

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMILY BERL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"The Space Between Us" — an installation by Janet Echelman incorporating light and fish netting — looms over Glow, a triennial event held on Saturday near the Santa Monica Pier in California.

## An Interactive Art Festival Illuminates a California Beach

By IAN LOVETT

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — It took an entire week for Janet Echelman — along with a team that included a composer, landscape architects, lighting technicians and a bulldozer crew — to construct her art installation in the sand along the beach here. They dug a crater and strung enormous, handmade fishing nets overhead that were illuminated with colored light. It was the most expensive piece at this year's Glow, this city's all-night, interactive art festival.

But as soon as the crowd descended into the installation, the sand began to shift; the temporary dunes of piled sand surrounding the crater began to erode; and the piece, titled "The Space Between Us," was altered.

"I just love seeing all the people changing it; everyone is sculpting it," she said. "It comes down Sunday, so it's entirely ephemeral."

Modeled after Nuit Blanche, the one-night art festival held in Paris and other cities, this year's event was the third installment of Glow. Organizers bill it as "Santa Monica's signature cultural event." Fifteen artists — internationally known figures like Ms. Echelman, whose hand-knotted hangings give crafts a coolly conceptual edge, alongside less-established locals — were commissioned to create one-night-only

installations on the Santa Monica Pier and the surrounding sand.

Yet, the event was also built on shifting sand, which would be washed away by the tide the following day. And the crowd itself — organizers expected about 150,000 people to attend — was often part of the artwork.

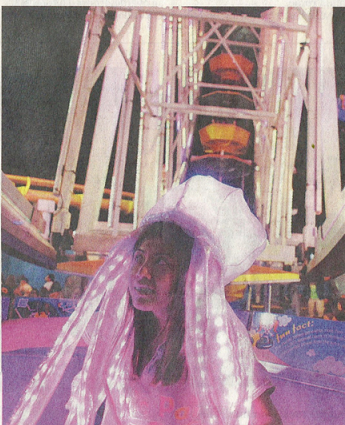
"I am art," said Rochelle Reyes, 33, as she walked through a field of lights.

Another woman nearby was less sure. "Is this the art?" she wondered aloud.

At Glow, the answer was not always clear.

One piece asked people to download a smartphone app, and then meet south of the pier, where they would wave their phones through the air while the screens changed color. Another captured the silhouettes of festivalgoers on a phosphorescent screen. And in a third, crowd members were asked to dance inside a translucent dome, their shadows visible to an audience outside.

Those were official Glow installations. The acrobats who stripped to the waist, covered themselves in glow-in-the-dark body paint and swung from the rings at an outdoor beach-side gym were not technically performers from the festival. But they drew at least as large an audience. And what about the man perusing the shimmering jellyfish sculptures while wearing a



Heidy Flores, 20, wears an octopus crown at the Ferris wheel.

homemade jellyfish cap on his head? Or the thousands of people waving glow sticks? Were they also part of the show? Even the

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Each year, we understand a little more clearly how we get the best art. We think less art can be more powerful."

Still, he conceded that few in the mainstream art world of museums and galleries have taken Glow seriously. He said the setting — on the beach right beside the Santa Monica Pier, one of the city's most overfamiliar tourist destinations — turned off many art aficionados.

"I find it very annoying," Mr. Pally said. Glow "challenges the

orthodoxy of the mainstream art world."

But Glow may also be settling into its own as a destination for art lovers.

As she sat inside "The Space Between Us," while children jumped off the temporary banks of sand, Amber Carson said it was a more contemplative experience than she expected. "Being here is so much more relaxing than I thought," Ms. Carson, 42,

In its third edition, the all-night Glow lives up to its name.

said. "I thought it might be chaotic and loud. But sitting here, I feel very peaceful."

The next morning, Ms. Echelman said: "It was a really beautiful experience for me. I think the crowd did complete the piece. This morning, the mounds had been, with individual footprints, pressed down. There was a significant remnant, but it was completely transformed."

Mr. Pally agreed that the fleeting nature of the evening offered part of the appeal. "We like that it's just one night every few years," he said. "If you miss it, that's it. You'll never see it."