TIME TO REFLECT

Daisy Dumas finds art and nature converge in two new London projects

This artist's impression shows Aluna, a tidal-powered moon clock due to be unveiled in 2012 alongside the Thames

CLOCK WISE

In a world dictated by clocks and watches, East London artist Laura Williams swims against the tide. She sought a slower, more natural way of measuring time. "How can we help people to slow down enough to connect with each other and the Earth?" Williams' answer, inspired by the Kogi people of Colombia, was Aluna, the world's first tidal -powered moon clock.

Eight years and £1.8 million later (with a further £4 million needed), the Aluna project looks set to transform a bedraggled stretch of Greenwich riverfront and time-keeping, forever. At over 40 metres in diameter – larger than Stonehenge – the five-storey high grand-daddy of lunar monuments is made up of three static concentric rings of glowing recycled glass. They represent three distinct cycles: the lunar month, the lunar day and the tide.

Fiendish algorithms control the flow of illumination, powered by tidal energy, so that a full moon is artistically captured as a fully-lit outer ring. So by looking at how each ring is illuminated, you can follow the moon's movements, its current phase and the ebb and flow of the tides. This animation of light is called Alunatime.

The project's benefactors hope that after it opens in 2012 Aluna's gentle grace and sweeping ribbons of light will reconnect generations to come with the Earth's natural rhythms and to its life, culture and biodiversity.

"We're rushing on the way to nowhere," says Williams. "Aluna is about looking up, looking around and seeing a bigger picture."
alunatime.org

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BAT CHAT

It pays to protect our bat populations – as bio-indicators, their population strength mimics the health of our environment. Most of Britain's 17 species of bats are under pressure but now, at the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust's London Wetland Centre at Barnes, welcome respite comes in the shapely form of the brand new bat haven, a project initiated by an artist.

Jeremy Deller won the 2004 Turner Prize with Memory Bucket, which included film of three million bats swooping out of a Texas cave. He was inspired by how some Texans are helping bats by making artificial roosts and decided to import and expand the idea, with a bat house designed and built to specifications a bat 'client' would choose.

Says Deller: "They are beautiful creatures … capable of living in great numbers together in relative peace."

Deller and his partners ran a competition and the winning design by Architectural Association students Jorgen Tandberg and Yo Murata uses natural materials that allow the building to 'breathe', trap heat and accommodate as many species and roosting habits as possible.

The Berkeley Bat House throws clean, sleek design and cutting-edge technology into an unfamiliar context at the marshy wildlife sanctuary – all understandable given its genesis from an artist's work.

"We're breaking new ground to some extent," says Richard Bullock of the Wetland Centre, who has watched the project grow from day one. "It builds a bridge between design, architecture, arts and wildlife."

Bullock is now watching the house closely for any signs of contentedly roosting mothers – surely no better accolade for the success of architecture in nature.

bathouseproject.org

" Bats are beautiful creatures … capable of living in great numbers together in relative peace "

Jeremy Deller, artist

Jeremy Deller won the 2004 Turner Prize for Memory Bucket, featuring footage of bats swooping in Texas (above); the award-winning Berkeley Bat House at London's Wetland Centre (left)

JEREMY DELLER, MEMORY BUCKET 2003. ORIGINALLY COMMISSIONED BY ART PACE SAN ANTONIO. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ART CONCEPT, PARIS AND THE MODERN INSTITUTE/TOBY WEBSTER LTD, GLASGOW; TERI PENGILLEY (BAT HOUSE); HUGH CLARK/BAT CONSERVATION TRUST (BAT)