

THE BEST OF 2012



ASHLEY FRASER/OTTAWA CITIZEN

Life is Beautiful was the theme of Nuit Blanche, the all-night contemporary art festival that had a smashing debut in Ottawa in September. Above, fans take part in Tavi Weisz's *Study of Staged Exuberance* in the ByWard Market.

From ALL-NIGHT ART to WILD HORSES

Ottawa's visual art scene really popped last year

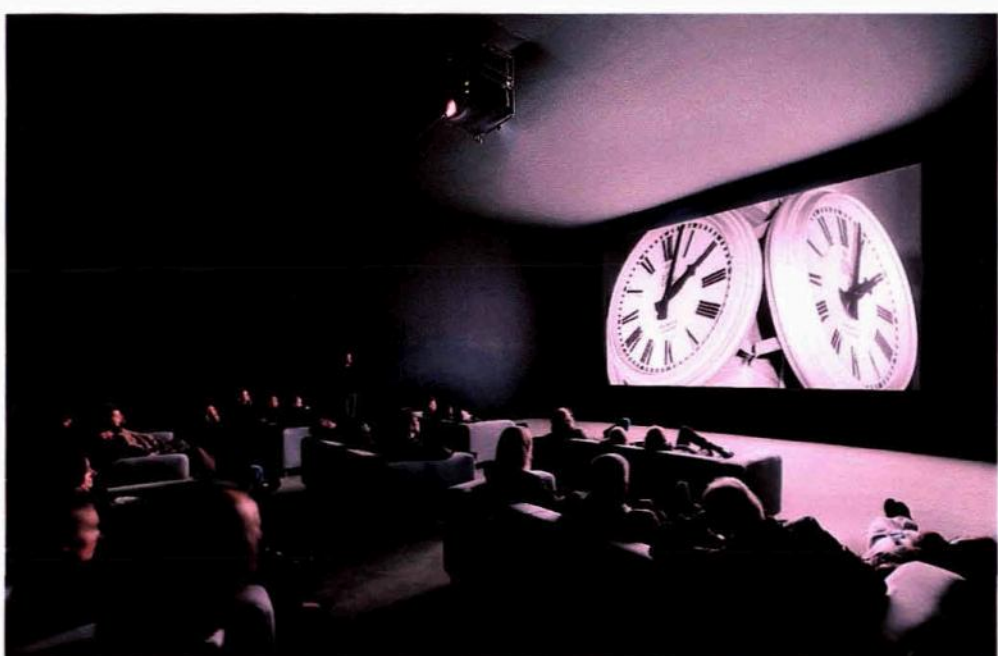


PETER SIMPSON
BIG BEAT

I didn't see every exhibition in the Ottawa area this year, but I did see many. Here are the shows in visual arts that I remember most fondly from the past 12 months ...

1 Nuit Blanche (Sept. 22): The overnight festival of contemporary art installations, spread throughout the city core, had a smashing debut in the capital. Thousands of people milled through the streets to see the work of hundreds of artists until well into the next morning. Big Beat high point? At the corner of Rideau and Sussex was Genevieve Thauvette, the young, idiosyncratic Ottawa photographer, dressed as Marie Antoinette in a giant cake singing *La Marseillaise* and *Mon Cher Ami* all night long. Her performance embodied the exuberance and freshness of the night. Nuit Blanche organizers proved the event held annually in cities around the world can work in Ottawa, because the public interest is huge.

2 Three installations (National Gallery): Throughout the year came a triumphant trio of temporary installations at the National gallery. Janet Cardiff's glorious *Forty Part Motet*, with 40 voices on 40 speakers, returned and was again ideally set in the Rideau Chapel. Christian Marclay's 24-hour video *The Clock* was built of imagination, ambition, and thousands of short clips from film and television, woven into a day-



BEN WESTOBY COURTESY WHITE CUBE

Christian Marclay's intriguing installation *The Clock*, at the National Gallery, combined thousands of short clips from film and television.

long odyssey of familiar scenes made oddly strange. Christian Jankowski's one-hour video *Casting Jesus* is a subversively straightforward record of a casting call for actors to play Jesus Christ at the Vatican, with papal officials presiding over would-be messiahs like reality-show judges, catty remarks and all. (It's now showing at the gallery.)

3 Van Gogh: Up Close (National Gallery): Some people told me they didn't go to the gallery's big summer show because it lacked the Van Gogh blockbusters — no *Starry Night* or *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*. How silly is that? Those people missed an exhibition that showed how Van Gogh's work, in just a few years, went from being studious and derivative to being free-spirited and enormously influential. Included were grand works by any measure — *Almond Blossom*, *Wheat Field with Sheaves*, *Iris* — and they helped to provide insight into how Van Gogh became possibly the most famous artist in the world, more than a century after his death.



CUBE GALLERY PHOTO

Joe Fafard's fanciful horses roamed a delightful show at Cube Gallery.

4 Sailing Through Time (River Building, Carleton University): Ottawa sculptor David Fels took the trunk of the 300-year-old "Brighton Beach Oak," a tree beloved by residents in Old Ottawa South until it died and was cut down last year. From a single block of wood Fels carved *Sailing Through Time*, a swooping, billowing colossus — more than 12 feet high and weighing hundreds of pounds. It's an eloquent, beautiful example of Fels' unique and profound relationship with wood.



WAYNE CUDDINGTON/OTTAWA CITIZEN

The National Gallery's blockbuster Van Gogh exhibit in the summer of 2012 featured some spectacular works.

5 Joe Fafard & Russell Yuristy (Cube Gallery): Joe Fafard and Russell Yuristy are old friends, and their work in the exhibition *Prairie Companions* was mutually complementary. Yuristy's drawings and Fafard's sculptures round up a menagerie of animals domestic and wild, and the stars of the show are Fafard's wild horses. They are magnificent, just like the larger versions he has outside the National Gallery.

6 Marc Nerbonne (Galerie St-Laurent + Hill): The Gatineau artist, now in Montreal, photographs roadkill and uses the images in multimedia paintings of animals. Some are ghoulish, some look almost normal, but all are stunning and highly original. In his exhibition *No Med*, at St-Laurent + Hill, and in the *Local Flora* group show at SAW Gallery, Nerbonne created a dark and disturbing world.