

Nicework by day, Bright Nights after lights out

 By Leigh Andrews

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The Bright Night project is an exhibition of some of South Africa's most talented photographers and illustrators. What makes this one stand out though is that it's crowdfunded and will be held completely in the dark, lit by a clever solar-powered lamp, all inspired by a talk at Design Indaba 2014...

Ross Drakes works at [Nicework](#). While that's certainly enough 'nice work' to keep him occupied during the day, by night he helps his wife think up bright ways to enlighten the rest of us... 'moonlighting', if you'll excuse the pun, on the Bright Night project. It's a 'passion project' Leigh-Anne's been curating for an age. What is it, you ask?



The Drakes

Lit only by the light of Little Sun, which is a beautifully designed, solar-powered lamp, the expo name was actually inspired by the project's involvement with Little Sun and the incredible work they do in bringing clean, reliable, affordable light to people worldwide without access to electricity. They're also inviting people to 'light up the night'.

The Drakes tell us how...

■ **1. An expo at night is an intriguing way of celebrating art, with the [Britain Tate Afterdark exhibit](#) already proving a big success last year. Let's start with the inspiration behind the project, what brought it on?**

Drakes: It has been a long-time dream to create a platform at this level in Johannesburg, to showcase the personal works of these photographers and illustrators who are often more recognised for their commercial work. We felt, in an exhibition environment, we have had limited access to this side of their work. This dream was inspired and jolted back to life by our introduction to Little Sun and the creative projects they have been involved with around the world. We were first exposed to them by Ije Nwokorie, the CEO of Wolff Olins, at the Design Indaba in 2014. This got the thoughts flowing, the cogs turning, and so began the creation of this unique art experience in our city with the Little Sun at its heart. The Bright Night Project was born.

■ **2. How exactly will it work?**

Drakes: On 15 October, our [Indiegogo backers](#) will be able to explore the Museum of African Design, in the dark, lit only

by the light from the Little Suns they will be given on entrance. They will then have the opportunity to wander through the space and discover each piece. There will be a second evening for the public on 16 October, without the blackout element, and the exhibition will be up for a week.

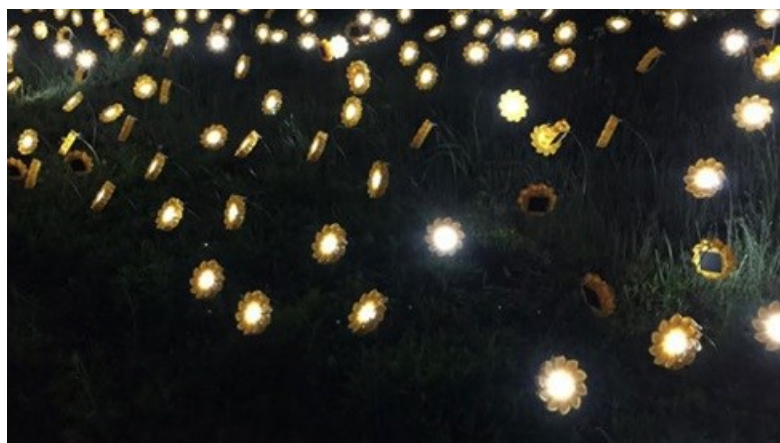
From the start we wanted to crowdfund this project, we have been curious about the platform for some time and want to see if it is, in fact, possible to make a project happen purely through the very people who want to see it happen. But instead of just asking for funds toward the project, we made the backing in itself the way to come to the opening night, so the Bright Night Project opening 'blackout' evening becomes an evening for the people who made the whole project possible.

The unique experience of blacking the space out is where we focused the launch of the Indiegogo campaign, but the essence of the project remains the artists and their work, we didn't want to limit the access to that.

With regard to doing more of these in the future, there are no hard and fast plans at this point, but just in the process of setting this exhibition up and the incredibly feedback we have received, we have seen just how necessary it is. Subsequently, we would love to see this as a growing annual platform. There has also been huge interest from other artists and venues which we are interested in exploring.

■ 3. *Clever. Tell us about Little Sun and how it will light up the expo.*

Drakes: Little Sun is a high-quality solar-powered LED lamp developed in Germany by artist Olafur Eliasson and engineer Frederik Ottesen. It is a global project connecting the world through sharing light. At its heart is the mission to get clean, reliable, affordable light to the 1.1 billion people worldwide without access to electricity.



A Little Sun Garden at Roppongi Art Night, Tokyo, Japan. © [Indiegogo page](#)

We have always enjoyed the way Little Sun has communicated their mission and have been intrigued by the different approach they have to positioning themselves; the Little Sun sits as comfortably in the MoMA store in New York as it does locally in the spaza shop on the corner. Their approach is creative, light and friendly. Their mission, important and necessary.

They have been involved with an impressive collection of creative initiatives in London, Copenhagen, Venice, Milan, Japan and New York, to mention a few. We think Johannesburg should take its place amongst these.

■ 4. Definitely. What went into selecting/curating the work of 20 of South Africa's most talented photographers and illustrators to be displayed? What was the selection criteria?

Drakes: Many of the artists come from fashion/commercial photography or design/illustration advertising backgrounds, so definitely some of the selection process was around wanting to create a platform for the personal work of these more commercially recognised photographers and illustrators. But, saying that, the curation is often more a 'feeling' rather than a set of criteria. For instance, Ian Marley is one of the contributing artists, coming from the fine art world. At face value this doesn't make sense, but his work just sits perfectly in the bigger visual curation angle.

From an exhibition curation angle, the artists will be creating original pieces around the theme of light. Working to a common theme and format, we are hoping to build a visual journey for the viewers as they discover each artist's personal take on the theme. From a printing, framing and hanging angle, it was important to us to elevate the platform to the highest quality we could, we felt that this is how these works should be viewed.

■ 5. Interesting that you'll display attendees' names at the venue and give a shout-out on social media - the new era of collaboration?

Drakes: Yes, definitely! It's been incredible to experience the potential that projects now have to be powered by the people who want to see them happen. We felt it's important to give the backers a sense of ownership as the project becomes possible because of them, this is what drives the thing forward.

Definitely one to add to the calendar if you're in the area. If you want to be part of the unique 'blackout' opening evening on 15 October, reserved for those who've backed the project, time is a-ticking as funding ends on 27 August, so visit [this site](#) to see the full project and get tickets, and don't miss the bloopers at the end!

Also view the video embedded below, and click here for more on [the project](#). You can also find out more on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

[The Bright Night Project](#) from [Nicework](#) on [Vimeo](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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