

N°3

THE SURVEY ISSUE

UNTITLED

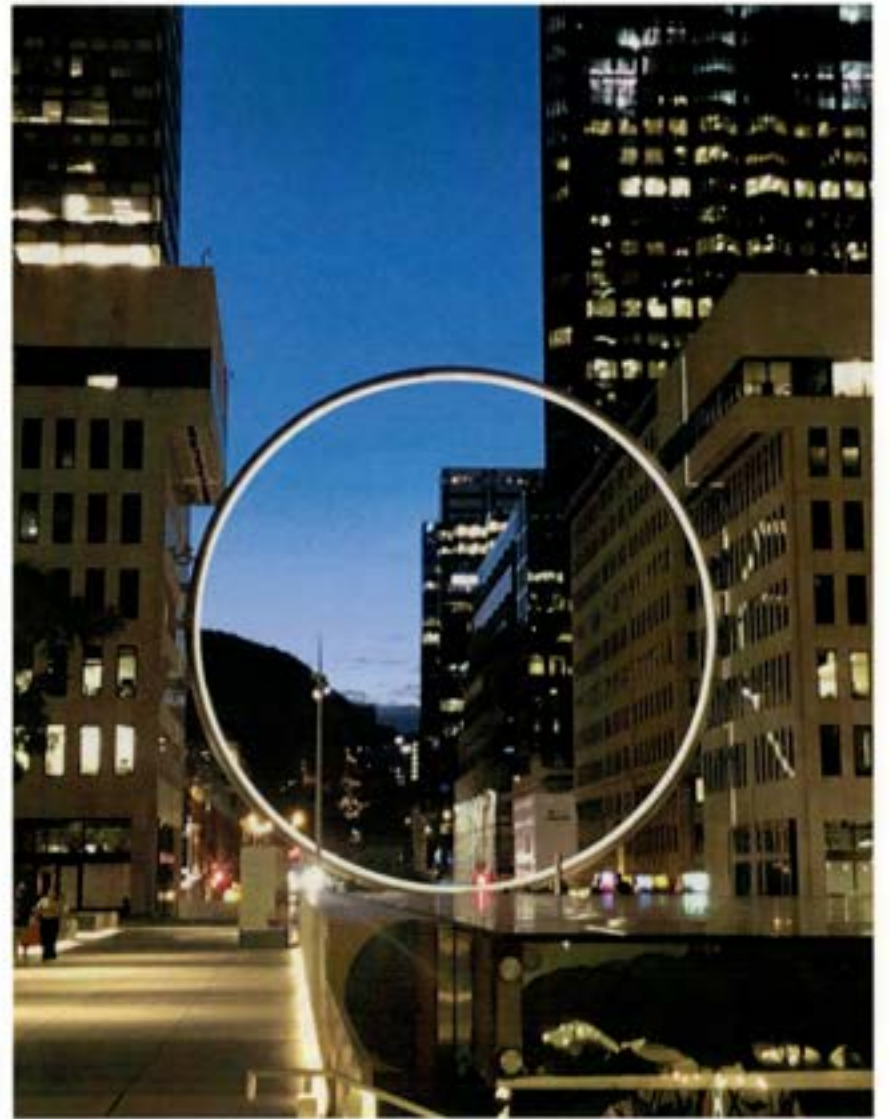
(A PUBLIC ART ZINE)





Claude Cormier, Love Park, Toronto, photo : Dustin William

"HUMOR - Joie de vivre - Générosité"



Claude Cormier, The Ring, Montreal, photo: Eleanore Carson

Claude Cormier 1960 - 2023

“DO YOU HAVE 2 MINUTES?”

N: 1-200 LOCATION: VARIOUS TORONTO LOCATIONS

DATE: SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023 AGE: 20-86 GENDER: 73% EVEN SPLIT

- Do you enjoy art? Yes I'm indifferent No
83% 5% 2%
- On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate Toronto's public artworks?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 6.5
- On a scale of 1-10, how important is public art to quality of life in a city?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 8.9
- Which is your favorite public art work in the city? Least favorite, if any?
GRAFFITI ALLEY 18 MINTONS HENRY MOORE LARGE TWO FORMS GRANGE PARK 13
JULIE BLUNDA DREAMING 12 CLAUDE CORNUSZ BERCZY PAVILION 11 BRIAN JENSEN COUGH MONSTER 9
- Who do you think owns the public art in Toronto?
CITY: 90% THE ARTIST: 8% THE LANDOWNER: 2%
- Who should pay for public art?
 Federal Government City of Toronto Private citizens
 Provincial Government Developers
CITY, PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TOGETHER: 95% DEVELOPERS 5%
- What is the most important role of public art?
 To be enjoyable 40% Political 9% Decorative 20%
 Educational 29% Surprising 8% ALL: 32%
- Which is better in public art:
 Figurative (bodies, animals) 34% Abstract (shapes, patterns) 49% BOTH: 20%
- Is it important that public art appeal to everyone? Yes 40% No 60%
- Is there a place for controversy in public art? Yes 89% No 12%
- Is there any correlation between public art and associated property value?
YES: 75% NO: 25%
- On a scale of 1-10 how important is it that people 'understand' public art?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 5.8
- Have you travelled to any other city with noticeable public art?
MONTREAL 26 MENTIONS LONDON UK 17 CHICAGO NY 16 PARIS 15 BERLIN 13

Would you be willing to participate in a follow up survey?

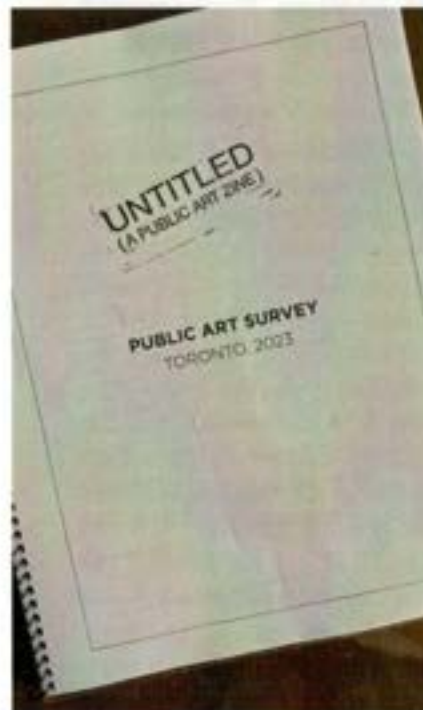
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For our third issue, we wanted to dive more deeply into Toronto's public art. While we were considering how to approach the issue, Janos came up with the idea of us doing a survey, as a way to find out what Torontonians think of the publicly accessible outdoor artworks—sculptures, murals, monuments, activations—scattered across the city.

The City of Toronto has three main public art programs: the city's own public art collection of over 200 sculptural pieces from the mid 19th century to today; StART Toronto, which facilitates street art on traffic boxes, concrete barriers and murals through partnerships with communities; and the Percent for Public Art program, which encourages developers to contribute one percent of construction costs to public art, generally on the property being built (often condominiums). Through these three programs, alongside the city's popular annual event Nuit Blanche and the many organizations and initiatives that display art in public including the Bentway, Stackt Market, the Distillery District and the city's many Business Improvement Associations, public art has exploded onto the streets over the past decade or so. Most recently, ArtworxTO: Toronto's Year of Public Art in 2021-2022 saw art hubs opened across the city including at Union Station, Downsview Park and Scarborough Town Centre, further engaging artists and audiences in creating and enjoying public art. The GTHA has even more initiatives, alongside artworks owned by universities, museums, businesses, not-for-profit organizations and private citizens. Public art of all kinds seems to be everywhere downtown and increasingly outside the core. But how, we wondered, is all this creativity received by the public?

We decided to find out. We wrote up a list of thirteen carefully thought out but wholly un-scientific questions, decided that two hundred surveys would be adequate, printed them, bound them into booklets, made business cards and we bravely hit the streets with pencils in hand. Over the course of a month, we visited areas including Queens Park, Cloverdale Mall, Yorkville, St. Clair West, Kipling Go Station, our workplaces in Markham and near Pearson airport, the Danforth, Harbourfront and Riverdale Park. We had a pretty even split between male and female respondents of all ages from 22 to 86, although we didn't survey children (that's another survey, for sure!) We got occasional refusals but overall people happily obliged. We expected many additional comments, and we received them. Many of our respondents claimed not to be 'art people' and then spoke at length about what they enjoyed or didn't, what they felt was important and what public art should mean to the inhabitants of Toronto. We heard from engineers, physiotherapists, insurance brokers, retired people, writers, artists, business owners, marketing and real estate professionals, factory workers, teachers, students, even a priest. Respondents were from Iran, Russia, France, Spain, Saudi Arabia, the UK, South Korea, Japan...And the results were quite revealing.

Our respondents top three favourite public artworks were Graffiti Alley, Henry Moore's *Large Two Forms* from 1966 which is now a centrepiece in Grange Park behind the AGO, and Jaume Plensa's *Dreaming*, an enormous head of a young girl at Richmond Adelaide Centre that was installed in 2020. Claude Cormier's *Dog Fountain* in Berczy Park on Front Street came in fourth, and was polarizing-people felt strongly about it either way. These large-scale pieces are all situated in a place where they can be appreciated. Graffiti Alley is well known, tucked away from main streets, provides a walkable view, is engaging and inspires a sense of discovery in the viewer. The others are all sculptures with a specific sense of place that can be viewed from all angles, a focal point,



surrounded by landscaping or hardscaping and public seating. The message is clear: people enjoy nice places!

While there are often public artworks situated in front of downtown condos, these were rarely mentioned (the exception being Douglas Coupland's *Monument to the War of 1812*), perhaps signaling the time for a new direction for the city's valuable Percent for Public Art program. As a member of the city's Public Art Commission, I continue to advocate for the pooling of funds towards artworks in local parks. Despite being technically architecture, OCAD's Sharp Centre-monumental, colourful, noticeable, with a strong sense of place—was mentioned several times. While we know that the TTC boasts some wonderful examples both old and new (Rita Letendre's skylight at Glencairn; John B. Boyle's bright historical murals at Queen, Marman & Borin's exuberant bus platform at Woodbine, Katharine Harvey's stunning mosaics at Chester), these weren't mentioned. Perhaps a future issue will focus solely on subway public art...

That 88% of respondents said that there is a place for controversy in public art perhaps presents an opportunity for the city, and for artists. But if our sample survey reflects the general public, then isn't it important for juries, consultants and other stakeholders not to shy away from controversial public artworks being presented? In our opinion, and the opinion of many of our respondents, some public art absolutely should be provocative, start discussions and make people think. But when was the last time that happened in Toronto? And what would it take to enable these kinds of conversations? The involvement of the artist? Art consultants? The media? The Toronto Public Art Commission? City staff? (We'd still love to see a full-on piece by Kent Monkman as we suggested in our first issue.)

Respondents felt that public art should reflect the community. In a way, Toronto already does that better than most. By having a de-centralized public art policy, Toronto has a variety of styles, and communities tend to shape their own public art, providing opportunities for local and international artists, and giving us a wide variety: Condo art at Yonge & Eglinton and a preponderance of graphic murals at Yonge & St. Clair, while floral murals dominate at Mount Pleasant and Davisville. There is sculptural work in the Distillery, urban-style at Stackt Market, art complementing nature at the Brickworks and through the Don Valley, temporary and performance work at the Bentway and grassroots style work throughout Kensington Market best represented by the wonderful, kooky Garden Car. There is Chinese public art in Chinatown, and it goes on and on. That's pretty special.

While the process of public art is not perfect and must be continually adjusted, our respondents gave Toronto's public art a 6.5 out of 10 overall. Many comments were directed at the need for public art to be accessible, whether conceptually, or by being recognizable, or at a scale where it is noticeable, or, importantly, through explanatory plaques. Many felt that public art can have an educational role, but that some kind of entry point for the public would be required in order to fulfil that role. People drew attention to the lack of a single 'iconic' piece of public art in the city, occasionally referring to the CN Tower (really??) Toronto needs more than one iconic piece: Perhaps in High Park, at the Scarborough Bluffs and on the island. And let's finally give the potentially iconic Ron Arad work, *Safe Hands* at Yonge & Bloor the space it deserves in a parkette, with benches and landscaping within close proximity of one of Canada's most significant intersections.

Thankfully, nobody mentioned the TORONTO sign at Nathan Phillips Square—it didn't even seem to register as public art. And anyway, we can do much better than that.

The city should put out a call to artists for a piece that represents Toronto, make a shortlist and ask the public to vote. It could even be a temporary piece, changed up every few years like London's Fourth Plinth. The best way to get people to understand, care for, and to appreciate public art is to involve them in the process. That way, they come to understand it on some level, which opens the door to discussion and eventually to embracing it as their own. It would be much improved, and much less literal: After all, hasn't Chicago's iconic Cloud Gate become the ultimate Chicago sign?

Andrea Carson Barker & Janos Kereszturi Toth

TORONTONIANS SAID IT

"The most important role of public art is to inspire us."

"We need more so-called anchor pieces, famous art that people will travel here to see."

"Public art needs to start a dialogue and discussion."

"Public art should be uplifting, should take us out of the everyday."

"Public art spark conversations."

"You never know who will be impacted by public art."

"Civilizations die, what survives? The art."

"I think art should just provoke. It doesn't matter about the reaction."

"Accessibility is critical. Public art has a responsibility to draw people in."

"Artists have a duty to provoke, to lead."

"Public art needs to be reflective of the people who live in the city."

NICOLE STOFFMAN: TAG-BUSTER

We all experience the public realm in different ways, whether it's en route to the subway, walking our dogs or kids, cycling in the neighbourhood...but most of us experience it visually. It takes a special kind of person to engage with it—and particularly with its art—physically. Nicole Stoffman is one such person.

Nicole, a friend of mine since kindergarden, has been an actress, an accomplished jazz singer and occasional performance artist, having produced in 2004 a project where pretended to be a tourist for 28 days in Toronto, sending postcards home to her family from different parts of the city! She is now a journalist—a vocation that she shares with her mother and late father. While she was a community reporter for the Annex Gleaner, Nicole began taking a closer look at her neighbourhood, which led to her becoming, for a time, a self-appointed public art ambassador.

In March 2020, she became intrigued by an unassuming work of public art in her neighbourhood, under a bridge just north of Dupont on Spadina Road. *Spadina Line*, by artists Brad Golden (now a public art consultant) & Norman Richards, is a subtle work comprised of various metal components in and around the bridge that refer to this history of the area and the railway as it had affected development of the site. The components include specially designed lighting standards, a time capsule, bronze words embedded into the sidewalk, and three iron, copper and steel rods or 'solar recorders' which align with shadows on the bridge (The Spadina Line) each year at the spring and fall equinoxes. It's a poetic piece intended to draw viewers attention to nature and to the idea of the bridge as an instrument to measure time.

ACB: Tell me about what you thought when you first saw Brad Golden's public artwork *Spadina Line*?

NS: I noticed it during the pandemic, when I decided to run nearby. Every day I walked under the underpass and I realized gradually that it's an artwork. But you wouldn't have known it because it was so vandalized. Then I decided I'll run one day and the other day I'll clean the art. I love art, I've travelled a lot in France, and I love the public art and public sculpture there.

The first time I saw it, I thought it was very cerebral, conceptual...which is unusual. It refers to history, to the passage of time, the feeling that we should be appreciating a sense of place. We don't often do that in Toronto the way they do in Paris, where the public squares named after local authors and artists makes you think about where you are. I think that's what Brad was trying to do; he really ties it in to the history of that particular location; there used to be dairy farms there, and he refers to that in some of the words embedded into the sidewalk and that's a reference to the archives across the street. I appreciated that.

ACB: Please describe how your work on *Spadina Line* evolved. What materials did you use?

NS: I became aware of a group of members of the Harbord Residents Association that had been very active in graffiti abatement. There were 3 anti taggers who would walk along Harbord street painting out graffiti. I got tips and tricks from them. I would get discount exterior latex paint that was a colour match (grey). I sometimes used grey spray paint if the tag was small. I did look into getting a cordless power washer. And I used Easy-Off. You have to protect your eyes and hands due to wind and I would clean the light standard and then wait an hour and then scrub it off with a bucket of warm water that I would carry to the site.

ACB: Why was it important for you to work on restoring *Spadina Line*?

NS: It was important because public art is important, because of the message that Brad is trying to convey, the intelligence and value of the work. I wanted to bring public awareness to the piece.

ACB: Why do you think *Spadina Line* fell into disrepair? What are some of the takeaways that could impact how public art is displayed in the City?

NS: I think it has to do with trends in tagging. Brad told me that when the piece was installed in the 90s, tagging was not a thing. It's become more common since then. With apologies to Brad, I don't think it is well sited. I don't think an underpass is the right location for an artwork that is that conceptual and that cerebral; what you want in those underpasses are murals. And that's what the City's StART program is. The murals that provide employment for graffiti artists are also graffiti tag deterrents for the tags that the city has decided is not art. I know there are many taggers out there who disagree and who feel that their tags are art. Take it up with the city.

Public art should be placed in spots where a citizen ambassador could be procured; if it's near a condo it could be the condo board, to make sure it's not defaced or damaged, and they can keep an eye on it and so it can immediately be cleaned. But the main thing is it's poorly sited. Everyone should know this: An underpass is a graffiti hotspot. Do not put public art in an underpass. Ok?

ACB: How can communication about public art be centralized, particularly towards young people? What kind of ideas do you have about this?

NS: The city public art conservator should liaise with resident's associations and provide them with the funds to be ambassadors for the public art in their cachement. For condos, they must be the ambassadors for the art which I think they're good at doing. If an artwork isn't associated with a condo, then it should be the city.

Public schools should know what public art is in their neighbourhoods, so they can do walking tours, or maybe incorporate them into assignments. The AGO should offer walking tours to raise awareness about it. Tourism Toronto: Why not make postcards of our public art to celebrate it in that way? Local businesses should be naming themselves after public art. The Spadina Line café, right? In France, they

name cafes after local art and artists. New developments should be named after public art - there are condos going up along Dupont and they could print beautiful photos of *Spadina Line* and display it in their lobbies so that people are proud of it.

ACB: Anything else?

NS: Technically the underpass is the property of the transportation department of the city. The conservator's jurisdiction is only the actual components of Brad's piece: the time capsule, the solar recorders, the light standards. The retaining walls where the tags are, that's the department of transportation. So the conservator wouldn't touch it, which is ridiculous because the walls are the frame for the piece. It's like saying the frame isn't part of the art!

Thank you Nicole!

NS: Thanks!

It's clear that even though the City has a public art conservator, Emily Ricketts, whose job is to clean and conserve the works in the City's collection, ultimately, those who are in closest proximity to the public art in Toronto need to step up. It's the public realm after all, and it impacts us all. Maybe the way forward is to encourage awareness, in the ways that Nicole suggests, and then to create a public art hotline where reporting can take place.

If there's something strange
In your neighbourhood
Who you gonna call?

If there's something weird
And it don't look good
Who you gonna call?

Andrea Carson Barker



Shayne Dark, *Double Vision*, 2010
Being repainted by Toronto Art Restoration, October 2023

OPPENHEIM, BALZAC'S AND THE JANITOR'S CLOSET

When asked who they think owns Toronto's public art, many of our survey respondents figured the work was owned by the artists. It's an interesting point to consider, particularly in light of some of the awful mistreatment of public art in this city. Case in point: The Distillery District.

The Distillery is unique in Toronto and in Canada's economic and cultural history. Matthew Rosenblatt, part owner of Cityscape Development Corp. and one of the founders of the district as we know it, repurposed the site back in 2001. It was an enormous undertaking, extremely well done. The place hasn't fulfilled its dream of becoming "Canada's premier arts, culture and entertainment destination"—it's kind of average with a few good galleries, some decent restaurants and boutiques and tourist buses by the dozen. The public art, however is a disaster.

No one in our survey mentioned the public art at the Distillery District among their favourites, filled as it is with mediocre sculptures that feel like leftovers from Burning Man. (Apparently, some of them are: Rosenblatt is a well-known Burner.) The *Love Locks* embody the same kind of kitsch as the dreadful Toronto sign at Nathan Phillips Square. The only quality art there—and it is impressive—is Dennis Oppenheim's monumental *Still Dancing*, a near-perfect piece from a great artist that connects Toronto's glorious industrial past with today in a light, playful way.

Entering the Distillery one day this fall, we were so distracted by all the stuff—the stage, the palm trees, the Christmas lights, the multiple patios and artisan kiosks, that we could barely notice Oppenheim's majestic sculpture that originally held the space, honoured the historic location and effectively highlighted its industrial past.

Balzac's café seems to have expanded its outdoor seating to within the sculpture, and they are—unbelievably—storing cleaning equipment and furniture right inside and around it. Extra tables? A spare hotdog cart? No problem! Shove it into the sculpture! Kids climb around, ignoring blatant 'Do Not Climb' warnings. In the original photos, you could see *Still Dancing* had room to breathe, it had space around it so it had a chance to work its magic, you could see the context behind and around it. There was a vantage point; it was a contemporary punctuation mark on an important, historic place. When this kind of place becomes cluttered, it becomes easy to treat it as a piece of junk, and sadly, that's what has happened.

The Distillery deserves so much better. It could be an elegant, European-influenced historic location with great contemporary art, but if it would rather become something junky along the lines of New York's Times Square, then it's on the right path. Mr. Rosenblatt, while presumably well intentioned, badly needs a curator. Rumor has it that *Still Dancing* is to be moved, and it is most certainly not the problem here. The clutter is the problem. The Distillery is in danger of getting rid of the only decent piece on site.

Unfortunately, it's a city-wide problem. We've noticed window cleaners tying their ropes to Douglas Coupland's *Monument to the War of 1812*, a smoking receptacle shoved in behind Blue Republic's brilliant *Stargate*, and a bench smartly situated next to Myfanwy Macleod's tender *Primrose*, but facing AWAY from the sculpture! This would simply not happen in Europe.

So, yes, it probably would be good for the artist to retain some kind of control of public art if that will ensure these pieces are respected and maintained. On a positive note, we were gratified to see Toronto Art Restoration hard at work on Shayne Dark's *Double Vision* on Jarvis Street recently, bringing it back to life with a beautiful fresh coat of orangey-red paint!

Janos Kereszturi Toth & Andrea Carson Barker



Dennis Oppenheim, *Still Dancing*, 2010



Blue Republic, *Stargate*, 2020



Douglas Coupland,
Monument to the War of 1812, 2008



Myfanwy MacLeod, *Primrose*, 2019

FROM OUR PREVIOUS ISSUES

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC ART IN TORONTO IS AT RISK

NOT JUST A WALK IN THE PARK

It was a cool but sunny April 4th in Antwerp. After our morning coffee, Andrea and I rented bikes and rode out along wide bike lanes to the outskirts of the city to explore the Middelheim Museum, 30-acres of land and private residences that were transformed into a public park in

STATUE OF LIBERTY

We were in our Uber, having arrived in Rotterdam central station, en route to our Airbnb and passing a quiet public square when Janos glanced out the window and said mildly: "That's kind of an unusual statue..." to which the driver quickly replied "Yes, and many people ask me about it. I never know what to tell them."

REBRANDING DISASTER ON THE 3RD FLOOR

Kent Monkman (as his drag queen alter ego, Miss

Published by:

Janos Kereszturi Toth & Andrea Carson Barker

Comments? Questions?
GET IN TOUCH:

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