



Light Flowers,
Dnipro, Ukraine.

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PROFILE

Art and Light in Ukraine

After a brief interruption, Mykola Kabluka and his team at Ukraine-based Expolight are once again finding a way forward with light.

Alessia H. Kirkland

In February 2022, one week before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian government asked each city to display the country's flag as a show of unity. Mykola Kabluka and his team at Expolight, a Ukraine-based architectural lighting company, provided a perfect light-themed contribution for their home city of Dnipro, Ukraine. They would update the colors of the laser beams emanating from Expolight's *Light Flowers* art installation to the blue and yellow of the Ukrainian flag—creating the largest display in the country, visible across the night sky.

Kabluka designed *Light Flowers* for Dnipro as a visual representation of the city's shift from its industrial past to a post-industrial technology center. To create the flowers made of light, the Expolight team covered five idle factory chimney pipes with 2500-pixel lights and installed 60-W lasers on top, all with changeable colors controlled through wireless synchronization.

"Even though Dnipro is no longer an industrial city, the chimneys remain as a symbol of what once gave impetus to the region," says Kabluka. "But now, instead

of smoke and dirt, the old factory chimneys emit laser lights that bloom into huge flowers every evening, transforming the visual association for Dnipro to one of light and technology.”

Inspired by light

As a child, Kabluka noticed how the world around him seemed to change with the time of day. The buildings and trees were the same, but his impression of reality was completely different depending on whether it was morning, day or night. He realized that the only change was the lighting. For Kabluka, “the world had become a completely different place—even the actual size and depth of space seemed completely different.”

This realization of light’s changeable nature led Kabluka to his understanding that “light is the perfect tool to create form and form space.” By managing artificial light, or by managing interaction with natural light, he could build a new physical reality, similar to what an architect does with building materials.



Mykola Kabluka

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“ Light is the perfect tool to create form and form space. ”

—Mykola Kabluka

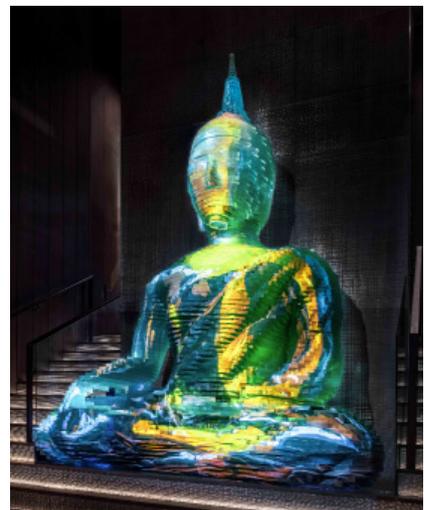
Architects of light

In 2000, Kabluka founded the architectural lighting company Expolight to help bring his concepts to life.

Since then, Expolight has grown to a team of 50 and completed more than 1,500 projects, both in Ukraine and internationally.

For one recent project, the 2021 design of the Buddha Bar in Manhattan, NY, USA, Kabluka collaborated with YOD Design Lab, a Ukraine-based architecture firm, to produce a complex lighting design system to enhance the ephemeral atmosphere of the space. The team installed diffused lighting throughout to emphasize the mysticism of the darkness, rather than erase it. At the center, they placed a 14.5-m-tall statue of Buddha. Formed from 245 layers of semi-transparent, solid-glass slabs and weighing 13.5 tons, the Buddha gives the illusion of being both solid and transparent at the same time.

The Buddha’s magic is the result of multiple light sources. Radiating light from within creates an aura effect that emphasizes the layering of the structure. And multiple lasers hidden in the trees facing the Buddha project light onto its surface, creating a 3D holographic effect.



The 2021 design for the Buddha Bar in Manhattan, NY, USA, a collaboration between Expolight and YOD Design Lab, features a 14.5-m-tall, solid-glass statue of Buddha that gives the illusion of being both solid and transparent at the same time.

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Left: Mariupol Freedom Square in 2020, filled with visitors and families enjoying a laser light show created by Expolight. Right: View from Freedom Square after nearby apartments were heavily damaged on 18 April 2022 during the Russia-Ukraine war.

Left: © Expolight / Right: Reuters, A. Ermochenko

Moved by light

Another project that holds special meaning for Kabluka is the laser light installation Expolight created for Freedom Square in Mariupol, Ukraine. For this project in an eastern region central to the conflict with Russia, in addition to combining architectural lighting design with laser technology, Kabluka included symbolic content highlighting the unity of Ukraine.

Along the perimeter of the square, 25 decorative supports in the shape of doves symbolize the

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—Mykola Kabluka

regions of Ukraine. The doves contain lasers that project flowers onto the square, which transform into

the contours of the 25 regions of Ukraine and then unite into a single image of the country.

Lighting the way forward

When the conflict with Russia began in February 2022, Expolight, like many businesses in Ukraine, had to cease work. Within a few months, Kabluka and his team were able to start working again, however, remotely.

One project the team has completed since reopening is the lighting for the Emily Resort in Lviv, Ukraine. The hotel is set in a forest by a lake, 70 miles from the Polish border. To light the extensive grounds of the complex without disturbing the beautiful natural setting, the Expolight team created custom caustic lenses.

Thinking about what the future holds, Kabluka says, “Ukrainians are very strong people. We do not panic. We adapt to the situation and we trust that light will always win over darkness.” **OPN**

Alessia H. Kirkland is OPN’s creative director.



A recent Expolight project, completed in the spring of 2022, illuminates the extensive grounds of the Emily Resort in Lviv, Ukraine, with minimal disturbance to its surroundings.

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View additional projects at expolight.net or follow on Instagram at [mykolakabluka](https://www.instagram.com/mykolakabluka).