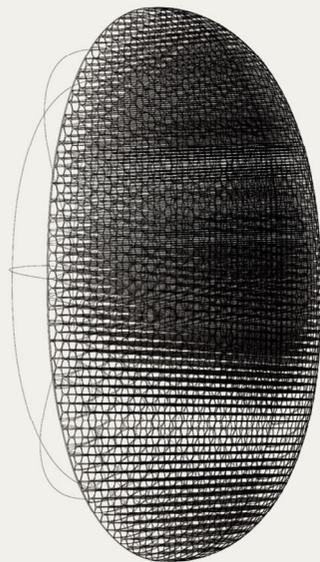


The ever-changing sky in Mathieu Lehanneur's meditative object, *Tomorrow Is Another Day*, is meant to give terminal patients relief at the end of life.

Words **Chris Scott**
Photos **courtesy of Mathieu Lehanneur**

The Sheltering Sky



1 An early line drawing shows the honeycomb structure of *Tomorrow Is Another Day*. At this stage Lehanneur was considering an object that would display the time and place selected, such as: London, tomorrow.



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The origins of *Tomorrow Is Another Day* can be traced to 2009, the year in which Dr Gilbert Desfosses suggested commissioning an artist to create a work for the palliative care unit of the Diaconesses Croix Saint Simon Hospital in Paris. What the department head had in mind was something that would offer solace to terminal patients and their families during the difficult period leading to inevitable death.

Desfosses could not have realized the project he had in mind without the financial support of La Fondation de France, an organization that sponsors initiatives with a focus on the needs of people and on problems that arise from the rapid development of modern society. As a financial partner of the New Patrons programme, the foundation enables people to approach artists, designers and architects with their concerns through mediators – in this case, Jérôme Poggi, founder and director of *Objet de Production*. Finding the right person to meet Desfosses' challenge was not easy, but during preliminary discussions Poggi mentioned the name of French designer Mathieu Lehanneur.

Known for pushing design beyond conventional boundaries, Lehanneur turned out

to be an excellent choice. When approached he did not hesitate, but he did ask for time to reflect on the humanistic, holistic and practical aspects of the undertaking. How could a piece of art or design offer solace and a sense of strength to terminal patients in the last days of their lives? What might 'work' for patients and grieving families immersed in an atmosphere of sorrow? How could he inject a spark of life into a place where talk of the future is difficult? Could he come up with an appropriate theme, one that might stimulate conversation? So many troublesome questions.

In the end, Lehanneur responded by 'talking about the weather' and, more specifically, the impermanent nature of 'tomorrow's weather'. He embraced the idea of being one step ahead of death and explained his concept with these words: 'Perhaps I will not be there tomorrow, but I know what tomorrow will look like.' Six months after accepting the commission and asking for a period of contemplation, the designer presented his concept for *Tomorrow Is Another Day*, a meditative object to be installed in every patient's room. The object, says Lehanneur, ...

The object on the wall of a room at the Diaconesses Croix Saint Simon Hospital in Paris.
Photo Véronique Huygue

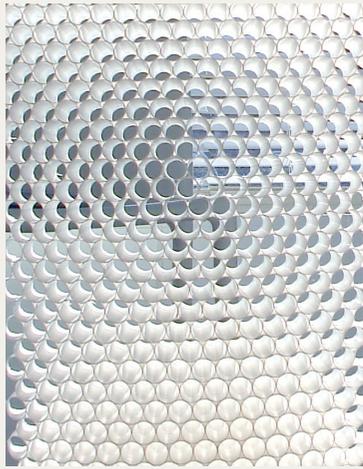


Tomorrow Is Another Day

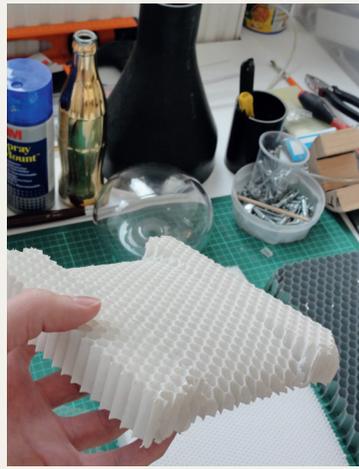
Process

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**How to offer solace
to terminal patients
in the last days of
their lives?**



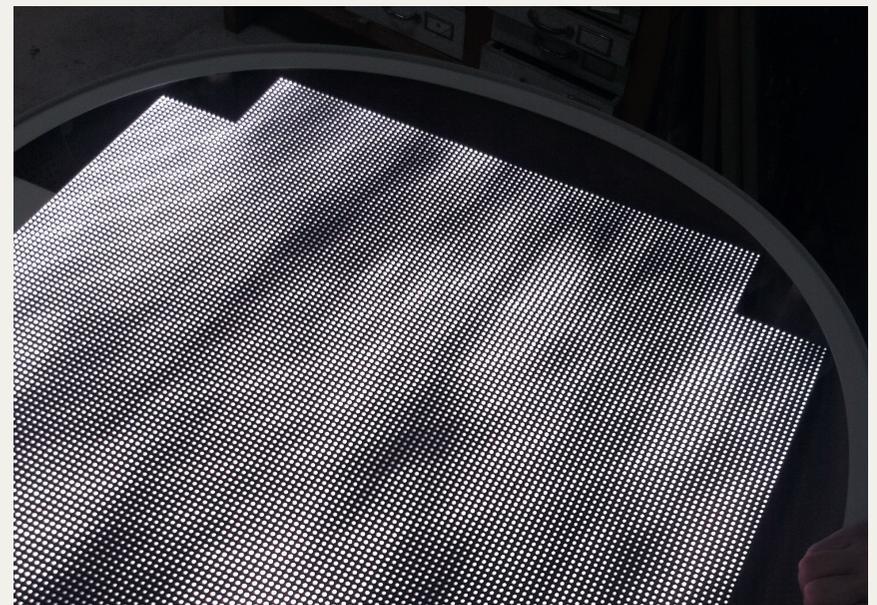
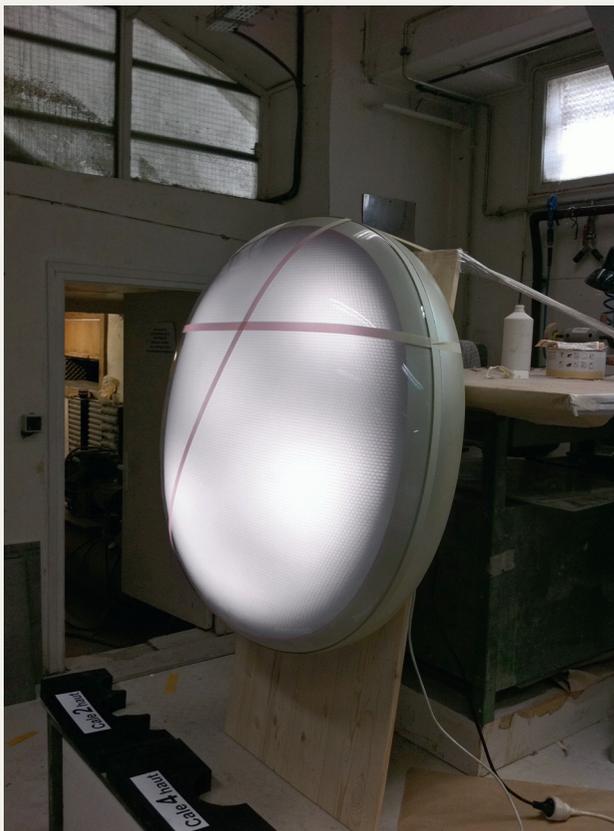
2 A close-up of the German-made polycarbonate honeycomb. Size and transparency were important factors in choosing the material.



3 Sample showing an early test of the milling process that produced the concave shape of the honeycomb structure.

An ever-changing sky 'circumvents the question of the time remaining'

4 A prototype of Tomorrow Is Another Day is tested at the Euromodel workshop.



5 The LED screen, without the honeycomb structure in place, displays an early version of a cloudy sky.

... 'circumvents the question of the time remaining' by displaying an ever-changing sky. Tomorrow's sky.

The hospital's immediate acceptance of Lehanneur's poetically sensitive proposal meant no persuasion was needed. The concept subtly addressed a question often posed in the palliative care unit, a query relevant to everyone involved: How much time? Taking note of a couple of minor stipulations – don't make a repetitive loop, don't make just another TV screen – Lehanneur said, '*Bien-sur, c'est évident, on-y-va.*' ('Of course, that's logical, let's get going.')

Thus began the development of the complex design, with Lehanneur coordinating all aspects of the project to keep things as simple as possible. He collaborated with Frédéric Mauclere, with whom he'd worked previously, on the electronics and computing. All displays are based on actual weather conditions, so they needed software that would retrieve real-time meteorological information for use in generating animated images.

Because the project team was small and the assignment so complicated, it took a year and a half to get the technology right. They collected data on the appearance of the sky in all kinds of weather, taking into consideration geographical situation, time of day, cloud transparency, luminance, et cetera. One of the biggest problems was the (un)reliability of the meteorological sites they visited, some of which were 'here today, gone tomorrow'. The initial plan – to connect to only one site – proved to be impractical. The platform they ultimately created gathers information from up to 15 sites. If one disappears, another takes over.

The idea was to have patients or staff select the sky of their choice – sunny, cloudy, morning, night – and the location of their choice, anywhere in the world. The options had to be infinite, allowing the mind to wander. To make the object user-friendly, they needed an interface that was easy to understand, so they

6 The faceted back of the object allows it to be mounted in different positions, adapting to room size and surroundings. A polycarbonate lens on the front protects the honeycomb, and heat from the LEDs dissipates thanks to perforated metal fins. Power supply and network cables are integrated into the walls of the rooms.



developed an app for the hospital that works by tapping in room number, desired location, type of sky and start.

It goes without saying that a lot of testing was required. For the many trial runs he anticipated, Lehanneur joined forces with the model-makers at Euromodel, a company conveniently based just outside Paris. Euromodel realized a round shell, 96 cm in diameter and 35 cm deep, in fibreglass resin. The shell holds the computing elements and the RGB LED screen. Transparent honeycomb polycarbonate – manufactured in Germany, milled into a concave shape and fitted over the LED screen – diffuses the light emitted. The result is an impressionistic image. Finally, a large acrylic lens protects the honeycomb and forms a seal to comply with hospital regulations on cleanliness and hygiene. The back of the shell is multifaceted, permitting the object to be mounted in different positions according to room size and surroundings.

A major issue that threatened the project during development was financial. Solutions to the difficulties encountered demanded considerable funding, and the suggestion was made to fabricate only one piece, for the hospital's reception area. Lehanneur refused to accept this compromise. He was adamant that every room have its own *Tomorrow Is Another Day*: 'If we don't have the money, we'll find the money.' A feeling shared by the whole team.

At the end of a three-week search, additional funding was found. Carpenters Workshop Gallery Paris, with whom Lehanneur often works, played an important role. Normally involved only in completed works of art, Carpenters Workshop displayed a prototype of the design in an attempt to find buyers for a limited edition of Lehanneur's installation. The proceeds aided completion of the project.

Tomorrow Is Another Day is a synthesis of technology, medicine, science, art and spirituality. Enthusiastic about the definitive object, Lehanneur envisions his work functioning on multiple therapeutic levels. To Desfosses' explanation about research in palliative care indicating that 'more and larger windows prolong patients' lives', the designer replies: 'I can only hope to add another window.' _

mathieulehanneur.fr



7 Press image of the prototype on display at Carpenters Workshop Gallery Paris. This early version was 1.5 times larger than the one ultimately used at the hospital. Photos Felipe Ribon