

# DE-LIGHT-FULL

## JanLeonardo Wöllert

HAS QUITE A FEW BRIGHT IDEAS  
BY MAHA MAJZOUB

Photos courtesy JanLeonardo Wöllert

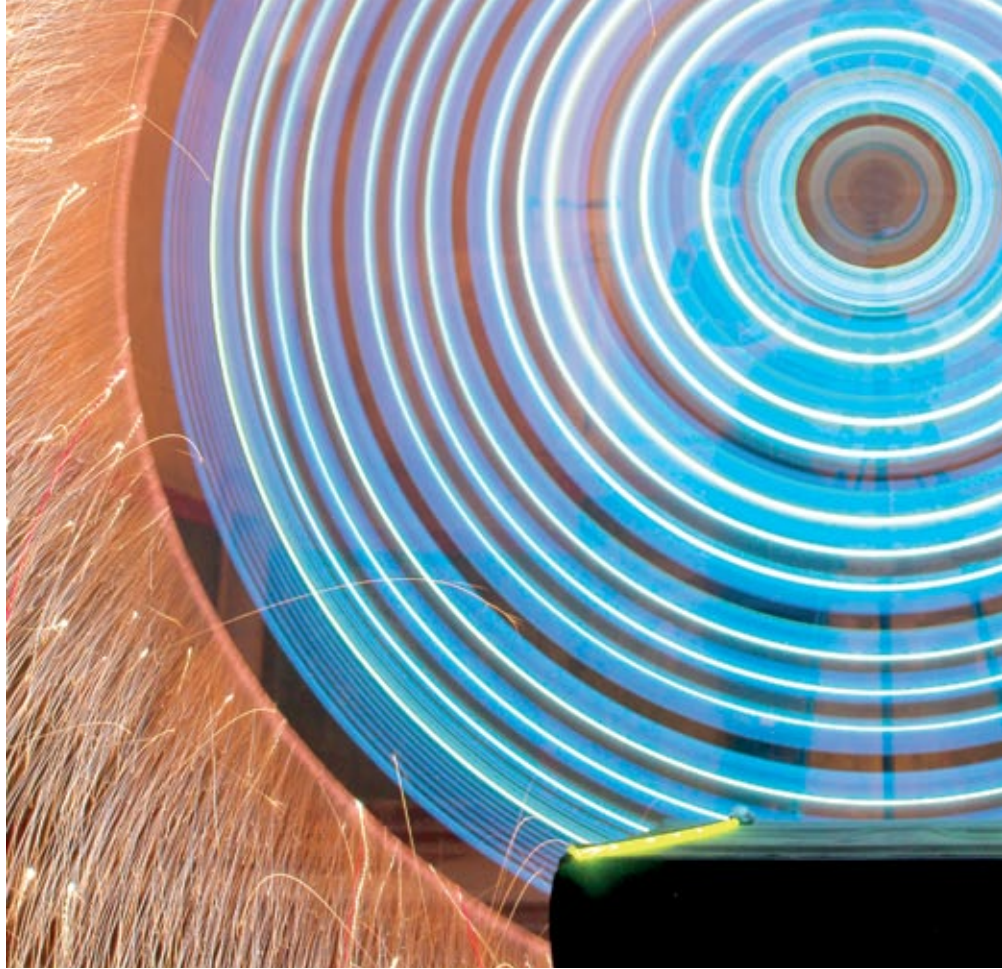
**W**hen I think of light, I visualize the flickering bulb in my bathroom or the dirty fate of my washing machine, which has repeatedly threatened - and thrice attempted - to take its own life. Both bulb and washing machine have been afflicted by years of excruciating suffering at the hands of the scheduled/random power outages. If, like me, you happen to reside in Lebanon at this particular point in time, you may associate light with an undeniably favorite pastime - and that's cursing the life out of our state.

But when JanLeonardo Wöllert thinks of light, he conjures up images of a somewhat different nature. To him, light is the creative agent of the 21st century. It is fantasy in spatial vision. It is unending possibilities in multi-dimensional creation. And it is with light that Wöllert makes pure, unadulterated magic. A wunderkind who creates luminous sculptures that are captured in photographs, Wöllert paints with light, and the world is his canvas. A symbiosis of art and photography, his work explores all possible - and the seemingly impossible - scenarios of choreographed light and performance.

The art form, known as Light Art Performance Photography or LAPP for short, was crafted by Wöllert himself, having discovered it coincidentally in 2007. "The work is created under time exposure at the moment of the performance," explains the German light artist. He defines LAPP as an interface between the performance of light art and the technical execution of a photograph. While there are no computers and no post-production at play, the light performance itself is heavily choreographed and rehearsed prior to the exposure being taken, insists Wöllert, a self-taught image maker who honed his skills while rubbing elbows with celebrated German photographer Stephan Meyer-Bergfeld. ▶

PHOTO CREDIT:  
SHIT WRONG PLANET, PORT OF BREMEN, GERMANY. JANLEONARDO WÖLLERT IS USING HERE THE CANON 5D MK III CAMERA WITH CARL ZEISS LENS, WHICH IS MOUNTED ON A SOLID MANFROTTO TRIPOD.





Many LAPP compositions consist of some 20 to 50 single steps between opening and closure of the shutter. And this necessitates a great deal of dexterity on the part of the performer by being both quick-witted and quick on his/her feet “to achieve the exact pace of synchronized steps with the handling and distribution of lights,” says Wöllert. The movements, planned and executed with much fastidiousness, compounded with obsessive precision in the design, result in inventive motifs and seriously striking photographs.

For each picture, the camera is mounted on solid tripods with a remote control to trigger exposures that often go beyond 60 minutes. Wöllert usually uses the Canon 5D MK III camera, Carl Zeiss lenses and Manfrotto tripods. Wöllert generates the most vivid colours and light effects with a range of sources, including fireworks, light sticks, flash and LED lights, usually combining the most diverse products to create entirely new lighting tools.

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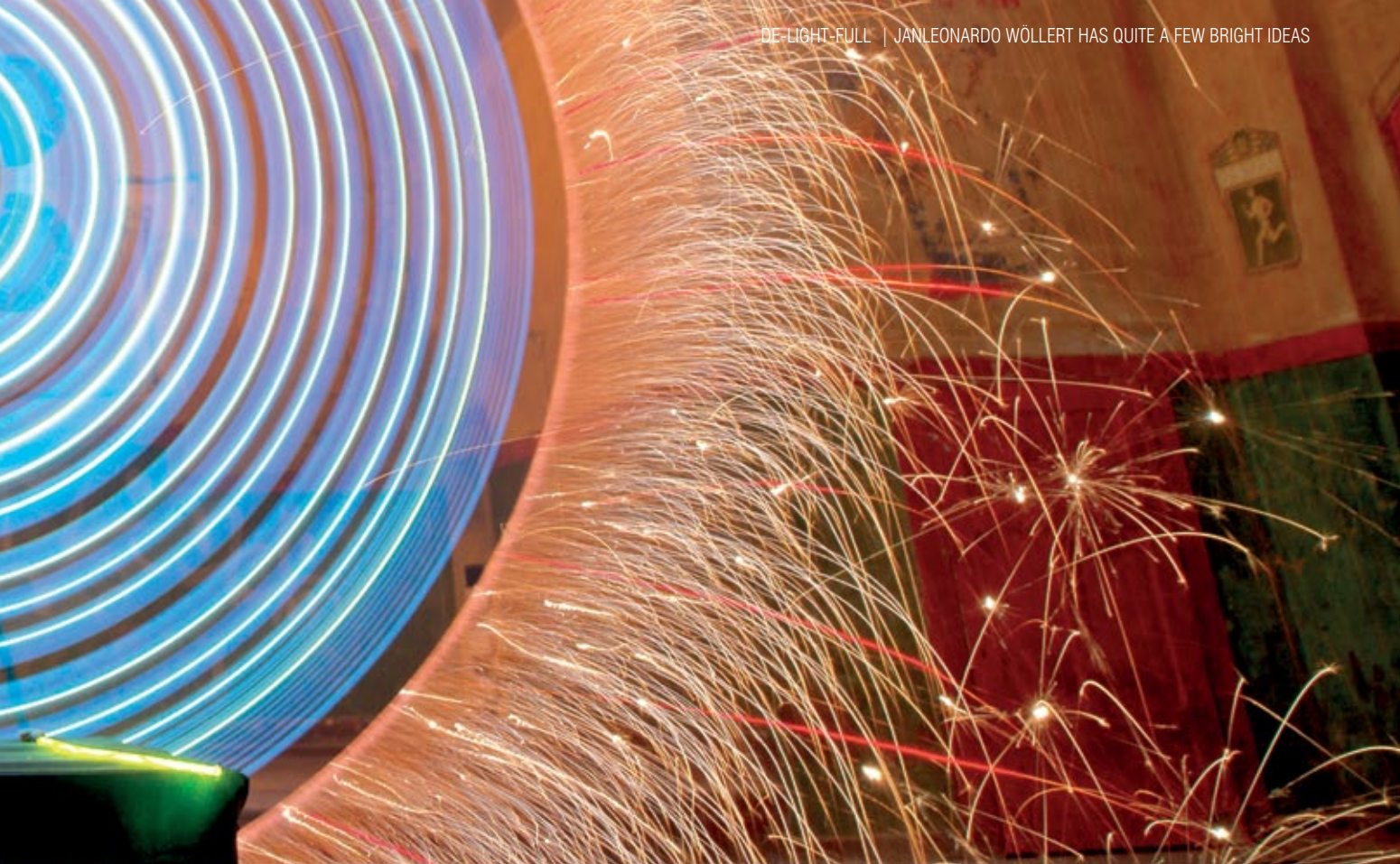
## A FLASHY ESSENCE

LAPP images, or dances with light if you wish, entail a painstaking amount of prepping and an endless supply of creativity. Wöllert would plan an image or a sequence for several weeks ahead of the shooting date, all the while scouting for the right location and mapping out the shoot in detail so as to leave nothing for chance. “My last work contract for Japan Tobacco, who asked for a LAPP photograph for a big campaign in Japan, required one month from start to finish,” he notes. “[Although it was a single photograph], they didn’t know what they wanted exactly, and so I worked on three different designs,” continues Wöllert, whose crisp imagination has earned him the “German Prize for Science Photography 2008”.

CLOCKWISE:  
LIGHT FIRE EYE, BEELITZ HEILSTÄTTEN, GERMANY  
UFO, BORREGAARD ATTISHOLZ, SWITZERLAND

Japan Tobacco wasn’t the first conglomerate for which the artist made light twist and shout. The seasoned photographer was commissioned by Nike during the 2010 World Cup to celebrate the colors of eight Nike teams, making the team jerseys illuminate in a breathtaking setting. It was one of many interactive pieces that Wöllert realized in his hometown Bremen in northwestern Germany. Another one meriting a mention is “Shit Wrong Planet”, where the artist masterfully embodies a man in a whirlpool of confusion. (We didn’t just pick that one for the über suave title, we promise).

Also at home Wöllert has staged more hypnotic performances than he can count. In Beelitz east of Germany, he has repeatedly gone inside the Beelitz-Heilstätten sanatorium, the infamously deserted hospital where Hitler and Honecker were treated for injuries they sustained during World War I. Examples include “Magician Hallelujah”, Wöllert’s brilliant interpretation of prayer and submission to the divine where he portrays his subject fully ready to accept the light into his heart. ▶







A self-professed late-night habitué, Wöllert paints the greater majority of his pictures when the rest of the world is fast asleep. “I love the night and the darkness. Even as a child I used to go out secretly at night. At night, you don’t meet people and you can organize the long exposures, choreographies and performances. The night is my stage,” he remarks. Equally crucial to the making of that stage of his is locating a site that speaks to him. “Locations are not always easy to find and the interaction between background and moving lights with their sometimes strange appearance of hard light are essential to create the desired atmosphere and effect of the light art performance,” argues Wöllert.

OPPOSITE PAGE:  
SPIRAL, BEELITZ HEILSTÄTTEN, GERMANY  
ABOVE:  
CRY - ARTIST KARLHEINZ LÖRNER,  
JANLEONARDO STUDIO, BREMEN, GERMANY

## THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS

Assignments - and Wöllert’s sheer passion - have taken him far and wide across the world, where he oftentimes had to brave the most extreme weather conditions from high humidity of a stalactite cave in China to angry winter storms on the Little Matterhorn in Switzerland. But the light artist doesn’t mind. He says he has had the good fortune of “visiting such amazing locations”, as he counts his blessings for commissions from the likes of fashion label Diesel and alternative rock band Coldplay as well as for sponsorship from Canon and Carl Zeiss, among many others. “Someday I would like to visit Iceland or Greenland,” adds Wöllert who will be touring Canada, Spain, Germany, Austria and Switzerland this year. Yet even an artist with such flair and armed with a to die for portfolio expresses qualms about his artistic future.

“If you ask me, what are the challenges of what you do? My answer would be ‘to survive as an artist,’” says Wöllert. Even as an established artist, Wöllert can’t rest on his laurels, working between 10 and 14 hours a day. “I don’t do photography every day, for as a modern-day artist you have to do a lot of online marketing and be active on your Website and social media among many other things. I have a very big community and they constantly demand information,” he adds. “Besides, I want to be the best,” he says with a boyish smile.

I leave Wöllert with the hope that he will soon bring one of his bright ideas to the Middle East, before I speed off suspecting my washing machine may have talked my fridge and dishwasher into committing mass suicide. ■

[www.lightart-photography.de](http://www.lightart-photography.de)