



We're going to stay up all night

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From Saturday's Globe and Mail

Published Saturday, Sep. 29, 2007 12:00AM EDT

Last updated Saturday, Mar. 14, 2009 1:09AM EDT

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"This is now or never. If you miss it, it's gone."

Jenn Goodwin is the programming supervisor of Nuit Blanche, the one-night-only, all-night visual-arts event that will convulse Toronto tonight from dusk until dawn, and she was extolling the ephemeral pleasures of the night to come.

Seated around our table at the Queen Mother Café were the five key creative people - all women, as it turns out - who are charged with developing the commissioned art projects. I got the distinct feeling that lunches like these were an aberration in their otherwise luge-like schedule. Nuit Blanche was continuing to morph as we spoke. The rumbling of vibrating cellphones could be heard below the table. It was D-day minus seven.

Notwithstanding all this, the atmosphere was surprisingly calm, and with good reason. The event has generated enormous popular support in the city. Last year was the first year for Nuit Blanche in Toronto - the event has incarnations also in Paris (where it was launched in 2002), Madrid, Rome, Brussels and Riga - and it was a spectacular success, drawing some 450,000 souls out of their urban hibernation to roam the streets and celebrate art together. Some of that art was pretty sketchy, some of it was brilliant, but for many of us the crowd seemed like the best part of the show: rambunctious, incandescent and full of surprises.

This spring, however, it looked as if Nuit Blanche might hit the skids, due to a combination of sponsorship wobbles and a generalized failure to seize the bullet down at Toronto City Hall, which backs the event with a \$1-million grant.

But the city coughed up, Scotiabank likewise (kicking in about \$300,000 plus in-kind support), and now it's just a case of tying up the last-minute details and bringing the thing to life.

Around the table sit the three freelance curators selected and hired by the city to commission this year's projects - Rhonda Corvese, Camilla Singh and Michelle Jacques - as well as Ms. Goodwin's City Hall colleagues Aretha Phillip, who is overseeing the independent projects generated by Toronto's various art galleries and museums, and Carole Boughannam, the head programming manager, who learned about Nuit Blanche three years ago while on a trip to Paris and brought its heady pollen back to Toronto.

But who does what, exactly? I had to push Ms. Goodwin for her job title. "I don't worry too much about job description," said the dancer and choreographer turned curator-in-chief. "There are a lot of us here making it happen." I started to feel as if I had walked in on some sort of communal quilting bee, with a distinctly edgy urban flavour. I had come here to ask them what to do on the night of Sept. 29, but the answer was not going to be simple.

"No one can see it all. It's impossible," Ms. Goodwin said. "There are more than 150 projects this year." Instead of establishing a Top 10 to-do list, then, I found myself submerged in a meandering tour of possibilities, with lots of little byways and possibly fruitful dead ends, places where you could stumble over something wonderful and stay all night.

What stands out about Nuit Blanche is its complex, non-

hierarchical and organic nature - a kind of anti-Luminato. This is a night when art forces its way through the cracks in the pavement to flourish under the glow of the streetlights. Blink and you'll miss it.

ZONE A: THE SLEEP OF REASON PRODUCES MONSTERS

"It came out of the artists," said Ms. Corvese, who organized the projects in the Bloor-Yorkville area and environs. With no particular curatorial axe to grind, she went to the artists whose works she most enjoys and discovered a commonality to their concerns. "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" riffs on the visions of Goya. "Alienation, fear and potential danger" are in the wind. "Sometimes the unknown is frightening," she said, stirring her salad, "and sometimes it is a fantasy." The artists in her Bloor-Yorkville area will explore both ends of the spectrum, from dread to delight.

On the dark side, Willie Doherty, from Northern Ireland, is showing *Non-Specific Threat* (2004), a slow-panning 360-degree shot of an ominous-looking bald man standing alone in a warehouse. (A prisoner? A terrorist?) We hear his internal monologue, saying things like, "You think you know me. I am unknowable," and we are left puzzling over whose side he's on, or wondering if he is a harbinger of good or evil. He's more like a generic piece of human ammunition, ready to explode. The piece

continues Mr. Doherty's now long-standing investigations into the climate of fear in his homeland and elsewhere around the globe. (The piece will be shown at the Burano condo development site, at 832 Bay at Grenville.)

Ms. Corvese is a master of the sly intervention. (Her project last year with the artist Iris Haussler, *The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach* - an installation that simulated the home studio of a make-believe artist in exile - was last year's underground art sensation in the city.) At Nuit Blanche, she continues to indulge her taste for trickery. *Event Horizon* by Toronto couple Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins promises to be another glorious hoax, an "intergalactic miracle" at King's College Circle at the University of Toronto. Look for sirens, emergency vehicles and smoke and, quite possibly, signs of intelligent life from afar within a tent pitched for the occasion.

The folks at CIUT (85.9 FM) are extending the motif of the fake-out by airing *The Airborne Toxic Event*, by Tasman Richardson and Elenore Chesnutt. And Kristan Horton, one of the city's rising stars, is creating *Crowd*, an installation of light and sound on the south lawn of Queen's Park that evokes extraterrestrial visitation and the dynamics of mass fear.

If it's visitations from the afterlife you're seeking, however, you might want to descend to the lower echelons of the Cumberland-Bellair entrance of the Bay subway, where *Ghost Station* (by artist Kristen Roos from B.C.'s Cortes Island) will summon spirits by turbo-charging the soundscape of the urban underground.

Romanian artist Mircae Cantor presents another kind of apparition with *Deeparture* (2005), a video of a wolf and a deer sharing a pristine white gallery space. The piece, which records an unpredictable encounter between predator and prey, will be presented at Isabel Bader Theatre on Charles Street throughout the night.

Between venues, Bloor-Yorkville pedestrians can encounter choreographer Barbara Lindenberg's street performance *HT*. Six dancers perform with their heads stuck together, their tightly synchronized movements suggesting themes of "independence/dependence, communication, proximity, intimacy, affection, discomfort and co-operation." If you're lucky enough to catch it, the piece will likely read as a metaphor for collaboration and group play. Is this the perfect mascot for Nuit Blanche?

ZONE B: AT THE CORNER

OF TIME AND SPACE

The area around Dundas and McCaul is the domain of Michelle Jacques, assistant curator of contemporary art at the Art Gallery of Ontario (site of a DJ'd End of the Party Party). This neighbourhood is both where Ms. Jacques works, and part of the city that she remembers from her childhood.

Her vision for Nuit Blanche, titled "At the Corner of Time and Space," is all about memory. "This is a neighbourhood built up of many different cultural groups moving in, one after the other," she said.

Originally a prosperous Anglo-Canadian settlement, it became the home to many abolitionists and black American immigrants who came to Canada via the Underground Railroad. Casting her mind back to the Sixties, Ms. Jacques said, "When my parents moved here from Grenada, Kensington Market was the place where you could find food. The Jewish market here was the next best thing to home, so the Jewish community and the Caribbean communities became these odd bedfellows."

The Asian diaspora came too, and Millie Chen's installation, *Watcher*, speaks to that reality. Ms. Chen will be occupying a series of houses on D'Arcy Street, two of which she lived in as a child, installing video works in the windows that hint at narratives from her past as well as imagined stories. At George Brown House, Montreal's Hannah Claus will be showing *Where There Are Trees Standing in the Water*, light projections that marry William Morris designs with Iroquois beading. Toronto's Vessna Perunovich is also suggesting themes of cultural hybridity with *Midnight Mirage*, a rotating Last Supper of Serbian bread and beans in the parking lot of the Anne Tanenbaum Gallery School at 60 McCaul. (The audience is invited to pull up a chair and become one with the apostles.)

Meanwhile, Johanna Billing's poignant video projection *Magical World* will show at the First Baptist Church on Huron Street, in which children in Zagreb, Croatia, perform in English a civil-rights song from 1968 written by black American singer Sidney Barnes.

Finally, at the Rex Hotel, Montrealer Adad Hannah is showing a series of video "stills" (moving images shot at the Rex of performers holding stationary poses), including Kristan Horton and his girlfriend engaged in a seven-minute "freeze-frame" kiss. In all these pieces, the past is made miraculously present in the here and now.

ZONE C: SUPERNATURAL CITY

Down on Queen Street West, it's Camilla Singh's vision that will prevail, and there's more fantasy on the menu. This is not inconsistent with the work she does in her day job as curator at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, where she stages freewheeling exhibitions that are long on imagination. "I felt a bit like a kid picturing all these unreasonable things," she said over lunch, describing to me how she walked the streets daydreaming about possibilities. "It's been amazing to be able to think outside the white box."

"Supernatural City," as her press materials suggest, "invites us to cross thresholds, to explore the unseen, the unknown, and to welcome that which is revealed in dreams ..." And entices us to stay up way, way past our bedtimes.

The show-stopper will undoubtedly be *Locust*, a 50-metre-long inflatable bright green bug created by Japanese artists Noboru Tsubaki and Hishashi Muroi. The creature will be tethered to the turf, Gulliver-style, at Lamport Stadium. *White Line Light*, a sound and light work (with drugged-out overtones and jet-set chic) by German artists Carsten Nicolai and Olaf Bender, should also offer an edgier taste of altered consciousness (at the Old Police Station on Strachan Avenue).

In *Femmebomb*, Janet Morton has wrapped the Beatrice Lillie Health Centre on Queen Street with pink fabric, snow fencing, insulation foam and industrial Velcro; and, at 2 a.m., Rachel E. McRae

will present an edible wild stag made out of chocolate for communal consumption in Trinity Bellwoods Park as part of *Abomasum*.

How to handle that cocoa-induced head rush? Why not blow it out at Insomnosonic, the all-night dance party at the Works & Emergency Services Building on King Street. The lineup of bands moves from conventional rock 'n' roll (Kids on TV and Nifty) to the deeply spaced out (Wyrd Visions and Nadja). No doubt the crowd will do likewise as midnight moves toward dawn.

THE LAST WORD

When the coffee arrived at the end of lunch, I asked this team if there were any changes still taking place to the lineup. The question was met with nervous laughter. "Why don't you tell your story?" Ms. Goodwin said to Ms. Jacques, encouragingly.

"Well, it looks like McKendree Key's piece is going to be my apartment," Ms. Jacques confessed, shaking her head.

The Brooklyn artist's work involves moving the contents of a private home out into public space, and then back again before night's end.

Originally, Ms. Key was going to use the contents of another colleague's apartment, but logistics necessitated a last-

minute change of plans. The performance will involve moving Ms. Jacques's stuff from Baldwin Street to the Polish Legion at the corner of Beverly and Cecil Streets, where it will go on public view.

"You know, I think it's going to be good for me," Ms. Jacques says with a good-natured shrug, "for someone that people might call repressed to have everything out on the street for 600,000 people to look at? This could be good."

Independent art projects

Many galleries and public art spaces around town have responded to the Nuit Blanche vibe by generating special events in their spaces for tonight only. Below, a selection of some of the best.

Mercer Union, 37 Lisgar St.

Take advantage of the Toronto collective Instant Coffee's unique ambience with their installation at the artist-run centre Mercer Union. For Nuit Blanche, the gallery is also hosting Misha Glouberman (host of Trampoline Hall) as he leads a group improvisation titled *Terrible Noises for Beautiful People*, a participatory noise choir, at regular intervals throughout the night (with a break from 1 a.m. to 3 a.m.)

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN, 100 mccaull st.

U.S. performance artist Ann Hamilton will be staging a "listening choir" with OCAD students at 7:30 p.m. at OCAD, Professional Gallery and various venues.

Hart House, U of T

This was a hot spot last year and it promises to be again with *Night School*, a project organized by curator Barbara Fischer. The lineup of works on view invokes pedagogy in such divergent fields as homemaking, astrology, funk dancing, intimacy and how to teach the dog the alphabet, delivered, of course, by artists. In keeping with the theme of education, hierarchy-busting social re-engineer Darren O'Donnell, of Mammalian Diving Reflex, will be staging *Slow Dance With Teacher*, a slow-dancing demonstration between teachers and students in the Great Hall.

Women's Art Resource Centre, 401 Richmond St. W.

Afro-Canadian performance artist Camille Turner and her three cape-clad collaborators present *The Final Frontier*, an Afro-Futurist performance work staged at midnight that imagines visiting Afro-aliens come to observe Earthlings from the vantage point of their Star Trek-style flight deck. (The piece was inspired by the artist's recent visit to Alberta.) "We are inviting people into our lab," says Ms. Turner, who is also known for her itinerant role as a self-appointed Miss Canadiana. "It's all a social experiment."

The Textile Museum

of Canada, 55 Centre Ave.

The museum stays open to display *Hungry Purse*, a multimedia fun-fur-enhanced environment by Toronto's own Allyson Mitchell, who will also conduct a workshop called Swap Till You Drop. Bring a bag of clothing and join her merry band of seam-rippers to create something new and you.

For information for all Nuit Blanche events, visit

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