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AUSTRALIA CULTUREBLOG

Beam in Thine Own Eye – Dark Mofo, Hobart

Mona's first large-scale public art programme includes Ryoji Ikeda's Spectra – which creates a 15km tower of light



Spectra: Ryoji Ikeda's installation uses 49 searchlights to sculpt the sky Photograph: MONA

From the city, it looks like a great beacon; a shard of light breaking the darkness and beckoning Hobart towards the shores of the Derwent, slick and black in the evening gloom. From below, walking among the 48, military-grade searchlights arranged in a perfect grid, it is like being cocooned in a weightless protective cage; a vast light sculpture that rises 15km, cleaving through the Tasmanian sky.

This is Spectra, Ryoki Ikeda's installation that forms the central plank of Beam in Thine Own Eye, Mona's first foray into large-scale public art in Hobart, the city some would

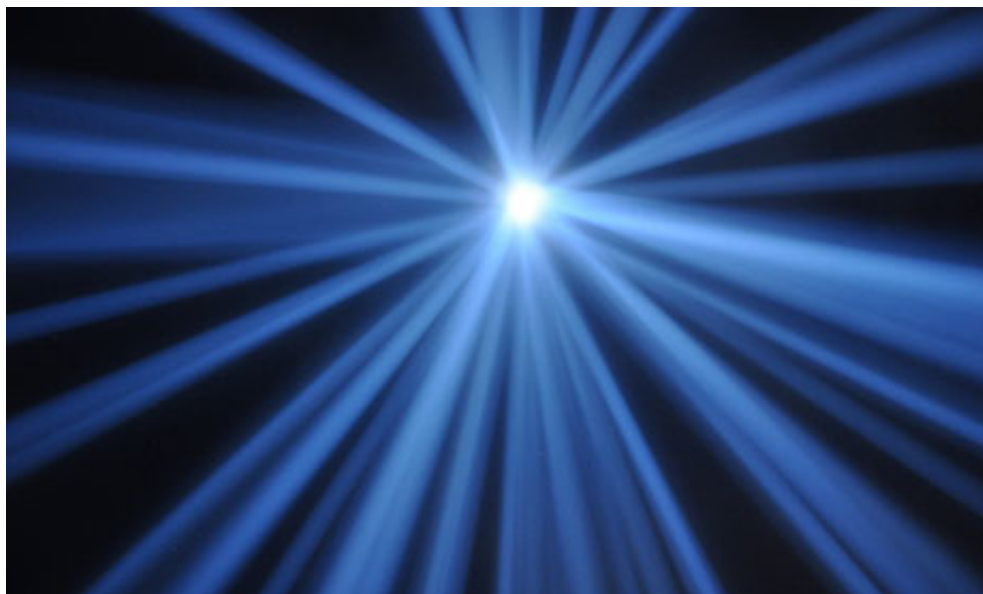
say the museum is helping to rejuvenate. As an all-enveloping soundscape drifts across the park and darkness falls, strengthening the column's display, people seemed pulled towards it, scooping up their dogs and deviating from their evening strolls – unable to resist its allure.

It is a quite spectacular work: something to revisit close up multiple times, and also to gaze on from afar. Something I wish I'd stumbled upon without knowing anything about it – Hobartians caught unawares have been wondering what unearthly force they're witnessing. Certainly it is the most affecting piece of public art I've encountered. And it perhaps also says something bold and interesting about what public art can be.

"Public art is a kind of a dirty word," admits Nicole Durling, senior curator at Mona and co-curator of Beam, which is funded by the Tasmanian government. "It certainly, I think, needs to be revisited and we possibly need to find a new title for it.

She questions what makes museum art less public than that displayed in an open park – an interesting question given that Mona, of course, is a private museum that is also free of charge (if you're Tasmanian, \$20 if you're not. A visit to the warehouse will cost you \$5 regardless). But Durling also hopes Beam and Spectra in particular will encourage people to think differently about public art.

"I would hope so. I really would. Static sculptures, as wonderful as some of them are, are often very insensitive to their environment. It's very much a plonking scenario. This has an idea that it is something ephemeral – it will be there for 10 days and then gone." Well perhaps: there's already [a Facebook campaign](#) to make Spectra permanent.



Spectra: Ryoji Ikeda's installation shoots pure white light 15km up into the Hobart sky Photograph: MONA Alongside Spectra, Mona has also taken over a disused warehouse on the Hobart

waterfront. Inside, a row of blankets hang on the wall – despite the patio heaters you can still see your breath in here – and an assortment of mismatched sofas sit in the centre of a series of rooms in which visitors' sensory perceptions are challenged by a succession of works.

From Guiseppe Penone's mirrored contact lenses, "they reflect the images that otherwise I would have captured with my gaze," to Anish Kapoor's interactive massage *Imagined Monochrome*, and Ivan Franke's *Seeing With Eyes Closed*, in which viewers sit before a wall of rapidly flashing LED lights, with their eyes shut – the patterns you then see are quite disconcerting – these works are immersive and often challenging.

None more so, on both counts, than *Zee* by Kurt Hentschlager. Gripping the rope that marks the boundary of the wall for dear life, visitors enter a fog-filled room in groups (so fog-filled you can barely see a shadow of the person in front of you). Blinded by the white smoke, strobe lights create an intense, psychedelic experience – if this description makes it sound a bit like an 80s dancefloor, then I'm really not doing it justice. Wild, changing colours and indefinable shapes fill your vision, whether your eyes are shut or open, creating an experience that's both claustrophobic and freeing at the same time.

"What we're trying to achieve, regardless of where we exhibit or perform, is about people having an experience and being affected by it," says Durling. I'm not sure *Zee* is necessarily an experience I'd want to try again in a hurry – it is truly quite overwhelming, though not necessarily in a bad way. *Spectra*, on the other hand, with its hypnotic soundscape like the hum of a vibrating glass, and lines of light snaking up from the grass like dappled sunshine reversed, is another matter entirely.



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