



Swisscom – Pavilion at Expo



Winner of Best Live Event at the AV Awards, the 'Empire of Silence' attraction at the Expo in Switzerland was a visitor experience that engaged the audience directly in the importance of communication and expression.

Working for Live Communication and to the design of Steve Austen-Brown, we created a series of complete scenic environments, drawing visitors through a succession of 'chambers' to experience various levels of sensory deprivation. This was achieved with the select and precise use of audio, visuals and special effects. Live actors added a further dimension, guiding and encouraging visitor interaction and participation.

Each scenic 'environment' was created using a variety of construction techniques and involved our Scenic Solutions, Interpretation and Qmotion departments to varying degrees. The project as a whole included several striking scenic features, the most prominent of which were the oscillating bridge which led on to the giant sculpted mouth, based on Edvard Munch's painting 'The Scream'. Standing at 7m high, the 'Scream' mouth was sculpted from polystyrene and then secured around a steel armature before being coated with GRP to provide a durable finish. The oscillating bridge was powered by pneumatic rams and had the appearance of being suspended by huge industrial metal chains. These chains were in fact manufactured from MDF, filled, glued and linked together by hand before having a specialist paint finish applied. Not only did this eliminate the problem of excess weight, but it also reduced the cost to the client whilst looking extremely convincing.

Another area of the attraction, the 'Chamber of Decenders', involved a carefully timed show sequence with actors descending from the ceiling space while a 4m high futuristic 'machine' rotated and pulsated as part of an 'interactive' lighting show. We provided all the automation and show control elements for the attraction, designing and installing the system to provide precise synchronisation for visual, audio, lighting, scenic and mechanical effect cues. Our 'conductor' controlled not only our own cues, but also those of all the other contractors.



The greatest challenge for us proved to be logistics, with twenty-five 12m trailers delivering to site in Switzerland. The venue comprised of one enclosed space and as such, required a methodical approach to both delivery and manufacture. With limited access and no storage, all scenery had to be constructed as it was delivered, one trailer at a time, making the order in which each trailer was loaded crucial. For the duration of the three-month construction period, this approach fed right back to our workshops where rigorous production procedures enabled us to meet each individual trailer load date in turn, keeping to the extremely tight on-site schedule.

In many ways, this project encapsulates everything we do at Stage One. Throughout the three-month build, all areas of the company were involved, from engineering and metalwork to specialist paint finishes and detailed interpretation. The project drew on our different areas of expertise, utilised our in-house facilities across the board and involved us working closely with other contractors, namely lighting designer Andy Grant and audiovisual contractors Demensia Audio.

