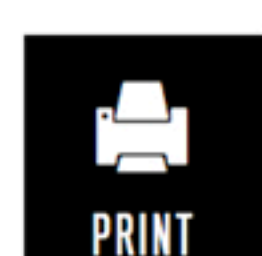
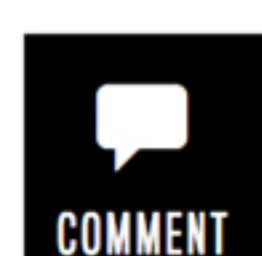
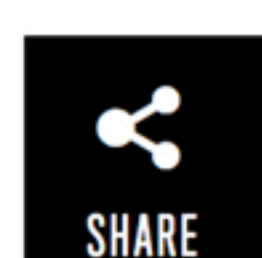


Nuit Blanche 2018 – the return of thought-provoking and shiny!

FISH GRIWKOWSKY Updated: September 30, 2018



If you had to pin down the best-executed feature of Nuit Blanche 2018 on Saturday night, Thierry Marceau’s re-enactment of the Gretzky Trade will probably push forward, or maybe the flickering incandescent lightbulb CLOUD by Caitlind r.c. Brown and Wayne Garrett — and there were certainly dozens of other elements from which to cherry pick.

But the truth is that none of these temporary balloon animals or strips of artificial wheat or goofy projections meant a thing without the thousands of hands and smiles really, honestly, transforming Edmonton into a place of joyful, adventure-seeking crowds actually happy to wait to get to the next thing on the map instead of freaking out with rush hour road rage.

And this is the actual magic of Nuit Blanche — finally in its second full-on incarnation since 2015. It turns all of us wandering through our construction-pummelled streets and alleys into something not unlike happy children at a waterpark.

If you weren’t one of the tens of thousands weaving the concrete pathways and parks — especially packed under the Epcor and CN towers in the first half of the 12-hour program — it was certainly a sight, especially as the unaffiliated Zombie Walk limped and shuffled through, moaning, including someone in a dinosaur costume playing guitar for unknown purposes.

The art itself was of two sorts — meaningful and thought-provoking like the memorial ribbons being tied to the poles in The Longest Journey at Abbey Glen Park. Or recent RBC Canadian Painting Competition runner-up Emmanuel Osahor’s artificial jungle, full of lush plants like the Muttart, yet cold enough even at the zero mark to have us thinking about people who don’t have a place to sleep at night.



Artist Thierry Marceau re-enacts the Gretzky Trade press conference at Nuit Blanche 2018. FISH GRIWKOWSKY / POSTMEDIA

Marceau’s Gretzky performance The Great One’s Back also fit into this conceptual side. Re-enacted video of he and Janet Jones (played by Merran Carr-Wiggin) making their way by horse-drawn carriage down Jasper Avenue, leading right up to the Art Gallery of Alberta’s steps where, with a rather brilliantly corny SCTV vibe, the performers walked live into the gallery’s atrium — lined with rink boards — to the adoring cheers of the crowd.

Some folks didn’t stick around through Gretzky’s imagined bachelor party video, possibly because of all that bare-burn towel snapping (there really was a lot of that). And watching the Great One flip through jerseys from team to team post-Edmonton hurt in exactly the way it was meant to — even at 2 a.m. the crowd cheered when he threw on the orange and blue again, presumably for the Heritage Classic.

Marceau and curator Wayne Baerwaldt outdid expectations, asking us to look at the bigger picture of holding on to the past, drowning in MEGA — Make Edmonton Great Again — nostalgia.

But what was the other sort of art?

Well, shiny things, of course — and plenty of them!

Full-grown adults were repeatedly yelling things like, “It’s shiny! And it spins!” at the bright crystalline sentinels at the periphery of the Light Gardens, wandering through the reflectors on sticks wheat field — successfully crowd funded over its \$10,000, PS — with their cellphones in front of them like Dalek periscopes.

A glowing wolf indeed hung in Edmonton City Centre mall; a faceted rabbit a bit smaller than advertised sat in the grass much as real hares do south of the Telus skyscraper. And security made sure people went the “right way” through the luminous bleeping colon on Rice Howard Way, supposedly moving us from the past to the future in a meaningful way. But I want to go the other way! MEGA, remember?

Meanwhile, at the far-flung SNAP Gallery over on 121 Street, ink-stained director April Dean conducted a dance of door-sized printing on fabric via steamroller, while at the farthest point to the east down Jasper Avenue, people tugged at the rain-looking chains, making the lightbulb cloud above them flicker on and off like an approaching storm.

All in all, once again, a great — wait, Great — success in turning this one-arena town into something a little more accessible and a little less serious for the night.

Hats off to everyone who made it happen, which certainly includes you if you were part of that bubbly champagne crowd.

And now, let the nostalgia begin! Wonder who’ll play Marceau in the 99 jersey 30 years down the road as we recollect the good ole days?

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