



PHOTO: AUTHOR

NUIT BLANCHE

A White Night of Wonder

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Nuit Blanche is an annual night-time art festival that spans across entire cities. With hundreds of official and unofficial art installations, the cities themselves are transformed into one vast art exhibition. I was fortunate enough to be in Toronto for this year's Nuit Blanche.

A few friends and I started out at 8pm. Our first stop was near Ossington Station where several interactive art installations were set up under the banner of *Photon Gallery 4.0*. While in line for a tuneable photography device, we noticed several people pointing upwards. There, hanging from an old clothing line was an ordinary looking tube of light. However, looking away from it quickly, the light transformed into a peace sign in our peripheral vision. Thus began a night where the art wasn't quite what it seemed, where the story behind every piece was as engrossing as the piece itself, and where looking away sometimes meant seeing things in an entirely different light.

After playing air hockey on a flaming table, and shooting jets of fire towards the night sky, we moved eastwards from Ossington towards St. George Street, where the *One Sky* installation was waiting for us in the Astronomy Building of the University of Toronto. This project was a shower of stars captured in a circular tent. Standing at the centre of the round patch of grass and looking skywards conveyed the meaning perfectly: one sky above millions of living organisms — all in a state of wonderment. It was humbling, to say the least.

Next we moved on towards downtown Toronto through the Toronto Coach Terminal. An installation there, *Make Your Mark*, consisted of what initially looked like thousands of white feathers hanging from the ceiling of a passage. On closer inspection though, it turned out they

were strips of plastic with unique fingerprints on them. That united they could look so beautiful, was simultaneously mesmerising and thought-provoking.

As we left the subway in awe, another installation called *Do Angels Exist* almost floated our way. The project, representing wings that occur in nature such as falling feathers or dragonfly wings, was meant to

provoke the question of whether angels exist in the spectator's mind, as it is a question that regularly plagues the artist who recently lost her mother.

Moving on we entered OCAD University to witness their installation, *Forward*, which had viewers stand between two screens displaying tunnels. As we looked ahead there was an illusion of moving forward at a rapid rate.

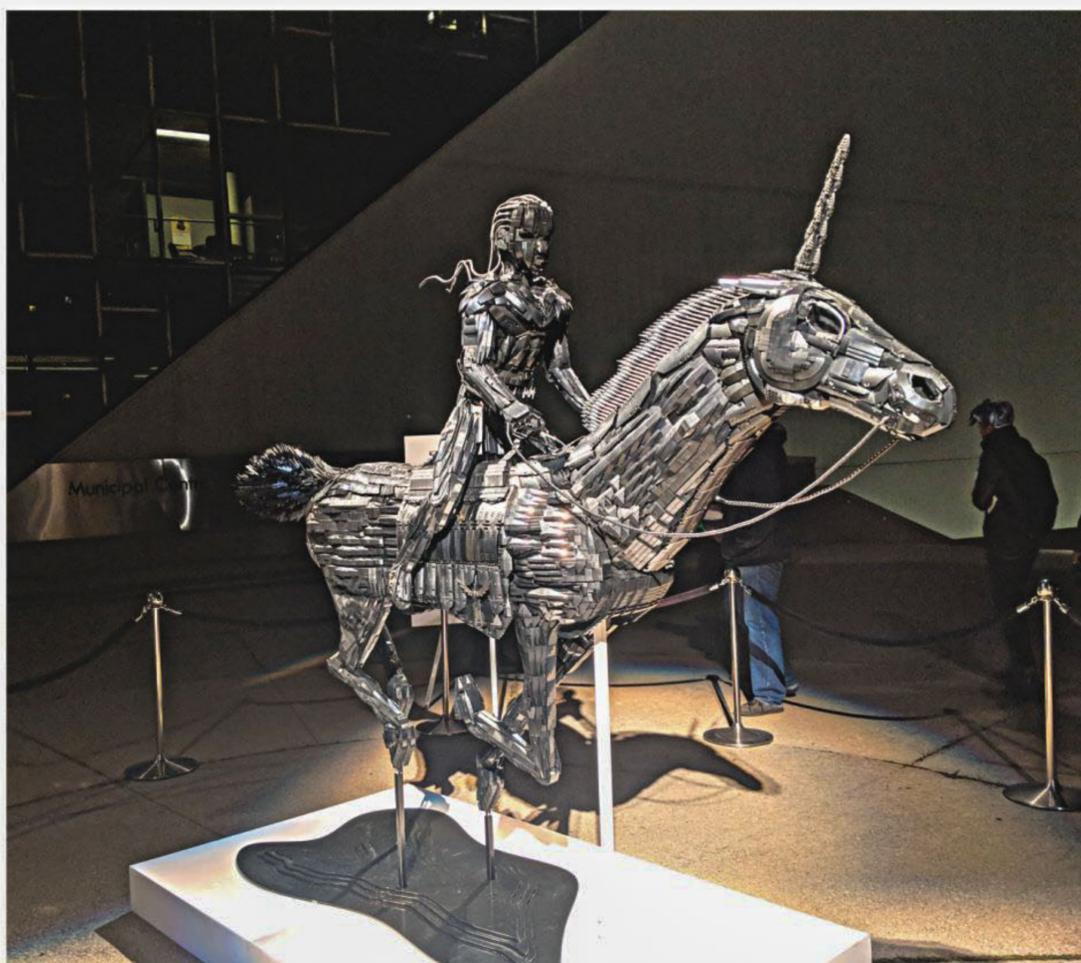
However, that wasn't the case because our physical location was unaltered, leaving us with the concrete notion of being here, now — which was the artist's intent all along.

By this time dinner had been forgone in favour of cramming in as many art installations into the night as possible. Arming ourselves with french-fries from a food truck, we walked on through the heart of downtown Toronto. We viewed installations such as *Passage* at the Bata Shoe Museum, *Continuum* at the CF Toronto Eaton Centre Bridge, and *On Flashing Lights* right past Nathan Phillips Square. With the clock striking midnight, half of our group disbanded to retire for the night. The other half decided to venture into Scarborough. No points for guessing which half I was in.

The Scarborough projects highlighted immigrants and their stories. Huge billboards comprised an extended project, *Everything I Wanted to Tell You*, which proudly sported moving messages from second generation immigrants. Beautiful installations such as *Walk among Worlds*, and *Mirrors of Babel* were scattered about. Soon after we had viewed these projects, we noticed the time and admitted that half past two was quite late enough and it was time for us to head home.

That was when my eyes fell on the *Cavalier Noir*. The last installation of the day, it was undoubtedly the most intricate piece I had seen all night. There was something about the little boy on top of his black unicorn that had me enthralled. As I stared into the face of the Black Knight on this White Night, something seemed to fall into place. The night made sense, and suddenly I was grateful... grateful for being here now.

Rabita Saleh is a perfectionist/workaholic. Email feedback to this generally boring person at rabitasaleh13@gmail.com



The Cavalier Noir; created with 80,000 Lego pieces, this Dark Knight stood tall at the Civic Centre in Scarborough on the night of the 29th of September, 2018. One amongst the 110 contemporary art pieces that transformed Downtown Toronto and Scarborough, the Cavalier Noir posed the question of what modern heroes would look like in the rapidly changing landscape of Toronto's society, and wound itself seamlessly into the theme of this year's Nuit Blanche in Toronto: You Are Here, Now.