

OMMATIDIUM

Samuel Wilkinson . Beau Lotto

PRESS RELEASE

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INTRODUCING: The OMMATIDIUM

'The most remarkable street lamp you'll ever see'

This August, something unusual is coming to Old Street in East London. Set to be one of the focal points of the Shoreditch Design Triangle during London Design Festival (18–27 September), it's a piece of street furniture, a lamp, a sculpture, a meeting place, a shelter, a community noticeboard, a maker of rainbows and the gateway to a vast digital resource for anyone passing under it. It's the **Ommatidium**, and there's nothing else like it.



Made from a canopy of 1,500 glass crystal lenses (weighing a colossal 600kg), the Ommatidium is a collaboration between industrial designer **Samuel Wilkinson** and the world-leading neuroscientist and perception specialist **Beau Lotto**. It is intended to act as a new site-specific sculptural icon for the Hoxton area that would fulfil a number of distinct aims:

- To celebrate the creativity of one of the most innovative sites in Europe.
- To create a meeting point for Shoreditch at the entrance to Hoxton.
- To complement the regeneration of the area around Silicon Roundabout.
- To offer a level of digital interactivity that reflects its location at one of Europe's foremost technology hubs.
- To serve a purpose in both daytime and night.
- To function as a bridge between the physical and digital worlds and demonstrate where the future of digital lives: in the space between.
- To give something appealing, inspiring and useful back to the community.
- To act as a proof of concept for future site-specific street interventions that enhance their surroundings in terms of both aesthetics and function – literally changing the world around it and the way people come together to exchange ideas within an urban environment.

Over the course of the last year, Wilkinson has been working with **Lottolabs** to conceive and construct an installation that would meet these criteria. Drawing a parallel between the fragmented nature of the digital world, with its kaleidoscope of different perspectives, and the refractive behaviour of prisms, Wilkinson and Lotto hit upon the concept of a giant, multifaceted lens canopy that would turn sunlight into an ever-changing display of rainbows on the pavement.

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“This installation was never about designing a loud provocative object,” says Wilkinson. “It was more to create something that fitted with the vernacular of street furniture. The challenge was to create the right experience, an interesting intervention, something with multiple layers that could react to the environment. A place where people would be able to appreciate the physical experience at the same time as virtually checking out what’s going on locally.

After various iterations, we arrived at a large horizontal window that refracts the sky during the day and is illuminated at night. The overhanging angled rim will frame the user’s view and create a strong contrast between the matte black patterned steelwork and the faceted hand-cut solid-crystal prisms. These are asymmetrical on both top and bottom so will create a kaleidoscopic view of the sky, and when the sun shines, thousands of rainbows will unexpectedly burst on to the floor below.”

Anyone passing beneath its canopy will be linked, via Ripple Inc’s **Traces** smartphone app (www.traces.io/app), to a wealth of ever-changing curated content related to their surroundings – ranging from local maps and inspiring community stories to offers from shops, pubs and restaurants. Professor Lotto is also the CEO and founder of Ripple Inc – the parent company behind the Traces app – the only app in the world that enables people to be ‘truly creative’.

What’s in a Name?

The Ommatidium is named after the individual units that make up the compound eyes of many insects, a nod towards the structural and functional resemblance between the clusters of photoreceptors in the arthropod eye and the 3m crystal lattice that forms the installation’s canopy.

A Prism and a Beacon

When struck by sunlight, the Ommatidium’s crystal lenses paint 5,000 rainbows onto the pavement, creating patterns of dancing light and colour that change with the sun’s path through the sky. It is deliberately positioned in a location that offers optimal sunlight.

By night, powerful LEDs illuminate the canopy, turning the Ommatidium into a gleaming beacon on Old Street – a site that receives more than 10 million people in passing traffic every year.

The Space Between

Traces is the world’s first augmented messaging app, allowing information and ideas to be tagged to a particular place and retrieved via smartphone. Rather than sending a message to a person, Traces allows you to send it to a location, where it is left as a virtual water ‘droplet’ – catch the droplet and discover the message. In effect, it is a means of leaving digital content in physical spaces – a concept invented by Professor Lotto and, in contrast to broadcasting social networks, scientifically proven to increase people’s happiness, empathy and sense of connection with the world around them.

The Ommatidium will function as a hub for dynamically changing traces, providing instant access to a trove of multimedia content created by Professor Lotto, assorted partners and, ultimately, the public. This might include content such as updates on nearby TfL building works, maps of the area featuring the creative people and companies working in it, music playlists, videos of talks on creativity and perception, and much more.

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Augmenting Reality

'Our brain makes meaning by truly [engaging with the physical world](#). This is because the brain evolved in a body, and the body in space. That means we are not outside observers of nature; we are defined by our interactions – by our ecology. This basic fact creates a fundamental challenge for digital social platforms, which are typically non-experiential, non-interactive and devoid of physical context. How can they be meaningful, as opposed to merely informative? By bringing together neuroscience and design, the Ommatidium and Traces facilitate the inherent creative nature of the brain by enabling people living, visiting and working in one of the most creative areas on the planet to gift their way of being and seeing to others – to augment our world with digital, rather than attempting to replace it.'

– Professor Beau Lotto

When it is installed, the Ommatidium will be the only thing like it on Earth. But, if Wilkinson and Lotto's ambitions for it bear fruit, that will not be the case for very long...

For more information about the Ommatidium, images, or to request interviews with Professor Beau Lotto or Samuel Wilkinson, please contact **Sabine Zetteler** at sabine@zetteler.co.uk or call +44 (0)7791 568890.

Notes for Editors

About the Ommatidium

- 4.5m tall
- 3.2m canopy diameter
- 600kg canopy weight (crystal)
- 1,500 asymmetrically hand-cut crystal glass prisms
- Manufactured by Benson-Sedgwick
- Engineered by Pryce & Myers

> About Samuel Wilkinson

Samuel Wilkinson's commitment to designing interesting objects is apparent in his work, always looking to add a fresh dynamic approach in either form or function. His deep understanding of materials and manufacturing helps him to push the boundaries whilst still achieving a high level of detail and craftsmanship.

Samuel graduated in Furniture and related product design at Ravensbourne College of Art & Design in 2002. After working for 5 years for leading consultancies he set up his own studio in 2008. The studio's work diversifies across various disciplines from small products to large public projects. Samuel's work has been published worldwide and has won numerous awards including two of the highest honors in design, Design of the Year from the London Design museum and the Black Pencil from D&AD. His work is featured in permanent collections of some the most regarded museums including the MoMA, The Victoria and Albert Museum, The Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago and the Design Museum in Helsinki.

samuelwilkinson.com

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> About Beau Lotto

Beau Lotto is the world's foremost professor of neuroscience and a serial TED speaker who specialises in the biology and psychology of perception, which is at the core of complexity, wellbeing, creativity and innovation. His renowned research – published in two books, and more than 60 papers and reviews in international journals – blurs the boundaries between neuroscience, design and the arts. One of the most talked about entrepreneurs in the world, he is the CEO, inventor and founder of Ripple Inc, the pioneering neurodesign company behind the geo-messaging app Traces. Transcending boundaries between technology, science and the arts, Beau's experiential approach to communicating science has won him international acclaim and a global audience through guest star appearances on BBC TV's Horizon programme, the National Geographic Channel, three TED talks, the RSA series, G8, Google and Wired.

www.lottolab.org

> About Traces

Professor Beau Lotto has invented the world's first augmented messaging app: Traces. Traces lets you make your mark on the world by sharing your ideas in a completely new social way – tagged to the places that matter to you. Instead of sending a video, picture or text to someone's phone or posting online, with Traces you can send it to a physical place. To get your trace, people have to be in the right place. To open a trace, catch the drop with your phone to discover the message inside.

The app was conceived by neuroscientist Beau Lotto to explore how the principles of neurodesign can be harnessed to create more meaningful digital experiences. Traces is privately funded by angels on the West Coast and in the UK.

To download Traces, visit: <http://www.traces.io/app>

To apply for access to the Traces Studio, visit: <https://studio.traces.io>

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