



A century not out

A brief history of the Grand Palais

The Grand Palais was built – along with the neighbouring Petit Palais and the Eiffel Tower – for the 1900 World Fair. It housed an exhibition of fine arts for the duration of the fair, and was intended to be a temporary structure.

After the fair closed its doors, however, there was no willingness to tear down the buildings, which have remained a part of the Paris skyline for over a century. The Grand Palais is constructed principally from stone decorated with friezes and mosaics, but its claim to fame is its curved glass roof, which holds a record as the largest ironwork and glass structure in the world – at least since the demise of London's Crystal Palace.

The vast structure has 12,000 square metres of space – including 5,300 square metres of exhibition space divided into eight galleries and three rotundas. It can host three exhibitions simultaneously.

The building housed more than 250 exhibitions until 1993, when the falling rivet incident closed it to the public.



Photo: Rocco Toscani

The grand scheme of things

A falling rivet closed the Grand Palais in Paris for nearly a decade. Now it has reopened in a glorious blaze of colour. **Robert Such** reports from the French capital

For two weeks in September, Thierry Dreyfus and Frédéric Sanchez's colourful light and sound installation filled the interior of the newly restored Musée du Grand Palais in Paris, closed since 1993 when a rivet was found to have fallen from its steel-and-glass roof. The extended period of closure was largely the result of government departments arguing over the budget, an estimated £69 million, which put back the start of restoration work until 2001.

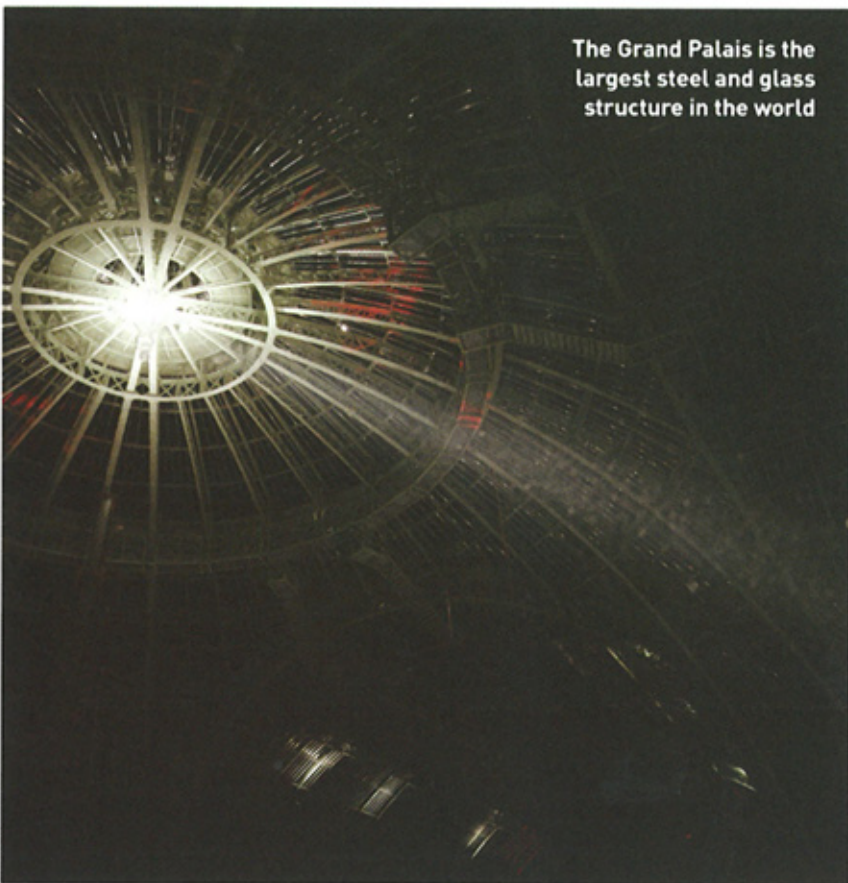
Thierry Dreyfus, winner of an international competition, designed the installation for the grand opening of the historic building. The 40-something Paris-based artist has worked in lighting since the early eighties, illuminating French opera houses and consulting on fashion shows held by designers such as Helmut Lang and Yves Saint Laurent.

Sunset over Paris

Dreyfus designed the Grand Palais lightwork to emulate a sunset over the French capital. Accompanied by Sanchez's electronic and sampled-sound score, an array of Syncrolite projectors with 5kW xenon lamps illuminated the museum's



Thierry Drefus used banks of Synrolite automated projectors fitted with 5kW xenon sources to saturate the colour around the interior



The Grand Palais is the largest steel and glass structure in the world

Photo: Thierry Dreyfus

► structure in shades of amber, lavender, pink, blue and red. Through the use of coloured light and the reflections from 18 mirrors, Dreyfus wanted to create a feeling of "serenity". His idea was to have visitors suspend their thoughts, appreciate the space and feel a sense of calm.

"There was a wave of movement of light from the centre to the outside of the Grand Palais," he says, "then all became slowly red, beams reflecting in the mirrors, so when people were walking they had monochrome paintings around them,



Dreyfus set out to create a feeling of 'serenity' for visitors in the vast glass and steel halls of the Grand Palais

Strutting his stuff

Thierry Dreyfus – from the catwalk to the gallery

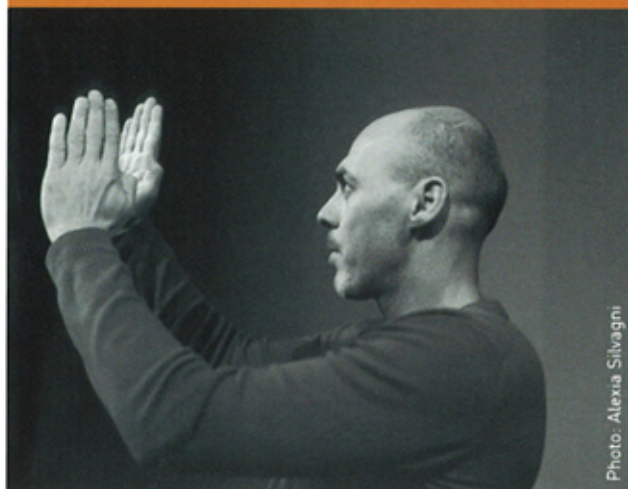


Photo: Alexia Silvagni

Thierry Dreyfus is a lighting designer with a quarter century of experience. His first work in the industry was for the Strasbourg Opera in the early 1980s, but he has made his name creating catwalk lighting for the likes of Miguel Adrover, Dior Homme, Helmut Lang, Martine Sitbon and Yves Saint Laurent.

Away from the catwalk Dreyfus has designed lighting for the French state bank and even dabbled in luminaire design.

and then the red turned to white, and the beams hitting the mirrors went back to the sky through the glass roof."

Although architect Alain Perrot's work on the Grand Palais' foundations and metal structure is complete, the renovation of the façade will take another two years. The 13,500 square-metre hall will be used as a multipurpose venue. ■



Photo: Rocco Toscani

The Grand Palais lightwork simulates a sunset over Paris and makes the building hard to miss at night