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Entertainment

Hobart's winter festival shines in the dark

June 15, 2013

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The launch of Dark Mofo 2013 - Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart. *Photo: MONA/Rebecca Fitzgibbon*

A shimmering rainbow cut across spears of spotlights as they burst through the clouds and punched a hole of light in the night sky over Hobart on Friday night.

The rainbow effect added an extra dimension to the spectacle created by Japanese electronic artist Ryoji Ikeda's installation Spectra [Tasmania] from a grid of 49 enormous spotlights encased in black cabinets at the city's cenotaph.

Spectra marked the launch proper on Friday night of Dark Mofo, the city's inaugural winter festival, a joint initiative of the state government - which is tipping in \$1 million a year for three years - and the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA).

The state government is unashamedly making hay out of the stunning success of MONA - the \$100 million pet project of gambling millionaire David Walsh - which has put what was once regarded as a sleepy hollow firmly on the global arts and culture map.

Premier and Arts Minister Lara Giddings said she had been looking for a way to attract visitors to Tasmania during its quietest and coldest months when Walsh and Brian Ritchie, music director of the now well-established and successful summer music festival MONA FOMA, pitched their idea of Dark Mofo.

Giddings sees Dark Mofo as a way of not only attracting visitors from interstate and overseas to the city, but also giving locals something to see and do, a reason to leave their cosy, warm houses during the winter months.

Curator Nicole Durling concurs, and on early results says it seems to be working, with many of the paid shows - such as Martha Wainwright's concert on Thursday night and the Vandemonium Lags musical show based on some of the state's early convict stories - selling out well in advance.

As Spectra soared five kilometres into the sky (a third of the distance it could reach on a night with less cloud), queues of people snaked through a warehouse down on the nearby wharf to see a series of installations as part of Beam In Thine Own Eye, the first large-scale public art program curated by MONA.

While Ikeda's work began to become visible as darkness fell, hundreds of locals - adults, kids, dogs - swarmed to the site.

Seemingly oblivious to the rain and cold, they peered into the cabinets containing the spotlights and closely inspected them before dark, when their beams were still barely visible.

Ryoji Ikeda's shafts of light produced the smallest shimmering rainbow at their base as they first became visible at 4.42pm.

Within half an hour the rainbow was enormous and from a distance looked to spread across the width of the spread of beams.

The enigmatic Paris-based Ikeda spoke to Fairfax Media just as the slivers of light became visible, saying he had only seen a rainbow appear in the work once before, on a much smaller scale and only fleetingly.

Ikeda was at pains to explain how little energy his installation used, comparing its daily power consumption while operating from dusk to dawn to that of just 10 households.

Given the turnout, there were surely more than 10 Hobart households using less electricity while trading their slippers for boots and coats on a chilly Hobart night.



Dark Mofo lights up Hobart. Photo: Ben McKay

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