

Natural light shows in the laboratory: Auguste de la Rive's apparatuses for reproducing polar auroras - Spettacoli naturali in laboratorio: gli apparati di Auguste de la Rive per riprodurre le aurore polari

Wednesday, 14 December 2022 15:00 (20 minutes)

This talk comes from a discussion I had with Paolo Brenni many years ago. Between 1849 and 1862, the Geneva physicist Auguste de la Rive (1801-1873) developed his explanatory theoretical model concerning the functioning mechanism of the Northern and Southern Lights. To support his theoretical ideas, de la Rive devised two spectacular scientific apparatuses whose function was to visually reproduce, on a small scale, the movements and multiform colours of auroras on a large scale. The first apparatus of 1849 was an ingenious modification of the electric egg, better known as the philosophical egg. It had good commercial success throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The second, more sophisticated apparatus, devised in 1862, had little commercial success; today, only a few specimens are known worldwide.

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