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Fringe review: Borealis

Artist Dan Acher literally paints the sky in this stunning, automated version of aurora borealis which is being presented over the lake in Gluttony. ★★★★★ 1/2

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Canvas of colour: Borealis lights up the sky over the lake in Murlawirrapurka / Rymill Park.
Photo: supplied

Borealis has now unfurled its canvas of digital colour across the skies of many major cities, including Tokyo, London and Geneva.

In 2018, the show wowed over half a million visitors when it lit up the skies of Adelaide's North Terrace as part of the Fringe's Parade of Lights. But the latest venue, the lake in Murlawirrapurka / Rymill Park, is an even better setting – with mist swirling across the water, and hundreds of fruit bats flitting overhead, visitors queueing to enter the space are immediately immersed in its wonderfully spooky atmosphere.

As the audience settle down on the grass around the lake, carpets of rolling blues and greens shiver through the air above them. Ghostly pinks and purples undulate and unfold. The colours flicker like fire, smudge like smoke, recede into the trees then billow back, manifesting in drifts like ectoplasm.

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This astonishing spectacle is accompanied by music producer OXSA's wonderfully ethereal soundscape, which throbs and pulses with the light.

Borealis in Gluttony. Photo: supplied

The viewers chat quietly to each other or lie back to take in the sights. When a particularly intense display spills across the sky, someone murmurs, "Woah, woah, woah!" "Sooooooperb!" cries someone else. There's a sense of both reverence and pure joy in the exclamations. But it's a young girl who describes it best: "It makes me want to do cartwheels!"

Real-life aurora borealis occur when solar winds move through the magnetosphere at the north pole, ionising particles. This causes the emission of different-coloured lights. The phenomenon has filled people with awe and wonder since prehistoric times, and its emotional power hasn't abated.

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Switzerland-based Dan Acher and his art collective, Happy City Lab, wanted to bring that sense of wonder into urban spaces, so they devised a way to artificially create an aurora effect by shining laser beams through airborne water droplets. It may not be an exact replica of the real thing, but the result is truly magical and strangely soothing.

Acher has spoken of Happy City Lab's mission to bring shared contemplation and emotion back into urban areas, constructing spaces where people can meet, have fun together and maybe begin to see their city in a different way. If the reactions of last night's crowd are anything to go by... mission accomplished!

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Borealis takes place most nights by the lake in Gluttony (East Gate) until March 21. Patrons enter every 15 minutes and bookings are essential.

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