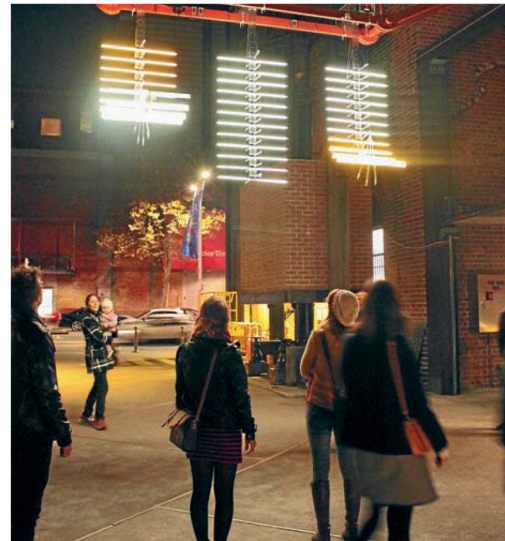


Unfurlii is modelled on the curling shape of a fern. When sensors at the top of the structure “notice” movement below, the three stems fold up into themselves and change colours.



An audience admires the light display at Sydney's Vivid Festival.

Beautiful monsters

Rana Abboud has a thing for “monster flowers”, or Frankenplants.

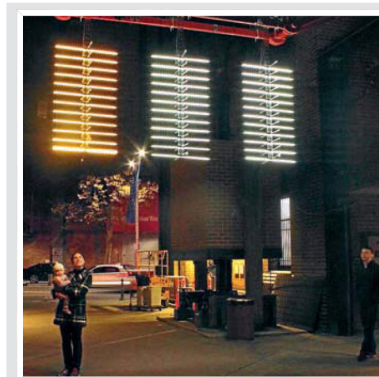
A three-time veteran of Sydney's Vivid Festival — a three-week extravaganza bringing together art exhibitions, talks and light installations — the Sydney-based Kiwi has a knack for creating magical Frankenplants that move and react to bystanders.

One was made from crushed plastic cups, which shook and clattered when people approached. Another was made from hundreds of metal plates that opened and shut when people clapped.

But this year's effort, Unfurlii, is the most ambitious yet, which strikes Abboud and her husband Ewen Wright as somewhat ridiculous given that they are working around a baby daughter and their full-time jobs as architects.

“Every year we come back and go, what were we thinking?” laughs Abboud. “We would love to just get a sheet and project things onto it, but Unfurlii moves up and down and changes colour and reacts to people. It's really complicated, and we are cordoning off parts of the house where you can't have a little person coming in.”

Unfurlii is modelled on the curling shape of a fern. When



“It's great seeing people enjoying them because it takes a hell of a lot of work to make them happen.”

**Unfurlii co-creator
Rana Abboud**

sensors at the top of the structure “notice” movement below, as people reach up their hands or jump, the three stems fold up into themselves protectively and change colours.

There are hundreds of moving parts and the whole structure needs to be watertight to avoid malfunctions in inclement weather. It also has to be robust enough to withstand interference from admirers who may want to

grab hold of it.

The couple plan to join the crowds wandering around Walsh Bay, where their piece will be on display, and watch how people react to it — their favourite part of the whole process.

“It's great seeing people enjoying them because it takes a hell of a lot of work to make them happen. Our first year, people didn't know how [the plants] were reacting, because they had hidden

motion sensors, and people couldn't tell if the [flowers] were reacting to sound or activity.

“It was hilarious watching people trying to guess, and people telling you how they thought it worked.”

Vivid brings together 150 light artists from 23 countries. Their work is displayed in eight precincts around Sydney, which also plays host to 500 speakers and nearly 200 music events. Now

in its eighth year, it is the largest festival of its kind in the world.

Last year Abboud and Wright transformed an often overlooked alley in The Rocks known as the Suez Canal with their piece *Clapiconia*, inspired by the *heliconia pendula* plant. When bystanders clapped, the geometric flowers strung above them opened and closed.

Born in Beirut, Abboud moved to Wellington with her family aged 3. She went to Victoria University and did a Masters degree at the University of California, Berkeley.

She met Wright in Wellington and they moved to Sydney 10 years ago.

“This is the kind of thing we do on the side as a little bit of an outlet, to do something interesting and creative that we don't get to do at work,” says Abboud of the light installations, which she “bullied” her husband into making with her.

“I've always been obsessed with lights and things that combine interactivity and movement.”

Other Kiwi light artists to show their work at Vivid are Napier-born Mark Hammer (now living in Sydney) and Auckland-based Angus Muir, Hamish Steptoe, Jarrod Barrow, and sisters Julia and Alexandra Heaney.

Eleanor Black

■ Vivid Sydney runs until June 18.