesy of Studio Drift.

When Gordijn and Nauta later joined forces to create Studio Drift, they made a clear departure from the expert-driven paradigm by intentionally not placing labels on their own practice. We are just creators." explains Gordijn. And like true creators, the studio frequently collaborates with engineers, scientists, computer programmers and universities. Gordijn feels, "The answers [to innovative design] are mostly found on the crossroads of multiple disciplines. We are what we are as we make pieces of art that are in between the classical borders of creativity."

Creative indeed! To glimpse into the intimate 16-person workspace of Studio Drift is like peaking into the inner-workings of a prolific mind that contains no physical markings of hierarchy. Instead the modern industrial space is flooded with light, natural materials determine the color scheme and uniform wooden desks spill over with prototypes and physical manifestations of experimentation. Needless to say, the creativity is palpable. Their resume isn't too shabby either. To date, the work of Studio Drift has been exhibited in such prestigious institutions as Museum of Art and Design, New York; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem and is included in the permanent collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Most recently Studio Drift announced its representation by Pace Gallery's, Art and Technology division, who featured their spacial kinetic installation In 20 Steps at the 2016 Armory Show in New York. However, this was not the first appearance of In 20 Steps. Originally designed as a site-specific installation housed in an aging industrial building on the island of Murano, In 20 Steps made its debut in Glasstress 2015 Gotika, an exhibition presented by the Hermitage Museum in conjunction with the Venice Biennale.

A homage to flight, the fragile and weightless elegance of In 20 Steps sits in stark contrast from its heavy decaying environment. The installation's 20 wing-like cylindrical glass bars, separated at their center point by brass tips, deceptively appear as if they are floating in mid-air. Suspended from the ceiling, a delicate pivot system seamlessly transitions the bars up and down to create the sequenced ballet of wings as they rise and fall in flight. Light becomes an unexpected collaborator when it begins to reflect and travel up and down the surface of the bars, enhancing the subtle transition of each wing. Like Muybridge's photos that first allowed the human eye to study motion, In 20 Steps is paced at a speed that congers that image of the skeletal remains bird flying in slow motion.

To witness In 20 Steps in person is both

mesmerizing and meditative, and it is the goal of Studio Drift to offer the viewer this transformative experience. "We want to surprise the viewer with a feeling of disbelief and utter amazement," explains Gordijn. "The relationship from the viewer to the work is the most important bond there is. To create this there needs to be a feeling of recognition and discovery at the same time." Recognition and discovery definitely apply to the experience of In 20 Steps. The longer you spend in its presence, the more opportunities for discovery begin to emerge. As daylight fades and darkness settles in, the glass bars disappear altogether. Only the reflected interior light remains as it travels up and down the moving bars in a sequence that congers the vision of underwater bioluminescence. Are we viewing a deep-water sea creature, an alien life form? Left in a state between question and amazement, we are hypnotized, and that is just as Studio Drift would want it to be.



Founded in 2007, Studio Drift is the brainchild of Lonneke Gordijn and Ralph Nauta

Portrait of Ralph and Lonneke by Manon van der Zwaal.



PLUMA
▲ LUISAVIAROMA.COM