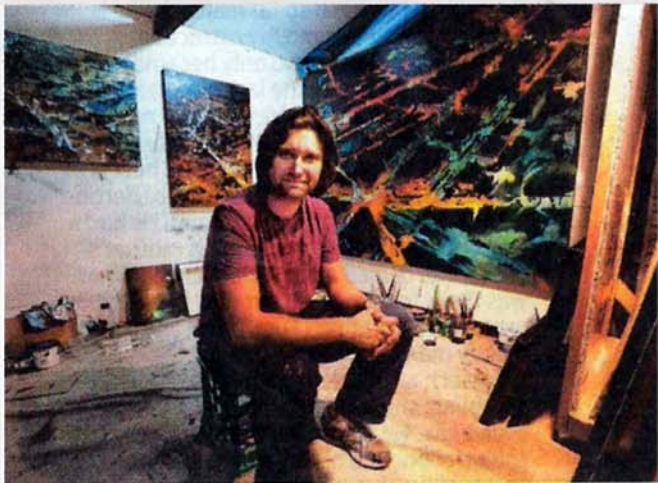


## His brush with Paris proved to be a truly illuminating time



Alex Fensham's new collection captures the romance of Paris at night in winter. Picture: Bob Barker

### ART: ALEX FENSHAM

THEY call it the City of Light, so what better location than Paris for an artist who paints nocturnal cityscapes?

When Alex Fensham arrived in Paris in early 2012, Christmas was still twinkling in the shop windows and in the trees along the boulevards. It was winter, so the lights came on early.

It was a perfect situation for the Dulwich Hill painter, who earned his PhD at Sydney College of the Arts on the subject of artificial light and the urban sublime.

For the three months he was in Paris, Fensham walked the streets at night in below-freezing temperatures, seeking out vantage points from which to photograph the lights.

These photographs were the source material for paintings that Fensham

worked on during the day. In some, the boulevards are so bright they burn through the city like a pour of molten gold.

Fensham was perturbed only by the bright blue skies, which stymied his hopes of painting lots of atmospheric mists.

Only once did he find a misty scene, while walking near the precinct of Saint-Germain-des-Près one cold night.

"There was this old church and a work site right next to it," Fensham says.

"They had some big steam machine pumping hot water and, because it was minus 10 (degrees) and the water was hot, it was creating these fantastic plumes of steam. I finally got my atmospheric light."

The oil paintings on canvas and paper go on show from Saturday at Artsite Gallery in Camperdown, in a solo exhibition titled *La Nuit* (the night).

There's no mistaking the identity of the

romantic city depicted in the paintings. But Fensham created the likenesses without actually painting the structure of the buildings as they appear in reality. Instead, he painted only the lights themselves.

"The points of light (in the paintings) create the illusion of structure," he says.

Fensham's residency was at the renowned Cite Internationale des Arts, an egg carton of a building on the Seine.

The Cite is made up of hundreds of tiny studios designed as temporary residencies for creative people such as artists, writers, dancers, actors and musicians. Fensham stayed in the Dr Denise Hickey Memorial Studio, which is managed by the Art Gallery of NSW.

ELIZABETH FORTESCUE

Artsite Gallery, 157 Salisbury Rd, Camperdown; 8095 9678, from Saturday until March 3, [artsite.com.au](http://artsite.com.au)