



Seeing is believing at the Aavistus festival

Aavistus
FESTIVAL OF
AUDIOVISUAL
ART

"This is a project that we have dreamed about for many years," enthuses artistic director Merle Karp when talking about Aavistus, a festival of audiovisual art and Video Jockey (VJ) culture that celebrates and recognises the skills and talents of VJs globally. Although VJs create their own visual work, produce it and perform it, awareness of VJs among the general public is low, as they often perform their art in 'underground' scenes. When their work is displayed publically – such as at concerts and events – it's often overshadowed by the performing artist that their spectacular work has been created to support. While that dynamic is understandable, one of Aavistus' goals was to show that live visuals have the potential to have an even greater role in certain shows and events.

Welcome to the world of VJs

To raise the profile of VJs – and the public's appreciation of their talent and skills – the Aavistus Festival was established. Host to a line-up of local and international VJs, the festival showcases their skills via live audiovisual performances, installations and projection mapping, as well as workshops and a panel discussion to hear more about what motivates and inspires them when they are creating their work. The festival aimed to provide them with a high-profile platform to engage both their peers and the public, while promoting the VJ culture and securing its place as an important – if alternative – art form.

The first Aavistus event took place in early October 2020. One of the host venues was the Helsinki City Museum. Founded in 1911 at the corner of the Senate Square, the museum is in one of the oldest quarters of the city.

As the guardian of Helsinki's history, the museum provided an ideal contrast for showing the latest high-tech installations. The main event was held in The White Hall (Valkoinen Sali), and the remaining shows were held at WHS Teatteri Union, an old arthouse cinema and performing arts venue with a rich history.

A gathering of excellence

When the concept of the Aavistus festival was announced, it was met with considerable enthusiasm from VJs, as Merle explains: *"We had 60 applications from across five continents,"* a response that reflected the VJs' willingness to participate. The selection panel





chose the final 45 artists based on the artists' vision of the work they wanted to create for the festival. Merle added: *"They could propose a new idea or a concept they already had. To ensure the festival was as inclusive as possible, we encouraged new artists to take part and not just those who had artistic training or experience."*

it was imperative to show how funds were invested because the budget for the event was low. Despite that, the team was keen for the event to be as professional as possible. *"Because of this, it was important that we had partnerships to make the festival happen,"* Merle added, which is how the organisers came to engage with AV Marketing Finland, which is a presentation technology importer founded in 2009. The solutions it offers are primarily centred around AV equipment for use in public spaces and the accessories needed to install them. Its consumer offerings include solutions suited to home theatre applications.



Partnering with the best

The team was determined that everything they did operationally and from an organisational perspective was very collaborative and transparent. That included how the artists were chosen; given that the organisers are an independent, non-profit festival organisation,

Elisa Nurmi, sales manager, AV Marketing, stated why she was keen to participate and provide support for the event. *"We see that the future of projection is in art, and we wanted people to see what can be achieved with projectors outside of meeting rooms. In our opinion, there is a lot of potential in projection when it comes to city art, lighting and so on. Mapping and bigger images projected across the street are the future."*



We wanted to show our support for the young and creative people behind the event, as they are the ones that will make the future."

Vivitek's performance to remember

Given that the requirements of the festival and the space and room available at the Helsinki City Museum's and The White Hall's combined courtyard, the AV Marketing team recommended Vivitek projectors for this project. With the event devised to put the VJs' work in the best possible light, it was imperative that the festival was supported by the best technology, as Hannu Häkkinen, creator and head of technology, explains: *"To do justice to the artists' work, projection quality was essential. It had to be as good as it could be, otherwise it undermines their work and all the effort they put into it."*

As a leading manufacturer of visual display and presentation products, and offering projectors specifically designed for the most creative visual

experiences, Vivitek was the perfect choice for the festival's needs. The projectors selected – which included five DU3661Zs for the AV exhibition, two DU8195s with 0,73 -0,93:1 lenses for the projection mapping and a DU8190Z, a DU8193Z, a DU6871, and a DU6675, all with 3,58-5,38:1 lenses for the main event – all provide high brightness levels, exceptional image quality and can operate for many hours using high efficiency long life lamps, which makes them ideal for events like festivals.

The arrival of the projectors was a momentous occasion, as Merle observed: *"Normally, we look at things like lumens when thinking about projectors. We weren't too sure how many projectors we would receive. When these arrived, all we could think about was their weight; they arrived on a 200kg pallet!"*

The installation was carried out by the festival's technical team and volunteers, an active group of Finnish VJs that are behind many clubs, events





and festivals. The task that was completed in just one day and simplified further by the projectors' keystone correction feature, as Hannu explains: *"Keystone possibilities were great for tilting the projector and this is what you expect from a high end, quality projector."*

Once installed, and with the events underway, they VJs were able to demonstrate their skills. The work displayed internally saw VJs using a video mixer connected to the projector, while for the projection mapping, the artists' laptops were connected directly to the projectors.

The choice of projectors went down very well with the VJs, as Hannu added: *"Usually, other exhibitions tend to have mediocre AV devices that the VJs have to perform with. With our festival, we wanted to address this and with Vivitek devices, we knew this would be the best way to convey their work. Many of the VJs were surprised and impressed at how professional and high-end our audiovisual set up was."*

Safety in numbers

Of course, given that the festival happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, the organisers went to great lengths to ensure the safety of the VJs and the event's attendees. Hannu added: *"It was really important to organise the event even though we were faced with the pandemic. We felt that we still needed to provide the opportunity for*



VJs to perform and earn an income even during those difficult times. So we ensured that we did it according to the official rules and guidelines about COVID-19 safety. To that end, we needed to limit the capacity to half and so we provided live-streaming from the event and from the open panel discussions. We also provided masks for the audience, as health and safety was and is our top priority for everybody.” This safety-first mindset became a virtue as Merle adds: “There was a silver lining to the regulations that were in place at the time. Everyone had to be seated instead of walking, standing and dancing, to avoid people mixing. We got a lot of good feedback from our guests saying that they loved being able to just sit down and look at the show without distractions. I think that, as much as everything else, the festival was a great example of how to organise physical events in a responsible manner.”



A look to the future

There’s no doubt in Hannu’s mind about the role that the Vivitek projectors played in the success of the event. He cites four stand out qualities that were a contributing factor to the organiser’s, the VJs’ and the audience’s satisfaction with the work that was displayed.

“First, the ANSI lumens are very impressive. Second, the projectors offer really good contrast and image quality. Third, it’s really useful that they support multiple video inputs and finally, Vivitek offers a great variation of lenses.”

Such was the success of the festival, that even the museum was impressed: “They were really happy with the event, as it brought a new generation of visitors to the museum, who may not have thought to visit before. In fact, the festival weekend broke the museum’s visitor records for the whole year!” Hannu remarked.

Inspired by the great response to the event from VJs, the public and the museum, the team is already considering a follow up event in 2022. Will Vivitek projectors be part of that event, too? “For sure”, stated Merle enthusiastically.