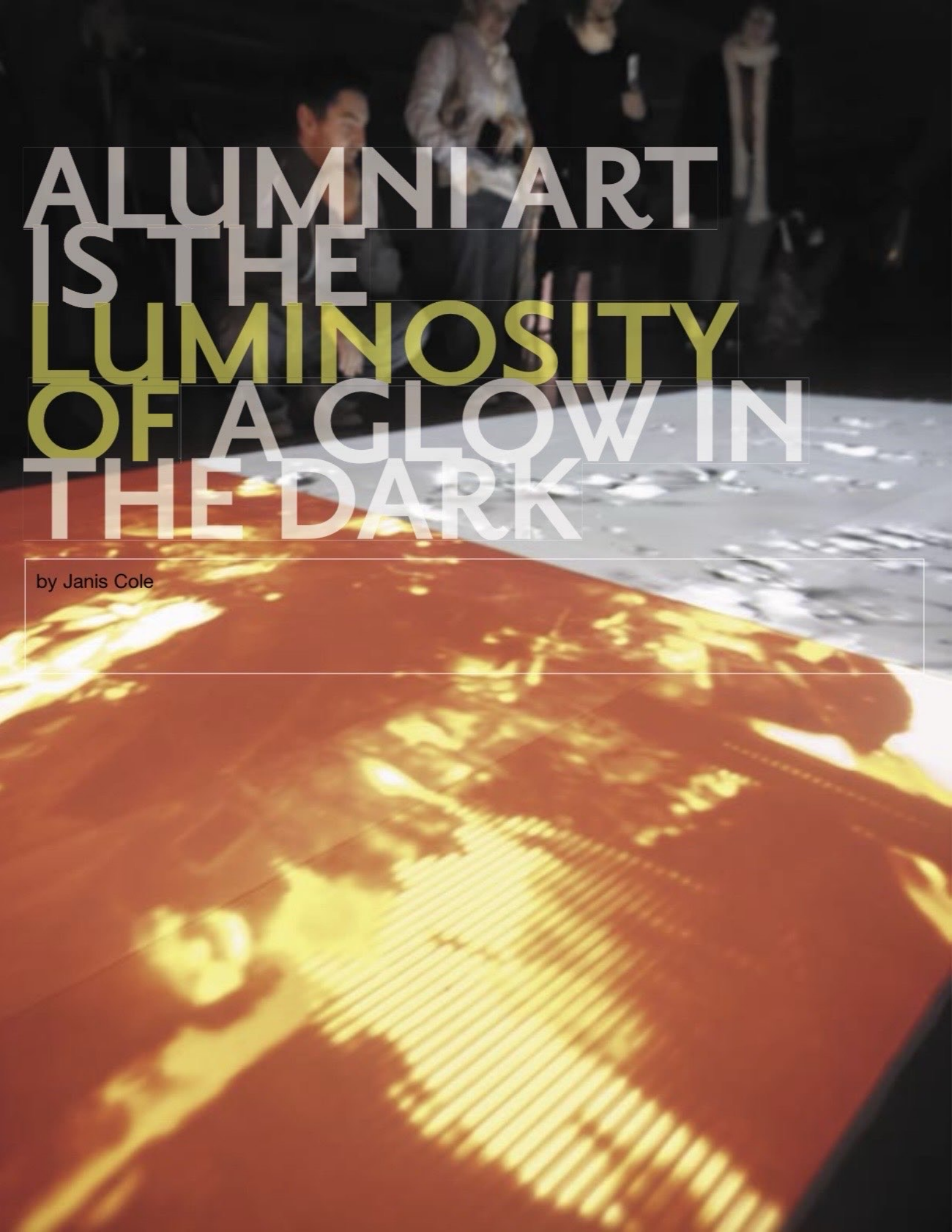




ALUMNI ART IS THE LUMINOSITY OF A GLOW IN THE DARK

by Janis Cole



Scotiabank Nuit Blanche, likely the most significant art event of the century in Toronto, began at dusk on Saturday, September 30, with its organizers, curators and artists poised to unveil to the public more than 130 art exhibits. The city's first "free all-night contemporary art thing" was spread out over three downtown "zones," clustered around Yorkville, Queen West and McCaul Street, with OCAD at the hub of activity on McCaul.

ALL PHOTOS BY
HORST HERGET

OPPOSITE
DAVID ROKEBY
OVERSEER, 2006
SITE-SPECIFIC REAL-TIME
VIDEO INSTALLATION
FOR SCOTIABANK
NUIT BLANCHE

BELOW
VISITORS ENJOY
A GLOW IN THE DARK,
OCAD'S CONTRIBUTION
TO SCOTIABANK NUIT
BLANCHE

ABOVE
VISITORS RELAX IN
OCAD'S GREAT HALL
DURING SCOTIABANK
NUIT BLANCHE

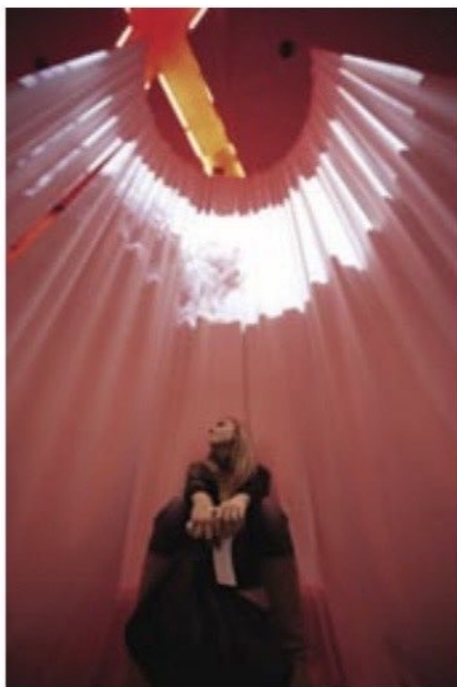
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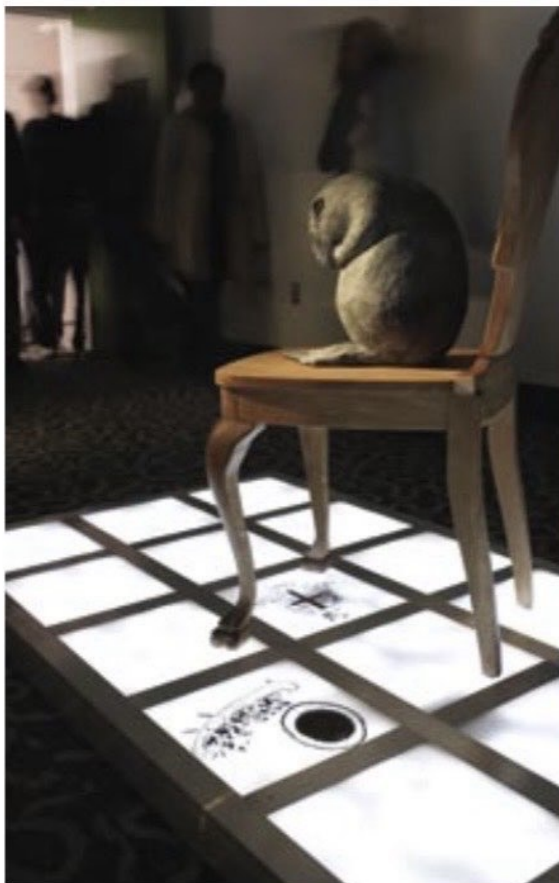
The phrase *nuit blanche* references a natural phenomenon in high-altitude places where dusk meets dawn, creating a night without darkness. A sleepless night. A white night. Conceived in Paris in 2002, the concept of a nuit blanche event has since been adopted by half a dozen cities worldwide, including Toronto, which hosted its own version this year for the first time.

I spoke with the organizers beforehand, and right up until Scotiabank Nuit Blanche actually got underway, they were wondering what to expect. Would it work? Would people stay out all night to experience art?

For starters, a cold, steady rain during the day threatened to dampen spirits and attendance. However, a large canopy of umbrellas on University Avenue, where eager people huddled in the rain watching *Counting Sheep* – a DVD projection by prolific artist Michael Snow (Environmental Design, '52) – hinted at the magic that was about to permeate the city. The dome of the Royal Ontario Museum Planetarium was enlivened in an unexpected way. Strangers seemed excited about being squeezed together in the rain, at night, to watch Snow's deceptively simple shot of sheep grazing on a grassy field with a backdrop of the Atlantic Ocean's rhythmically rolling waves. It reflected Nuit Blanche's playful approach to art exhibition, and from Snow's work, I got a subconscious message: be mindful of quiet observation; don't rush to see everything at once.



ABOVE
A VISITOR TO
A GLOW IN THE DARK
VIEWS WORK BY
GEOFFREY PUGEN.
THE DAY ROOM, 2006
MULTIMEDIA
INSTALLATION



ABOVE
MARY ANNE BARKHOUSE
WORK BASED ON
PETITION, 2006.
SCULPTURE INSTALLATION
BRONZE, WOOD AND LED
LIGHTS



ABOVE
JOHN MCEWEN
IMPERFECT PARADISE
SCULPTURE IN
BUTTERFIELD PARK

The crowd at OCAD, when I arrived there, was lively, and several hundred strong. The purple glow of the Sharp Centre for Design, which has been heralded as Toronto's boldest architectural statement to date, illuminated a path for the more than 10,000 visitors passing through the doors of OCAD to view *A Glow in the Dark*. This exhibition presented a cross-section of work by some of the university's illustrious alumni, spanning film, performance, interactive media, sculpture, installations, painting and photography.

At the university's foyer, I experienced the gargantuan Styrofoam sculptures of Kristan Horton (Sculpture/Installation, '96). They set a playful mood that matched the enthusiasm of the crowd, packed tightly into the space and mostly comprised of young people. Their eagerness to touch the art, along with the occasional offhand remark that I would overhear, revealed that many *Nuit Blanche* visitors are not of the art world.

This makes them as interesting to observe as the art, and demonstrates the event's true value – thousands of people unabashedly and spontaneously taking pleasure in art in the middle of the night, and having a good time doing it.

Just past the foyer, in the Elizabeth and Goulding Lambert Lounge, filled to standing-room-only capacity, was an experimental video screening of *A Life of Errors* and *The Paper Wall* by Nick and Sheila Pye (Photography, '02; Integrated Media, '02). This couple's narrative style had many visitors enthralled, while others looked tentative, not quite sure what to think. The vignettes featured the two filmmakers performing several activities – stripping, spewing and kissing until a certain point, when these actions appear to exhaust them. Narrative comprehension seemed not to have been the crucial aspect for most viewers, as I overheard several of them talking about the film afterwards. Instead, what seemed to have mattered to them

was the chance to engage with the filmmakers' stark performances and experimentation with the genre.

Moving into the auditorium later, I joined another good-sized crowd to view several Michael Snow films. Snow's experimental cinema is legendary and has a tendency to generate mixed emotions: intrigue, frustration, curiosity, exhilaration and awe. Local artist Petra Chevrier, who handled the 16mm film projection, said that she "went into the screening marathon thinking this could be a complete failure!" But as it turned out, there was a steady stream of visitors all night. Some of them sat through entire films – including the three wonderful hours of *La Région Centrale* (which actually garnered applause) and the 45-minute 1967 classic *Wavelength* (admired by young people to this day).

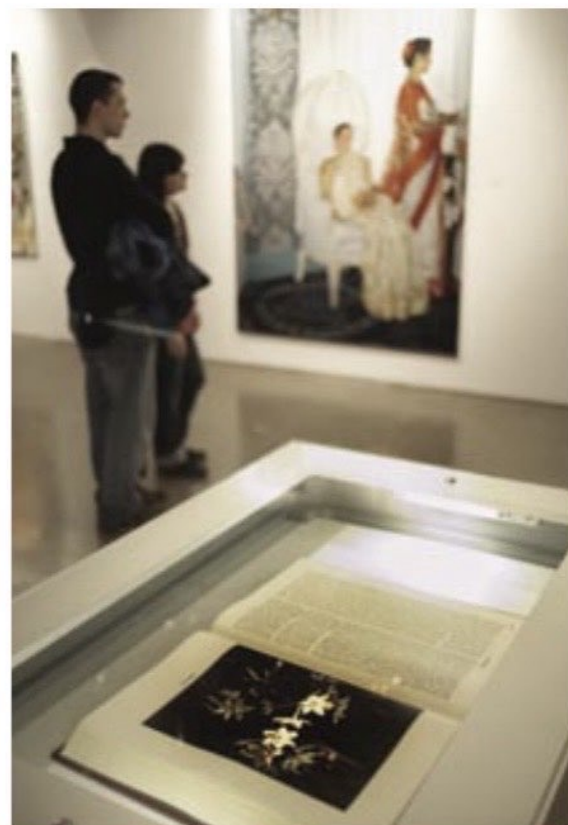
Two large-screen projections from installation artist Geoff Pugen (Integrated Media, '04) filled the Great Hall, as did mats and stools for lounging. Clearly, Pugen wanted

people to take in his sounds and images in comfort. He had set out to transform the space into a meditation room where people could relax and be drawn back to nature. And he succeeded: the open space felt intimate, romantic and slowed-down.

Then I entered a room featuring a bronze beaver sculpture on an 18th-century sculpted hall chair, and I knew immediately that this was the work of Mary Anne Barkhouse (Integrated Media, '91). For *Nuit Blanche*, Barkhouse reconfigured two of her installations, positioning a beaver (from *Night Beaver*) on a backlit, disco-style floor with an interactive glowing red light (from *Petition*). She'd set a specific and all-encompassing goal and, remarkably, met it. She'd wanted a unique piece indicative of her current work and yet reflective of the OCAD program that she'd graduated in. She'd planned something that would exemplify the theme of *A Glow in the Dark* and also showcase her conceptual intent – to have the audience expe-



ABOVE
GEORGE WHITESIDE
PHOTOGRAPHS,
2002, BEING VIEWED
BY VISITOR.
MEDIUM-FORMAT
POLAROID



ABOVE
VISITORS TAKE IN THE ART AT OCAD'S
PROFESSIONAL GALLERY. FOREGROUND:
"NARCISSUS," 1994 BY IAN CARR-HARRIS.
WOOD, ARBORITE, BOOK, FLUORESCENT AND GLASS

PGII

perience a reactive and interactive connection to human culture and the environment.

Down the hall, I entered a room of extraordinary photographs by acclaimed artist George Whiteside (Photo/Electric, '79), whose exhibition included two large photographs of the Taj Mahal that were serene as well as haunting.

Meanwhile, artist David Rokeby (Experimental Arts, '84), brought the outdoors in with his clever side-by-side, floor-mounted projections of Butterfield Park, as if spying on the action six storeys below through an invisible floor. In keeping with his distinct style, this piece focused on real-time events, directly engaging the viewer with artificial systems of perception. According to Rokeby, the basic bones of the piece were predetermined, but the art exhibit, which incorporated an oversized chess game in Butterfield Park, was a happy accident that perfectly matched his concept. He wanted the piece to be friendly, to give people

the feeling they could jump right in. Once again, I found myself struck by how rich the OCAD alumni contributions were, and how plentiful. Then I entered a room dedicated to The Manifold Project and I was reminded of an even greater wealth of alumni talent. Glowing onscreen were the names of more than 80 graduates, each accompanied by images of their selected works.

In the Professional Gallery, I encountered a selection of paintings and installations by Joanne Tod (Drawing & Painting, '74), Gary Neill Kennedy (Drawing & Painting, '60) and Ian Carr-Harris (Sculpture/Installation, '71). I then ventured outside to view the final exhibit, *Imperfect Paradise*, a large and very impressive installation by John McEwen (Sculpture, '70).

It was just a flicker before dawn when I sat down, grateful to the Student Union volunteers who told me they served over 1,000 free pancake breakfasts that morning.

Speaking to several of the participating OCAD alumni after that night, I asked them about their experience with Scotiabank Nuit Blanche. Busy as they always are, these artists managed to squeeze in the time to participate in the event, and all of them were emphatic – and unanimous – in praising the hands-on support they received while setting up and dismantling their work. Some of the installations were complicated to mount, they said, and the staff, faculty, technicians and students helped make the artworks stand out and made the whole experience a joy.

Many months before Nuit Blanche, a small committee at OCAD had coordinated the gathering of exhibits for A Glow in the Dark. It was comprised of faculty members Johanna Householder and Rosemary Donegan as well as Blake Fitzpatrick, Dean, Faculty of Art; Professional Gallery Curator Charles Reeves; and Media & Communications team Laura Matthews and Sarah Mulholland.

President Sara Diamond contributed to the planning and determined the scale of OCAD's involvement. She also created a special rapport with alumni by personally inviting them and thanking them for participating.

The sprinkling of rain at the start of the evening did nothing to derail Scotiabank Nuit Blanche. Participation in OCAD's contribution, A Glow in the Dark, was enthusiastic. President Diamond expressed the hope that the event would "ignite the imaginations" of Torontonians. On that magical night of art, both participants and visitors – young and old and from all walks of life – demonstrated that it did precisely that.

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