



FEATURES



5 Things We Want to See at Toronto's Nuit Blanche

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BY [CANADIAN ART](#)



Public Studio, *Zero Hour*, 2015.

[Tania Bruguera's *Untitled* at College Street and University Avenue](#)

Tania Bruguera's untitled piece for Nuit Blanche marks a number of firsts. To begin, it's Bruguera's first piece since her eight-month detention in Cuba, which was sparked after she invited participants to speak for a minute into a megaphone about whatever they wished for her work *#YoTambienExijo*. It's also, to my knowledge, the first time Nuit Blanche has ever included an event on the docket with virtually no details about its nature. The information we have is scant: Bruguera will be holding a referendum for the citizens of Toronto that allows them to decide on issues of importance.

Enticing an audience without any details is a slight gamble, but Bruguera isn't a stranger to risk. During a reading/performance at the 53rd Venice Biennale, she pointed a loaded pistol at her head, pulled the trigger, continued to read and subsequently raised the pistol and pulled the trigger two more times. For a recent project with public-art programmers Creative Time, she lived with undocumented immigrants before opening a workshop that offered assistance with artmaking, English and legal aid. Shortly put, she's a contemporary artist deeply committed to radical politics.

Will this be a career-defining event? Another first, perhaps: Nuit Blanche programming is frequently enjoyable, but rarely history in the making. – ***Caoimhe Morgan-Feir, interim online editor***

Public Studio's *Zero Hour* at 90 Queen's Park

What do you do when the about-to-be-demolished planetarium in which you want to install your Nuit Blanche project is being used for storage by the institution that sold it? If you're Elle Flanders and Tamira Sawatzky, you build your own geodesic dome beside it.

Zero Hour is the title of Flanders and Sawatzky's ambitious 12-hour project adjacent to the shuttered McLaughlin planetarium once owned by the ROM (who now rents it from U of T to, apparently, house an apocalyptic surfeit of antique Canadiana furnishings). Public Studio work collaboratively, and at Nuit Blanche are joined by Carol Weinbaum, Josh Schonblum, Han Yang, Anna Friz, Lili Huston-Heterich and, their star here, [Etel Adnan](#), the 90-year-old Lebanese artist, philosopher and poet whose striking minimalist paintings were brought to light at the last Documenta.

In somewhat of a coup, Public Studio have commissioned a poem from Adnan, entitled "Night." A recording of the poem read by Adnan will be played in the dome, which will house a digitally rendered video of current (i.e., human-altered) weather patterns. A ticker running along the bottom of the dome will announce natural-disaster statistics interpolated with surtitles from Adnan's poem. A soundtrack by Friz will meld industrial and weather noise.

Public Studio have given me a preview line from “Night”: “it’s wrong to think that we’re loved.” I can’t think of a better contra-motto for the audience-pandering that has come to define large public-art events like Nuit Blanche. – **David Balzer, deputy editor**

Marguerite Humeau’s *Requiem for Harley Warren (“Screams from Hell”)* at WaterPark Place, 10 Bay Street

In Derweze, Turkmenistan, in the middle of the Karakum Desert, there’s a gaping crater of boiling sludge and raging flames the size of a football field. It’s been burning steadily for more than four decades, and it’s known as the [Door to Hell](#). Seriously. In fact, there are many of these purported gates to the underworld, located all across the globe, and legend says that you can hear the terrifying screams of a million damned souls emanating from the violent inferno below the earth’s crust (or so says Wikipedia, which means it’s probably, almost definitely, marginally true).

French-born, UK-based artist Marguerite Humeau has researched and visited such sites, bringing back “red-spitting yttrium crystals from the Belizean caves” and “arcanite, moonmilk and aragonite from Central Asia” to analyze, and her resulting project is an installation and live sound performance that serenades with an eerie chorus of everlasting torment. She claims to have synthesized an iridescent mineral called silicon carbide that sings chilling soprano chants, which echo into an artificial stalagmite that shrieks and bellows its testimony in concert with the roar of an open flame. It’s all performed as a requiem for H.P. Lovecraft’s character Harley Warren, an occultist who met a mysterious end at the hands of a ghastly unknown entity when he tried to enter a supernatural gateway to the “other side.”

Humeau’s work explores “the means by which knowledge is generated in the absence of evidence”—while this project is all in good fun, and like Hallowe’en come early for fans of paranormal tales and science-fiction fantasies, the artist is also cleverly exposing how easily people let themselves be deceived (just watch [the video of Matt Damon interrupting Effie Brown](#) so that he can #mansplain to her that the film industry is a meritocracy, or take a look at [Donald Trump’s national polling numbers](#)). Hell isn’t a real place, of course; it’s a metaphor for madness. Keeping our belief systems in check, and knowing what’s fiction and what’s real, is the only way to protect society from crumbling and descending into it. – **Rosie Prata, copy editor**

JR’s *Inside Out* at City Hall, 100 Queen Street West

Bloordale got to kick off JR’s Nuit Blanche effort on Sunday as the artist’s *Inside Out* shaped up over the course of the day on the tennis courts adjacent to the Toronto School of Art at Bloor and Dufferin. By noon, under a bright sun, people were lining up to step inside an

official *Inside Out* truck to snap a flash-lit self-portrait against a perky polka-dot background that lined the walls behind the stool inside the truck. A few minutes later, a large, three-foot-wide image began to roll out from the side the truck to join a pile of other portraits that would eventually find their way into a wheat-pasted grid of images on the tennis court. As the grid filled in and the faces amounted, one could only marvel at the prescient control that could generate such an impressive, monumental-scale artwork—conceived at JR’s Paris studio—that literally embodied neighbourhood and local community. A day later, the trucks (there were two) showed up in the east end in the parking lot of the Coxwell Subway Station. One can only imagine the scene to take place at Nathan Phillips Square on Saturday. Behind each and every image is a collection process that gathers first name, last name and email address and sends a small JPEG version of the self-portrait back to its subject. So far, [the project has resulted in 250,000 portraits taken in more than 125 different countries](#). It begs a public plaza big enough to hold them. – **Richard Rhodes, editor**

Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla’s *Raptor’s Rapture*, Hart House (The Great Hall), 7 Hart House Circle

Aside from its massive spectacle effect, one of the great things about Nuit Blanche is the opportunity to see work (if only for one night) by some key international artists whose institutional presence in the city is all too rare. A case in point is Puerto Rico-based American/Cuban duo Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla’s video installation *Raptor’s Rapture* (2012), on view as part of curator Agustin Pérez Rubio’s pan-American survey exhibition “HTUOS/HTRON: The New Coordinates of the Americas.” Based on a 1943 drawing by Uruguayan artist Joaquin Torres Garcia, Pérez Rubio’s title plays on the inverted spelling of north and south, suggesting an upended geopolitical order that at once acknowledges and subverts dominant continental cultural and political currents. It’s a bid to close the perceptual gap—both physically and conceptually—using time and distance as pivot points to a richer understanding of what makes us different, and what makes us the same, no matter which side of the equator we call home.

For *Raptor’s Rapture*, which debuted at Documenta 13 in 2012, Allora and Calzadilla go way back—35,000 years or so—in a looping, speculative examination of the common ground that ties the uncertainties of today to the unknowns of the past. In the video, Bernadette Käfer, a flautist specializing in prehistoric instruments, attempts to play a recently discovered Paleolithic flute (the oldest known musical instrument found to date) carved from the wing bone of a griffon vulture. It’s unknown how the flute was meant to be played, what sound it was designed to produce or for what specific purpose, and Käfer doggedly struggles to find a resonant acoustic tone. Perched next to her is a live griffon vulture—an ancient species of scavenger now on the brink of extinction. What happens between them over the course of the video’s 23 minutes remains open to interpretation: Are we

experiencing the sounds that people might have heard 35,000 years ago? Does the sound create some kind of link between descendants and ancestors? Is this somehow a metaphor for precarious histories, both living and dead? How does a moment of discovery dovetail with the reality of pending loss? In all, it's a classic existential conundrum that offers no clear answers, only more questions. – ***Bryne McLaughlin, managing editor***
