



## ERCO LED lighting tools for glamorous exhibition design: the Yves Saint Laurent Museum in Marrakesh

The recently inaugurated Yves Saint Laurent Museum in Marrakesh presents itself as a veritable jewel of contemporary museum architecture. The interior of the monolithic brickwork construction designed by Studio KO surprises with its dramatic exhibition concept referencing the theatre and stage. ERCO LED lighting technology installed in a walk-in black box enables the tones and textures of the iconic haute couture models of Yves Saint Laurent blossom.

### Project data

Project:	Musée Yves Saint Laurent, Marrakesh / Morocco
Client:	La Fondation Pierre Bergé – Yves Saint Laurent, Paris / France
Architecture:	Studio KO, Paris / France
Scenography & exhibition design:	Christophe Martin, Paris / France
Lighting design:	I.C.O.N. – Akari-Lisa Ishii, Paris / France
Lighting techniques for scenography:	Sébastien Debant
Photography:	Christian Schaulin, Hamburg / Germany

Outside: flickering heat below the sun of North Africa that illuminates the brick facade of the new museum building in the Rue Yves Saint Laurent in a warm, pink glow. Marrakesh, located in the south-west of Morocco, is famous for its houses painted in all possible tones of pink, red and terracotta. The exterior of the long, low building complex of the Yves Saint Laurent Museum pays homage to this typical colour palette with its terrazzo base and artistic brick facade, and also to the typically Arabian architectural tradition of shielding the interior from the road. In the relief-like facade, the architects from Studio KO celebrate the complex plays of light and shadow below the southern sun. Inside: an exhibition space completely in black – a black box that accommodates the key works of the creative genius Yves Saint Laurent and a scenographic concept that celebrates the opulence and diversity of the haute couture designs of the

fashion designer who passed away in 2008, and was one of the most influential couturiers of the 20th century. Fifty selected robes, skilfully illuminated, confront visitors to the pitch-black darkness – clothed on mannequins assuming the appearance of protagonists on a theatre stage.

The French architect and scenographer Christophe Martin who designed the exhibition of the new museum was personally acquainted with Yves Saint Laurent. In 2005 Martin designed the first exhibition (dedicated to the famous first trouser suit for ladies, "le smoking", from 1967) as well as around 15 further exhibition projects commissioned by the fashion designer and his partner Pierre Bergé. With the presentation in the Yves Saint Laurent Museum in Marrakesh, he provides an extensive insight into the life and work of the couturier who came to Morocco for the first

time in 1966 with his life partner and business partner Pierre Bergé, and who also decided spontaneously to purchase a house in this city. The "red town" became his home away from home in Paris – and his most important source of inspiration. Christophe Martin purposefully intended not to present a classic retrospective. On the contrary, he sees the progress through the main exhibition space designed completely in black as resembling a trip through the mind and spirit of the creative genius – and exemplarily brings together selected iconographic models taken from four creative decades (1961 to 2002) along with jewellery and accessories to create an emotional, highly coloured and diverse display. Due to conservation reasons, different haute couture models from the Fondation Pierre Bergé collection of over 3,000 pieces are displayed at regular intervals. In this way the filigree beauties are not unnecessarily burdened in their exposure to the visitors and public at large. In terms of lighting and also due to conservation considerations, the decision was taken for LED technology. Akari-Lisa Ishii, the lighting designer who transformed Christophe Martin's scenographic concept into LED lighting tools from ERCO explains: "LEDs do not generate any heat or UV radiation, which is a very important aspect when illuminating sensitive and valuable textiles."

**With Optec contour spotlights, the crisp-edged illumination of exhibits creates a colour explosion in the black box**

Those entering the foyer of the museum from the road and through the slender corridor between brickwork walls and the entrance courtyard, flooded with sunlight and embellished with a six-foot YSL logo (effectively displayed by two beamer projectors following the onset of twilight), is guided to the right towards the main exhibition space. At

first glance visitors experience complete darkness. "This contrast between bright and dark and between the exterior and interior was an essential factor in designing this space," said Christophe Martin. "Detached from daylight and their surroundings, visitors find themselves here in a completely different universe – in the world of Yves Saint Laurent." As an eye-catcher in the entrance, the famous "Robe Mondrian" from 1965, accented with two Optec LED contour spotlights, appears to float towards the visitors from the depths of darkness. The dress with its geometry and colour design is akin to an exclamation mark within the black box. The 50 models exhibited on mannequins here are displayed in thematic groups that serve to illustrate the most important subjects of Saint Laurent's creative oeuvre. Textures, embroideries, flounces and the draped textile plies of the robes are crisply and three-dimensionally enhanced thanks to accented lighting from the Optec contour spotlights – even those of the black gowns on black backgrounds. This method of lighting that lends a sense of drama to the presentation hints at Christophe Martin's attachment to the world of theatre. Following his architectural studies, he worked for over 12 years in close cooperation with the renowned American director, theatre producer and video artist Robert Wilson on stage setting for the opera and theatre. High visual comfort is exceedingly important, not just for visitors to operas and theatres but also for museum visitors. The highly precise ERCO LED lighting technology enables such high levels of visual comfort within this exhibition and also avoids any form of glare. "For me, light is the most important building block in any scenography," explained Christophe Martin. "This perfect illumination of individual exhibits within an exhibition is essential for the impact of the complete presentation."

**Luminaires used in the project**



Optec

**Copies and links requested.**

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**About ERCO**

The ERCO Light Factory in the German town of Lüdenscheid is a leading international specialist in architectural lighting using LED technology. The family business, founded in 1934, now operates as a global player with independent sales organisations and partners in 55 countries worldwide. Since 2015 ERCO's portfolio has been 100% LED. With this in mind, ERCO in Lüdenscheid develops, designs and produces digital luminaires with focus on photometrics, electronics and design. Work-

ing closely with architects, lighting designers and engineers, ERCO develops lighting tools used primarily for applications in the following fields: Work, Shop, Culture, Community, Hospitality, Living, Public and Contemplation. ERCO understands digital light as the fourth dimension of architecture – providing highly precise and efficient lighting solutions to support creative designers in turning their visions into reality.

