From the Distant Past
laser projection at the Palazzo Franchetti
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picture: Bob Fosbury

From the Distant Past

The bright green light waves pulsing in the evenings from 15 September - 14 October 2010 over the facade of the Palazzo Franchetti in the heart of Venice were a minimalist representation of the most distant objects in the universe discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope. These undulations projected by a green high power laser tell a story about the oldest colours in the universe originating from some of the earliest agglomerations of stars ever recorded.
So *From the Distance Past* reveals that Hubble and other astronomical telescopes do not only produce the familiar and spectacularly ‚pretty' pictures of the sky. The astronomer's heart is often made to beat faster by the analysis of the light of the most distant objects in the universe by the use of ‚spectroscopy': the splitting of light into its constituent colours by a prism or a diffraction grating. The light emitted by stars, be they as close as our own Sun or as distant as the youth of the universe, caries the imprint of the chemical composition, the evolutionary state, and the mass of the shining star or stars. By its luminous animation on the facade of the Palazzo Franchetti, this faint colour echo of the primordial universe appears less as an abstract idea than as an anthropomorphic association with a heartbeat or a brain wave. This work makes a powerful connection between the long tradition of painting and with colour seen in a conceptually new way.

Coordinated with the projection of the spectra, the image of the corresponding star, galaxy or quasar is projected onto the lawn in the Franchetti garden. The images are projected by a special process emphasizing the very nature of the images captured with just a few hundred pixels. Never seen in public before, these observations represent the very limits of our knowledge of the distant Universe today. Due to the fact that these pixel constitute the end of resolution and that only the faint light consisting of a couple of photons may result in a spectral peak, „From the Distant Past" is not only a light trip back to the origins of the universe but also a walk at the borders of contemporary vision in general.

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detail of the laser projection at the Palazzo Franchetti >
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