



arc

LIGHTING IN ARCHITECTURE

#132

Cover Story:

Amplexus, Noor Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Mark Ridler

Retail Lighting

Grimanesa Amorós

“When I create a piece of artwork, I focus on making the viewer think. I want to attract your attention and take your mind to creative places.”

Grimanesa Amorós

Following the unveiling of her mammoth, 100ft artwork at Noor Riyadh, held in November of last year, **arc** speaks to Peruvian-American artist **Grimanesa Amorós** to learn more about her unique approach to light art.



T

hroughout her career, Peruvian-American interdisciplinary artist Grímanesa Amorós has been guided by her mantra of living in a “romance with the unknown.” It’s a philosophy that inspires her creativity and develops immersive works of art around the globe, each with a contemplation of the local cultural heritage and community. Most recently, Amorós created the enormous 100ft *Amplexus* (Latin for ‘embrace’) for the 2022 Noor Riyadh light art festival.

While her recent work has become characterised by the sprawling, undulating, interwoven lines of light, Amorós told **arc** that her love for creating began with a fascination for drawing when she was a child. “When I was 11-years-old, I loved maps,” she said. “That’s how I started, with the love and curiosity for maps, memorising and making these continental shapes, seeing such a vast world beyond my own. Drawing these distances from one point, from one continent to another, went beyond the straight lines we were taught to write on. My mother saw this fascination and, instead of drawing all over my walls, thought it an excellent idea to put me into painting classes. That is how it began, since then; I have never stopped.”

While her passion for creating began at an early age, it wasn’t until a trip to Iceland in 2001 that she unearthed the potential of light as a medium.

“I was lucky enough to see the Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights, and it was breathtaking; I could not stop saying ‘wow,’” she said.

“I had my camera with me, and I could have become occupied with getting the right shot and angle, but I decided to put my camera down and live the moment. I thought, ‘if only I could share this with others, wouldn’t that be amazing?’

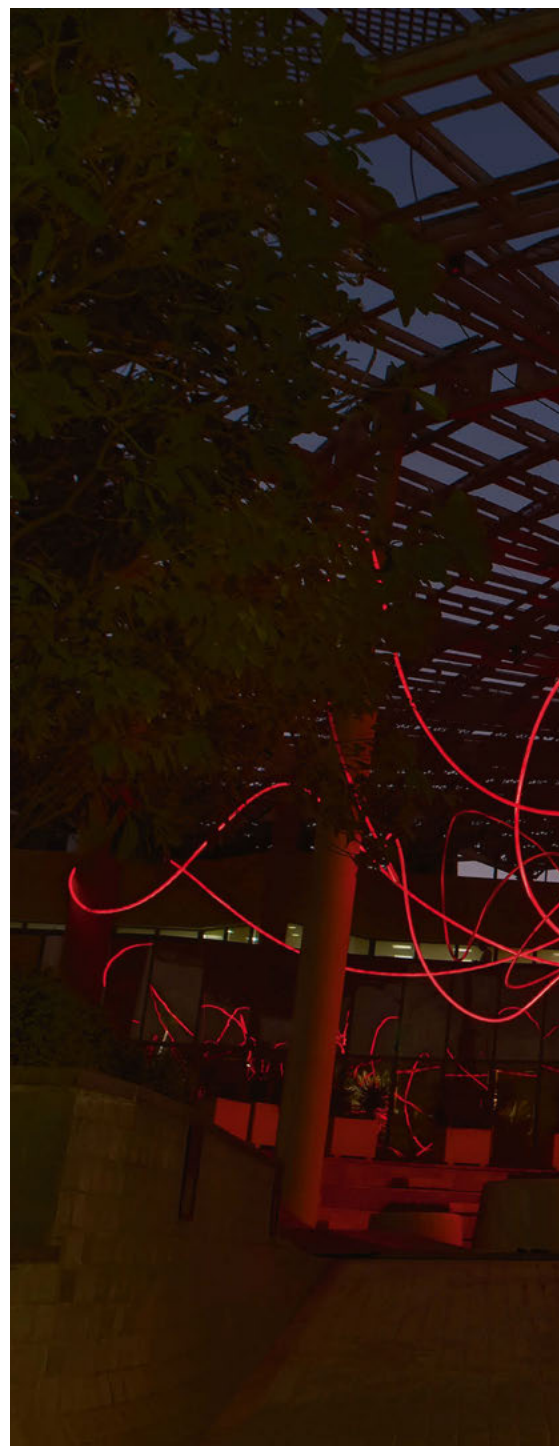
“I was fascinated by that Icelandic experience and began my adventure and relationship with light.

I began trying to figure out how to encapsulate the ephemeral part of light into my work, experimenting with materials to try to emulate the light that left an extensive impression on me. I love light because it is not physical; we cannot own or have it.”

From here, Amorós focused on creating immersive works of light art that would replicate “those magical moments that I lived through in Iceland,” inspiring and immersing people in her work.

Despite this, she doesn’t consider herself a “light artist,” but rather “an artist that uses light as a medium”.

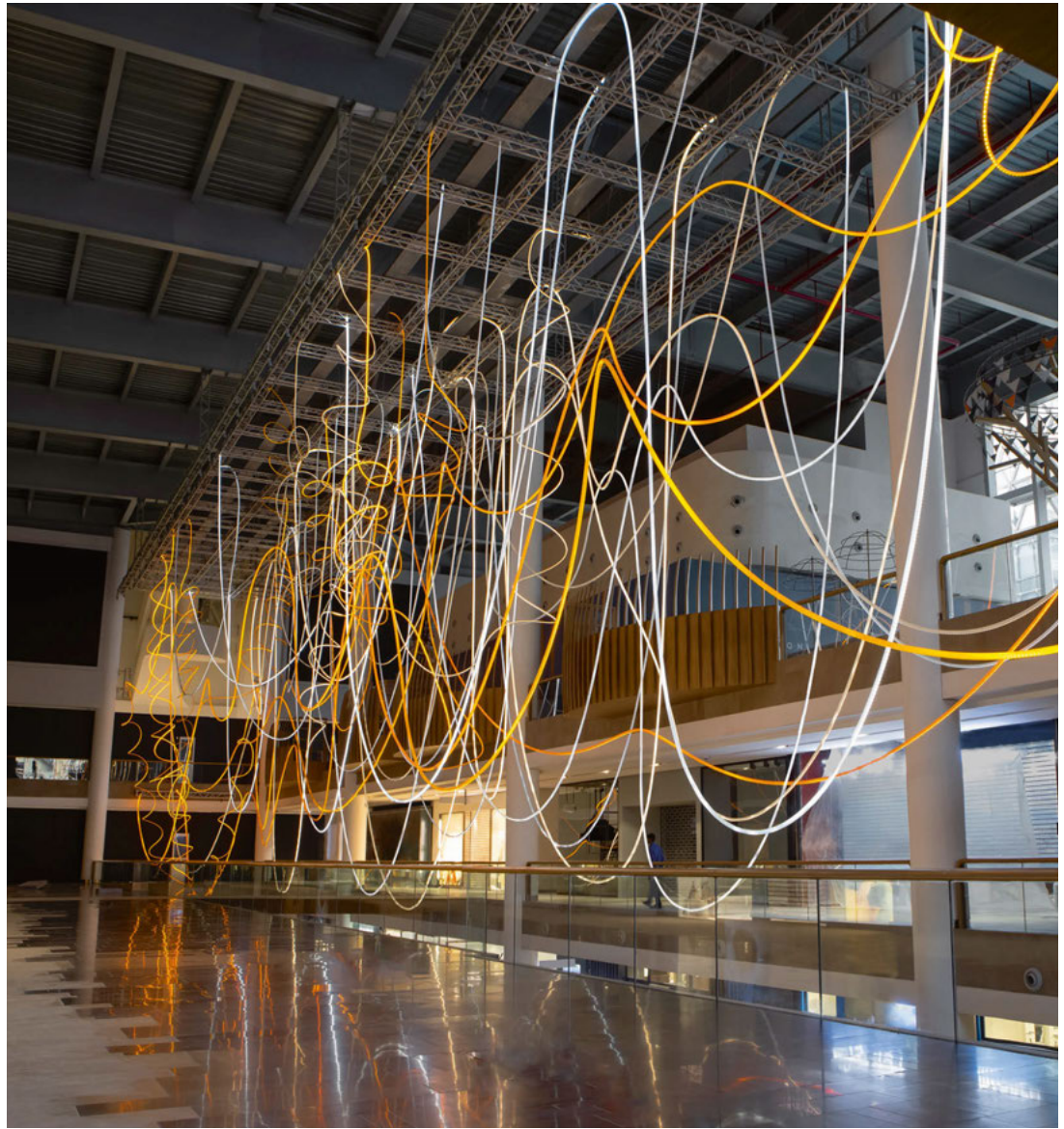
“At this moment in my life, I communicate my work with others through light, but I started with painting and drawing, and then I worked with handmade paper. As an artist, I have kept evolving, learning, and looking for new challenges. How can I inspire myself and push people beyond the boundaries of their initial reaction? To produce and create, I must fuel myself, which I do through travel and connecting with new places, cultures, and people. Presently, light is the medium that helps me best express myself.”



While Amorós has had a lifelong interest in art, whether through painting or light art, during her studies, she had a brief dalliance with psychology, studying full-time at university while working on her art.

“I was studying during the day, then going home and painting until midnight, so it was quite an intense life,” she recalled. But it was another mantra that inspired her to focus fully on her art. “I always talk about LPP, which stands for Love, Passion, and Perseverance. I knew that I could never give up on being an artist – it was in my DNA, who I was and am. When I was 21, I had to decide where my life would go; either I pursue a career that I didn’t love or have passion for or focus on what my heart truly sought, to be an artist. I decided to be an artist and left psychology three months before graduating. As you can imagine, my father was not so happy, but I firmly believe we must follow our hearts and ambition. So, I left psychology and, with my two bags and many dreams, moved to New York City.”





Golden Array, Mumbai, India, 2021

However, while she left psychology behind to focus fully on her art, Amorós believes that her studies impacted how she approaches her work: "I believe that it helped me to be objective when creating," she explained. "It allowed me to focus on not just creating my vision but a universal one. When you see the work that I did 20 years ago, it still looks current. You can't put a time or date to it; psychology has helped me understand longevity and humanity."

A core facet of Amorós' approach is how her pieces sit within their surroundings and local cultures, especially given the global reach of her work. Amorós explained how she ensures that each installation is in keeping with its locale: "When a project commences, it begins with a conversation. Then, I do research and development – curiosity has always been a part of my being. I love learning about the architecture of a site, the country's history, and the city. I like to know about the surrounding community. I do a very deep analysis and then ask myself, 'how I can make a piece that will be challenging, different, and that will embrace the local community.' I then sketch many drawings that interconnect and incorporate architecture, the viewer, and the piece."

Within this approach, she has reached a unique artistic style, where each piece is instantly recognisable as a Grimanesa Amorós installation. Again, this came as the result of research and an

examination of the wider art world. She explained: "As an artist, you must be informed about what is happening and be present. For instance, the goal is to find a visual language that represents you. You might think you're creative and innovative, but then you discover somebody else is doing something similar. You have to stay fresh and create in a way that is defined as you."

"I think the general responsibility of an artist is to be very well informed. It is important to be in tune with yourself – what is your message? How do you want the viewer to approach your work? How could you do something different for humanity?"

Across her career, Amorós has created a vast array of installations and sculptures worldwide, varying greatly in size and scale. Looking back on her portfolio, she struggled to pick a landmark, or standout piece, instead believing that each work "has its moment." "The most noteworthy is the latest, but each has an important place, they all have different attributes that make them stand out, but with each piece, we keep on evolving."

In this instance, her latest piece, *Amplexus*, is one of her largest works. Spanning more than 100ft in size, the piece was commissioned for the 2022 Noor Riyadh festival, taking over the city's Cultural Palace in the Diplomatic Quarter. As with previous works, Amorós sought to place the sculpture firmly within its environs, considering the local cultures and reflecting the city onto itself.