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Nuit Blanche lights up its fifth year in Saskatoon

By Gabriela Perez — September 27, 2018 — in Culture



Eye on U is displayed in a parking lot during Nuit Blanche Saskatoon, 2017.

Cities are rich in poetic and marvelous subjects, said Charles Baudelaire, but we do not always notice it. Saskatoon is no exception, and Nuit Blanche, now in its fifth iteration, is set to entice people to engage with the city once again.

Nuit Blanche Saskatoon is an annual, nighttime, outdoor arts festival that began in 2014. The event usually takes place on the last Saturday of September, coinciding with Culture Days weekend, a national initiative bringing different art and cultural projects to cities throughout the country.

Last year, we saw the festival expand to Broadway and Downtown, in addition to its original location, Riversdale. This year, the three neighbourhoods will feature 22 projects from more than 40 artists.

According to Michael Peterson, who has been involved with the festival since its third year, “Nuit Blanche develops projects that help people explore the city or see the city differently.”

These projects not only take place outdoors in a shared public space but also invite people to visit areas they might not otherwise explore at night, like back alleys or parks. According to Peterson, this encourages people to think about the city, how we use public spaces and how we would like to live through experiencing the city itself.

Additionally, as it continues to expand into more areas of the city, Nuit Blanche partnered with the University of Saskatchewan for a preview night on Sept. 22. Andreas Buchwaldt, a graduate student working with robotics art, exhibited *Celestial Mundane* at the university’s observatory.

In a video, Buchwaldt shows all of his possessions floating in space. The project, explains Peterson, “looks at consumption and waste through the lens of astronomy.”

For Peterson, the goal is to bring attention to the observatory, and at the same time, extend the festival another day by adding a preview night, so more people can take part in the festival.

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The partnership between Nuit Blanche and the U of S is expected to continue next year, involving the galleries on campus and the department of art and art history as well as the department of computer science. In Peterson’s words, the idea is “combining science and art and seeing how different disciplines can inform each other.”

Next year will presumably see a larger Nuit Blanche preview night on campus, allowing more work from the university into the festival.

The Canadian Light Source is another of the festival’s partners. Every year, they sponsor a project for Nuit Blanche. Last year, they worked with Jean-Sébastien Gauthier, who used synchrotron radiation-imaging techniques to develop X-rays of zebrafish, which he turned into 3D models for use in a video installation.

“It’s really interesting looking not just [at] what art can learn from science but how art can inform science,” said Peterson.

This year, abstract artist Laura Payne developed a project with the Canadian Light Source, which will be projected at River Landing during the festival night, creating a spectacle by the river.

Nuit Blanche is not a festival that revolves around one specific theme. However, given that it takes place at night, there is a focus on light. Peterson explains that they encourage artists from all media to incorporate light into their projects.

“It’s that light that is going to attract people’s attention — if there is a project in a back alley, it will be the flashing light that will encourage them to go in and explore a little further.”

In this context, the partnership with the Canadian Light Source and the long-term plan to collaborate with the department of computer science are even more relevant, because as Peterson states, “when we are talking about light, there is a lot that artists can learn from scientists.”

Besides illuminating the city at night, Nuit Blanche brightens up Saskatoon’s art scene and cultural life. According to Peterson, “one of the things that the festival does is provide opportunities for artists to make and exhibit their art.”

Peterson goes on to explain that, when those opportunities are not present, those who want to pursue a career in art move to another city with more opportunities available or they move into another career. Having festivals like Nuit Blanche that provide opportunities for artists emphasizes that Saskatoon has a growing and vibrant art scene in which artists can develop.

Encouraging art is necessary, because as Peterson says, a focus on art “adds a lot, both to individuals in their lives [and] to the culture of our city.”

For artists and poets alike, cities have long been a source of inspiration, and through events like Nuit Blanche, art can provide an opportunity for both artists and the public to reinterpret and re-experience our city.

—
Gabriela Perez

Photo: Jiem Carlo Narag / Outreach Director

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