

# Supersized viruses

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On February 22, festival-goers at Melbourne's dusk-to-dawn White Night celebration lined up in droves outside the State Library of Victoria for an intimate evening with herpes. And they got it, in a big way: Bobbling around on the 40-meter-diameter central dome on the ceiling of the library's La Trobe Reading Room was a bright and colorful computer animation of a herpes virus particle.

Herpes was one of eight viruses featured that night in "Molecular Kaleidoscope," a multimedia installation designed by Drew Berry, a cell biologist-turned-biological animator at Melbourne's Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research. Berry's animations have won him both Emmy and BAFTA awards for his animations, and he collabo-

rated with the musician Björk on her multimedia *Biophilia* project.

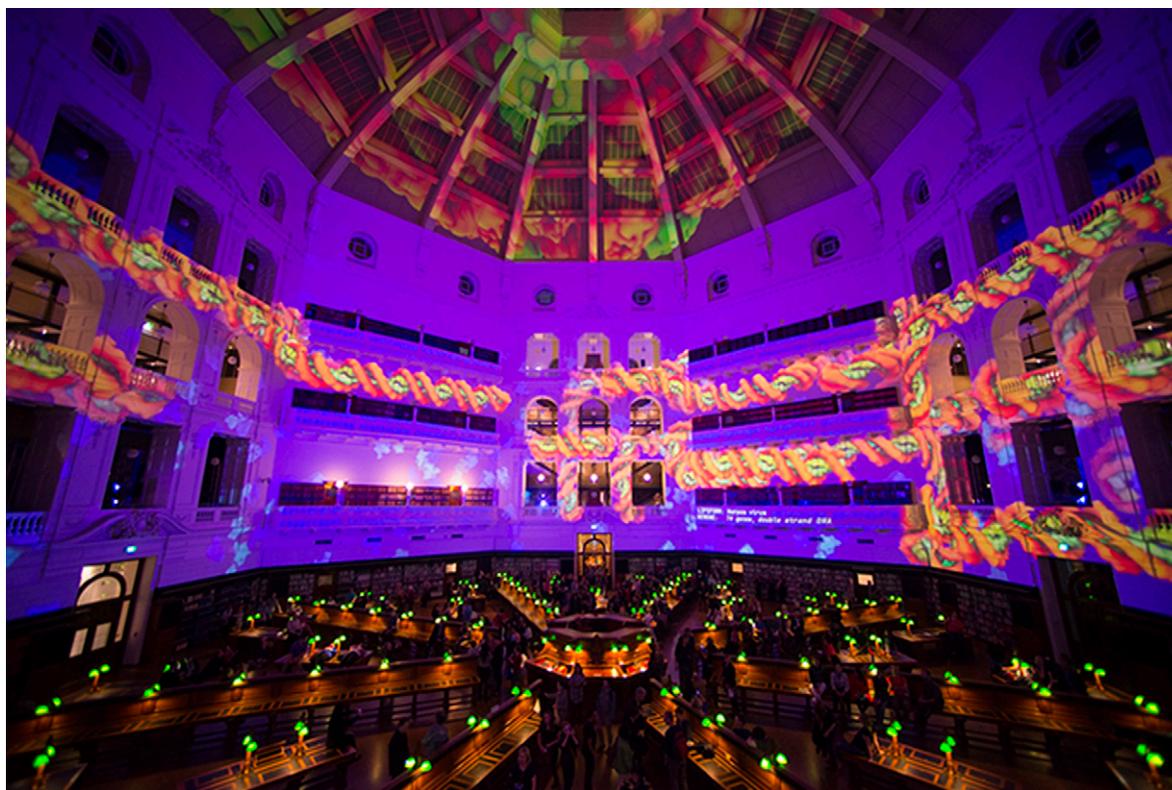
To create the virtual viruses in "Kaleidoscope," Berry studied X-ray crystallography images and fine-tuned the presentation by fitting it to a scale model of the space. His idea was to transform the six-story, octagonal reading room into a cavernous microscope with one billion-times magnifying power—which meant a 30-nanometer virus particle had a 30-meter diameter on the dome—considerably larger than most hot-air balloons.

The full viral lineup included herpes, HIV, human papillomavirus, smallpox, polio, gastroenteritis, influenza, and rhinovirus. As a particle twitched in the dome, its DNA or RNA strands roamed the walls, exploring galleries and bookshelves. Each virus was

center-stage for two minutes before being replaced by another, and music from composer Franc Tétaz accompanied each two-minute segment. Different musical themes and colors gave each virus "its own flavor and vibe," says Berry, who observed that attendees had similar reactions to certain viruses.

"Herpes was the most popular," he says. "Whenever herpes came up, some groups in the crowd would laugh or react. They seemed to have some familiarity with it."

The least-popular may have been the human papilloma virus, some types of which cause cancer, including almost all types of cervical cancer. The human papillomavirus animation, Berry says, "had a dark and disturbing soundtrack to it. That was the one where people would get up and leave." Similarly, when HIV had its turn, "you could feel the audience groan."



A herpes virus snakes its way around the bookshelves of the State Library of Victoria, Australia, accompanied by music composed for the occasion. Image courtesy of Drew Berry.