

# lighting up

## stephanie radok on adelaide festival's 2007 visual arts program

LIGHT, THE OVERARCHING THEME OF THIS YEAR'S ADELAIDE FESTIVAL OF ARTS, HAS A SPECIAL RESONANCE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA AS COLONEL WILLIAM LIGHT IS CREDITED WITH DESIGNING THE CITY. HIS BRONZE STATUE POINTING A FINGER AT ADELAIDE FROM MONTEFIORE HILL AND HIS GOLD-PLATED THEODOLITE THAT SITS LIKE A LOUISE BOURGEOIS SPIDER ON A PLINTH IN LIGHT SQUARE MARK THE CITY'S GRATITUDE.

Someone has suggested that a laser tracking light should be attached to his finger so that we can find out exactly where he is pointing. Sounds like disco and a job for Graffiti Research Lab (GRL), a New York-based art group dedicated to outfitting graffiti writers, artists and protesters with open source technologies for urban communication. They will be giving a masterclass and doing public art interventions all over Adelaide March 5-16. GRL often use LED Throwies to make statements. A Throwie consists of a lithium battery, a 10mm diffused LED and a rare-earth magnet taped together. You spell out your graffiti in light on metal (ie magnetic) surfaces thus saving both paint and muscle power.

Enlightenment is the twin theme of the festival and *The Speed of Light*, the set of five exhibitions and a keynote address involve a certain amount of what might be called an enlightened return to the 70s. This could be the wheel of fashion or, as in the worldwide tendency to re-enactment of past performance art, a reflection of the voracious need for copy in a web-based world.

Doug Aitken, LA-based artist and maker of music videos and ads as his day-job, recently showed very large image projections on the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He will not be making a work in Adelaide but is the keynote speaker for Artists' Week and will set the stage for thinking about different kinds of light and ways of working with it. Outdoor large scale projections will be present in the work of the Australian-based mob *The Electric Canvas* who will be projecting an Australian World Premier Free Spectacle from dusk til 2am every festival night on buildings up and down the cultural boulevard of North Terrace.

As part of *The Speed of Light* at Greenaway Art Gallery, New York-based Chilean artist Iván Navarro will show videos as well as light sculptures made with neon tubes that look like remakes of Dan Flavin's art and build on some of the unresolved aspects of minimalism. Argentinean artist Felix Larreta's *Spherescant*, a geodesic dome that you can walk inside and is covered with op art patterns responding to music and sound patterns, will be located on the 70s timewarp zone of the Adelaide Festival Centre Plaza by Greenaway Art Gallery's offshoot, GAG Projects, Berlin. At Flinders University City Gallery Italian artist Elisa Sighicelli will show lightboxes and videos. She selectively paints the backs of her photos before illuminating them thus combining the softness of oil-painted surfaces with the sharpness of photography. Düsseldorf-based Mischa Kuball has been working with light for 20 years. He makes political and social statements with projections, and twists our capacity to make sense from fragments of language projected onto sculptural elements designed from his digitized brain waves. Finally at the Jam Factory *The Speed of Light* comes to rest with *The AES (+F) Group* from Russia which consists of graphic designer Evgeny Svetsky and conceptual architects Tatiana Arzamasova and Lev Evzovich who work together regularly with fashion photographer Vladimir Fridke; on those occasions his F is added to the other initials. Their work, a three-screen video installation and a five metre photographic panorama, depicts a tableau vivant of international youth in battle [RT81, p2]. Of all *The Speed of Light* program



this work has the most political dimension as it makes palpable the youth of the world who sit in front of illuminated screens and play computer games, thus battling each other (and older people) day after day, night after night, on the internet.

Curated by Julianne Pierce, Artists' Week 2008 is a program of back to back artists' talks and forums. *Play It Loud* asks whether combining music and art is dumb or just plain fun. Speakers include Chicks on Speed and the Ziggy Stardust-coiffed Philip Brophy as well as art band *The Historionics'* Darius Kesminas. The Art and The City forum investigates whether more art is being made using the city as a canvas. Shaun Gladwell will speak along with Evan Roth from Graffiti Research Lab. *Playing It Safe* asks if we are in a period of conservative art. Speakers include Arlene Texta Queen, Deborah Kelly of Beware of the God fame and Adam Geczy. In *Intimate Dialogue* the question is: how do curators work with artists and contribute to their creative practice? Speakers include Rachel Kent, Victoria Lynn and Jason Smith. *Continental Drift* wonders if it's possible for Australia-based artists to have international

The Australian member of the Chicks, Alex Murray-Leslie, recently said: "I really believe that art is over in a sense, the whole thing is mostly just a commercial system now. So we try to reinvent it from our perspective, a feminist perspective..." There are distinct echoes of 90s art stars VNS Matrix's practice in Chicks on Speed's ambience. Who doesn't remember at least a few words from VNS's cyberfeminist manifesto of art for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: "we are the virus of the world disorder... the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix."

**Adelaide Festival of Arts, Speed of Light, Feb 29-March 16, <http://adelaidefestival.com.au>**

Image: left - Wang Ya-hai, *Visitor*, 2007 video stills, from the *Penumbra* exhibition; top - Graffiti Research Lab digital art projection

