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Muniz bringing his palette to Squamish

World-renowned Brazilian artist seeking community involvement in 'Biennale' project

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SEPTEMBER 26, 2013

REBECCA ALDOUS
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Creating portraits of garbage pickers with the trash from which they eked out a living, Vik Muniz salvaged lives. Now, the world-renowned artist is ready to use Squamish as his canvas.

Last week, the Brazilian artist's production director, Fabio Ghivelder, visited the town as Muniz's eyes and ears. The UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador is participating in next year's Vancouver Biennale, an outdoor art exhibit Squamish signed onto this past summer. The two-year show is responsible for many of the Lower Mainland's treasured public art works, including the bronze, smiling men in English Bay known as Amazing Laughter.

Muniz is famed for his interesting palette. He has replaced paint with sugar, syrup, spaghetti and

plastic toy soldiers. Using the unexpected, Muniz creates delicate images that he later captures in photographs.

While Muniz's medium choices are sometimes laughable, his talent is far from a joke. He's been a fixture in the art world for more than a decade. Attendance at his solo show at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro was second only to a show featuring Picasso.

In 2009, his work took on a new layer. For two years Muniz spent time among the people who work in one of Latin America's largest landfills — Jardim Gramacho. With their livelihood, garbage from the 321-acre, open-air dump, Muniz pieced together their portraits on the floor of a giant studio.

Photographs of the portraits were auctioned with the proceeds going toward a workers' cooperative. The artwork and a documentary about the process, Waste Land, raised \$276,000 for the group and an additional \$50,000 was handed to the people in the portraits.

Muniz's work has been shown in Canada, but Squamish will mark his artistic debut in the country, Ghivelder said. What drew him to the Sea to Sky Corridor over Lower Mainland Biennale participants was Squamish's growing pains. It's a community in transition, Ghivelder said.

"Vik thinks that is the stuff of art," Ghivelder said.



Submitted image

Vik Muniz created giant portraits of garbage pickers with the trash that they worked among. Muniz is coming to Squamish to do complete his next project.

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- They're right, and their comments are welcome
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While it's too early to say what the project will look like, Ghivelder was on the hunt for materials "found in abundance."

"The participation part of the piece will be important," Ghivelder said.

The Squamish-based project has sent a buzz throughout B.C.'s art community. Muniz is one of the world's best art minds, said Krisztina Egyed, who spearheaded Squamish's Biennale involvement. She and Biennale's founder, Barrie Mowatt helped Ghivelder scour through and above Squamish properties. Armed with aerial photos, he headed back to Rio de Janeiro to sit down with Muniz.

"It doesn't get any better than this," Egyed said.

Muniz's work will catapult the community into the international arena, Coun. Patricia Heintzman said. With Biennale on the books as well as Squamish's centennial celebration, next year will be a banner year for a town that's been pushing for arts and culture, she said.

"This is sort of a big coming-out party for public art in Squamish."

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