

In Pictures: Illuminus: An Eruption of Art in Public Places

By *Ron Mallis*

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In case anyone was wondering what Boston—its artists, its technical whizzes, its city agencies and "urban mechanics" (thank you, Tom Menino), its property owners, its neighborhoods, its private sector—was capable of regarding art in public places and collaboration, the answers started coming fast and furious sometime around 6pm in the evening of October 25th, in Boston's SoWa district. There, crowds started to gather for, and then wander through, the first, and certainly not the last, **Illuminus Festival**: an array of light/projection/ performance/interactive spectacles from nearly three dozen local artists whose collective, and individual, creativity was pretty much boundless. Focused on the so-called Powerhouse at 540 Harrison Avenue—a remarkable brick structure with a triple peaked roof—somewhere between six and eight thousand people, including hordes of kids, witnessed and participated in something at a scale, intensity, and variety that was new for this town, and this region. Overheard during the evening: "What's going on? This is like Berlin!"



Cemi, Kinetic Reflections

This was an inflection point for the city, where art in public places—at least for the evening—broke through any real or imaginary boundaries to become as big as day—or in this case, light! With an overall strategy devised (and sometimes improvised...) by Jeff Grantz, head of the design firm Materials & Methods, with a singular combination of discipline, sweet-talk, political savvy, and chutzpah like momma used to make, Illuminus shouted out a major call to action. Enough tip-toeing

around the edges! Let's plant some serious stakes in the ground to frame the kind of collaboration that will brand this city—and the region—as places where, in addition to its formidable history, its institutions, and its brainpower, artists are explicitly acknowledged as critical components of a vigorous civic life.



New American Public Art, *Your Big Face*

I had the privilege of being involved with the Festival, however modestly, and one of the most signal experiences for me was a walk-through of the sites several weeks before the event by a number of artists, led by Jeff, with other key production people in tow (including Ethan Vogt, a Boston native and Executive Director of **Nuit Blanche New York**, which has produced numerous events of this sort, and partnered with Jeff on Boston's "Nuit Blanche"). The diversity represented by this group was phenomenal, as were their descriptions of the work they each had in mind for the Festival. What emerged from the walk-through, as well as from the event itself, was a kind of "what the hell" energy: Let's try it, let's do it, let's see what happens — and let's have fun!



Illuminus Festival 2014

The thousands of images—video and otherwise—that showed up on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter during and after the event spoke to the way in which Illuminus triggered peoples’ imaginations. Even now, when I take another look at what I tried to capture on my phone: whether New American Public Art’s *Your Big Face*, Maria Finkelmeier’s percussion set, Samo’s *Glitche*, Claire Eder’s *Beetles*, I’m stunned anew. And this only touches on what was there.



Samo, *Glitch Cube*

I do believe we need to build not only upon what happened at Illuminus but on what else could happen, and who or what will make that happen. This is about the question I first heard posed by someone at ArtPlace America: What can we do together that we can't do separately? Raise your hands to respond!



Caleb Neelon, *Untitled*

- See more at: <http://www.bigredandshiny.com/cgi-bin/BRS.cgi?article=2014-11-17-062209207462713431#sthash.VD9inMM1.dpuf>