

Nuit Blanche: 10 picks for Ottawa's long night of art



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A detail from Super Phat Nish starring in Phat(asia), by Barry Ace, in Disney Made Me Do It! at Nuit Blanche 2014.

To predict the highlights of Nuit Blanche is like trying to recognize faces through a foggy window. Some seem intriguing and some vaguely familiar, but, really, one can only make a best guess.

The third Nuit Blanche Ottawa-Gatineau festival of art on the streets begins at sunset Saturday and continues to sunrise, or until everyone goes home. There should be large crowds — last year's NBOG was a huge success despite almost constant rain. The theme given this year to the hundreds of artists involved in dozens of installations and performances is Bypass. The art can't be seen until Saturday night, so in advance there's little more than a few sentences of often-opaque description. Yet some ideas sound promising, and some artists had successes at the city's past two Nuits Blanche that bode well for more good things this year. Here are 10 installations that caught my eye as I pored over the program and website.

Gravity: The Space Between Us: Consider the “laws of attraction” that govern the universe. Artist Alejandra Vera, engineer Michael Rockwood and video producer Helena Escallón have created an app which, when downloaded, will guide you through a crowded dance floor, while encouraging you to chart your own course. The idea is to consider the spaces between us all, and our propinquity to one another. It'll be in the underpass at Rideau & Sussex.



'Piece Tower,' a temporary, downtown campground to be built by Michael M. Simon for Nuit Blanche Ottawa-Gatineau.

Piece Tower: Installation artist Michael M. Simon will use “scaffolding, vegetation and platforms” to build a “multi-level, inhabited vertical campground” on an “underused site.” It’s a co-project with Ottawa Architecture Week, and it seems likely to prod people into thinking about our relationship with architecture, and how we use our urban spaces. 700 Sussex Dr.

Sentinels: Ottawa video artist Bear Witness travels the world as one of the aboriginal DJs in A Tribe Called Red. His video productions incorporate “stereotypical representations of Aboriginal people found in popular culture,” and, alas, there’s no shortage of such demeaning clips for him to choose from. Sentinels will be projected onto a large wall and “confront you and leave you with no option for detour,” says the Nuit Blanche program. It’ll be part of the multi-event program centred around the Ottawa Art Gallery and Arts Court, 2 Daly Ave.

Also at Arts Court, in SAW Gallery, young aboriginal DJs and VJs who have workshopped with A Tribe Called Red will perform (6 to 8 p.m.)

Disney Made Me Do It! Visual artists “reflect their own understanding of the lasting impact of Disney’s animation on visual culture.” The lineup of artists is strong — Barry Ace, Danny Hussey, Christopher Rohde, Guillermo Trejo, Alison Smith-Welsh, Michael Zavacky, Barbara Ochman, Phil Osbourne and Rah. The exhibition is part of the Ottawa International Animation Festival. Arts Court Library, 2 Daly Ave.



Still from Bodies of Water, by Cheryl Pagurek for Nuit Blanche Ottawa Gatineau, on Sept. 20.

Navigate: Cheryl Pagurek's public-art installation, *Currents*, is seen daily by thousands of commuters at the Market Place transit station in Barrhaven. For Nuit Blanche, she'll project on an exterior wall a video of human figures made of water, with music that evokes the movement of water and walking. Like her other work it should be contemplative, and perhaps even mesmerizing. 60 George St., in the ByWard Pedestrian Zone.



Detail from Portage, by Christopher Griffin at Nuit Blanche 2014. (Photo by Paul Couvrette.)

Portage(s): The most literal interpretation of the Bypass theme may be two installations that mark the city's history as a portage. Details of Christopher Griffin's Portage are scarce, but his Super Nova installation at Nuit Blanche 2013 was a huge hit with the crowds. Griffin will be at 60 George in the ByWard Pedestrian Zone. Meanwhile, artists Reid McLachlan and Becky Mason's installation The Portage will have a multi-media, interactive installation onto which passersby are encouraged to add their words and images. It'll be at Cube Gallery, 1285 Wellington W.

On Air: Geneviève Thauvette has been a star of NBOG, and she's back with something unsettling. You can sit in an airplane-like cabin and seat while watching crash scenes that are typically deleted from in-flight movies, all to a soundtrack of air-traffic controllers dealing with emergencies. Not the place for you if you have a fear of flying — or perhaps it is. The thing about art is, you never know until you see it.

Ottawa's Kitimat: Last year Lori Victor, who is adept at the quiet provocation, had more than 100 small embroideries of derogatory synonyms for "woman." This time out, her "long, rhythmic geometric snake-like structure" will hang over head and wind through various rooms, representing a natural-gas pipeline that would "bypass" central Ottawa. Victor will be one of numerous artists exhibiting in the Rectory Art House at 179 Murray.

Short Cuts: With all that art about, it's only fitting that you have the opportunity to see some being made. Throughout the night the Montreal-based collaborative En Masse will create a wall-sized, black-and-white drawing inside the cozy gallery that is PDA Projects. Artists from various media — "graffiti, comics, illustration, tattoo, street art, protest arts, etc" — will demonstrate that "different points of view are strengths, not weaknesses," says the PDA website. 361 Elgin St., in the Lieutenant's Pump plaza.

Urban Fashion Show: This could turn out to be just another fashion show, or it could be more. Several designers will debut their new collections on models who will walk not on a runway, but on the streets and courtyards of downtown Gatineau. Whippet-thin models with their pouty mouths and exaggerated gaits should be a curious sight on city streets. It's one of several installations or performances to be in or around the Jacques-Auger Cultural Centre, 39 rue Leduc.

Nuit Blanche Ottawa-Gatineau

When & where: Sunset Saturday, Sept. 20 to sunrise, throughout central Ottawa and Gatineau.

More: Download Nuit Blanche maps and other information at nbog.ca.