

# Lights on Tampa 2009 art show: A downtown street party

By Megan Voeller

It's a balmy Monday morning after Christmas, and Chris Doyle has his eyes fixed on the front of the Tampa Convention Center. There, in the portico that leads to the entrance of the shell-pink building, a line of glittering mirror balls hangs from the roof overhead. The low morning sun, barely kissing them at first, suddenly lets rip -- and light bursts into dancing fragments inside the space as people walk by.

"That's what I was waiting for," Doyle says, vindicated. Clad in black shorts and flip-flops, he squints up in satisfaction at the mirror balls through silver-framed glasses. As if on cue, a Convention Center employee appears to say how cool the installation looks, seemingly unfazed by the fact that a New York artist has drilled a dozen holes in the building and plugged disco balls into the voids.

Come this weekend, the dozen mirror balls already adorning the portico will be joined by dozens more, bracketed to palm trees surrounding the Convention Center. To execute the ambitious installation, Doyle and a four-man crew spent about a week in a storage room at the facility, assembling motors with watertight casings for the portico balls (the largest of which boast 40-inch diameters), as well as the brackets that will hold the smaller palm tree balls aloft. On Saturday night, their hard work will come to life, rendering a building that has played host to both the Log and Timber Home Show and the Solid Waste Association of North America improbably hip.

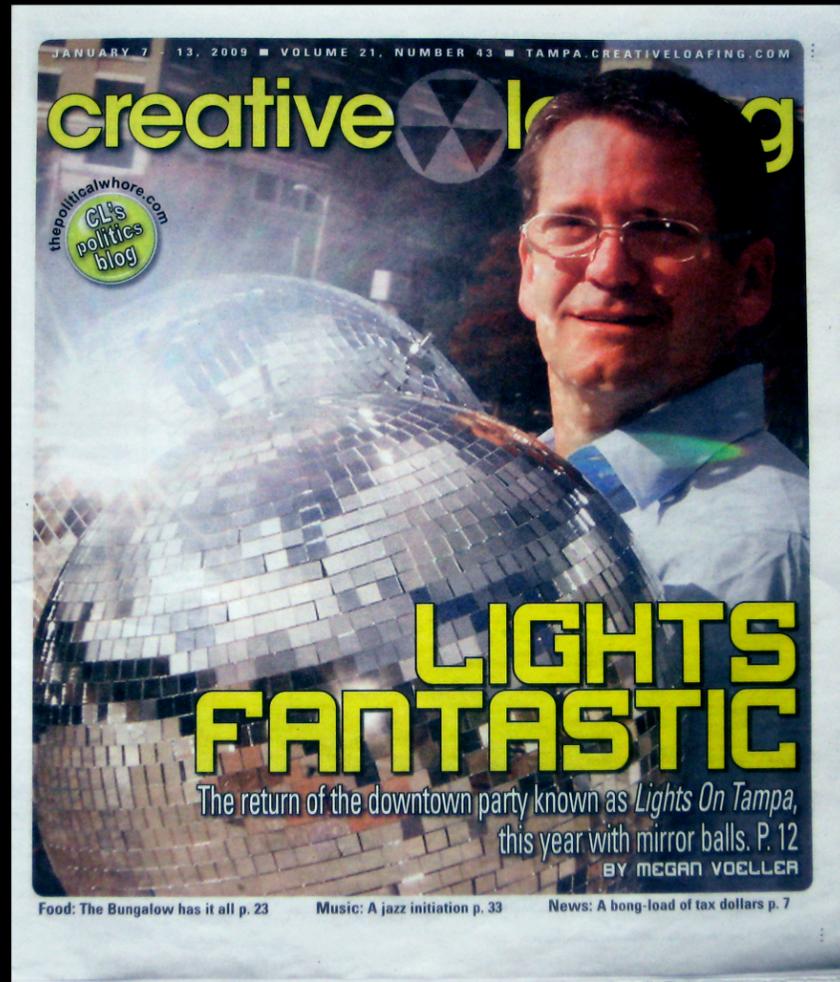
Ecstatic City, as Doyle's urban intervention is titled, represents merely one node in the network of light- and new media-based public art that is Lights On Tampa 2009. When the program unveils this year's selected projects on Saturday, downtown Tampa will host a combination street party, electronic art biennial and civic bonding experience. (Though the works will continue to be on view through the Super Bowl, Saturday's public debut offers a chance to see them in the enthusiastic company of hundreds of Bay area residents.) For this year's offerings are nothing if not unrepentantly fun: In addition to Doyle's spinning disco balls, viewers can expect to interact with a giant mood ring in Cotanchobee Park via the Internet, watch a post-apocalyptic cartoon projected outside the St. Pete Times Forum and hunt for video installations throughout the Channel District.

Lights On Tampa's five main offerings lie within easy walking distance of each other, between the Convention Center and the Forum; the slightly farther afield satellite projects in the Channel District are accessible by a longer walk or the briefest of car trips. Their proximity to each other is hardly incidental -- for along with its goal of showcasing adventurous public art, Lights On Tampa aims to suggest that local residents undertake the adventure of exploring downtown together. The sense of collective memory and community that might emerge only puts the city at better odds of crafting a creative future from its industrial past.

Doyle, whose public installations are often commissioned by medium-sized burghs looking to enhance their arts and cultural offerings, describes his objective as animating a space. Though relatively low-tech, the mirror balls exude high energy in their ability to create an atmosphere of indefinable expectation. With the portico balls set to remain installed at the Convention Center permanently (while the palm tree balls will come down after the Super Bowl), both residents and conventioners may find themselves responding to the installation with the occasional party, impromptu or planned -- and that's part of the fun.

"Every once in a while, maintenance workers come by and go, 'It's going to be so great because I'm going to be able to dance all the time,'" Doyle says. "And I'm like, 'Yes, you can -- anywhere you want.'"

The artists selected for Lights On Tampa 2009 are mostly New Yorkers, except for Tubingen, Germany-based collaborators Casa Magica and Tampa photographer Carlton Ward Jr. They were chosen by a trio of esteemed jurors: art critics Dave Hickey and Jerry Saltz, along with Anne Pasternak, head of New York public art organization Creative Time. In addition to the new projects, two installations from Lights On Tampa 2006 -- the program's inaugural run -- remain on view permanently: Tobey Archer's Marquee, a color-shifting fiber optic cable that rims the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center's roof, and Stephen Knapp's Luminous Affirmations, an installation of colored light and glass on the side of the new City Hall building.



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## LIGHTS FANTASTIC

The public-art party Lights On Tampa is set to shine again.

**BY MEGAN VOELLER**

**Lights On Tampa 2009**  
Jan. 10-Feb. 1 with a public celebration on Sat. Jan. 10, 5-10 p.m. [lightsontampa.org](http://lightsontampa.org) for a downloadable map of project locations.

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Here's what to watch for:

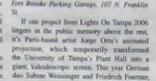
**DISCO BALLS** A mirror ball installation in the portico of the Convention Center. There, in the portico that leads to the entrance of the shell-pink building, a line of glittering mirror balls hangs from the roof overhead. The low morning sun, barely kissing them at first, suddenly lets rip -- and light bursts into dancing fragments inside the space as people walk by.



**REPAIRS** A view of the Portico at the Convention Center, showing the mirror balls hanging from the roof.



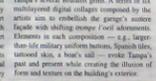
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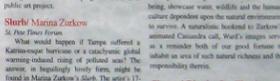
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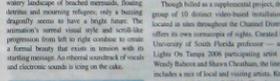
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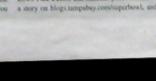
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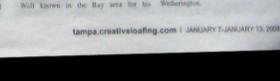
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