

Bicycle-led public art tour spins by 30 pieces

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People rode their bikes all the way from Port Moody last summer to tour Vancouver's public art.

Reservations for Art Wheelers' inaugural bicycle-led public art tours sold out after a story about the tours aired on CBC Radio.

"We were really surprised, we didn't think there would be an interest from locals," said Art Wheelers' co-founder, codirector and art guide Carole-Ann Ryan.

But the comments heard from participants explained the high level of interest from Vancouverites.

"Typically, it's simple things like 'I never knew that was there,' or 'I've seen that work 10 times but I had no idea what it was about, I had no idea what it meant.'" Ryan said. "So we enlighten people on these sculptures or works of art that are part of their every day, but most often people take them for granted."

Vancouver residents have an opportunity again to see public art with new eyes as the tour continues its second summer of operation.

From the start of the route on the seawall in Coal Harbour, through Stanley Park, along English Bay and False Creek and to the former Olympic Village, Art Wheeler participants spin by 30 pieces of public art. Art guides illuminate the background, context and creator of works that include Vancouver artist Rodney Graham's Aerodynamic Forms in Space at the Georgia Street entrance to Stanley Park, A-maze-ing Laughter by Chinese artist Yue Minjun at the intersection of Denman and Davie streets and The Birds by local artist Myfanwy MacLeod in the former Olympic Village.

Art Wheelers highlights public art from the Vancouver Biennale, the city's 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Public Art Program, private sector and regular civic art programs.

Ryan, who holds a MA in art history and previously taught continuing studies course about public art at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, says while other North American cities instituted public art programs in the mid 1960s, Vancouver only established a public art program, spurred by a need to manage works left behind, after Expo 86.

Art Wheelers also provides free tours to 20 Grade 6 and 7 students from the KidSafe Leadership Program for youth from vulnerable communities.

Ryan said most of the kids don't own bicycles and rarely leave their neighbourhoods so they relished the opportunity to cycle along the water from the former Olympic Village to Vanier Park last year. Art Wheeler tours run every Wednesday night from 6 to 8 p.m. until Sept. 19. The tour along the seawall is meant for cyclists of all abilities, age 12 and older. For more information, see artwheelers.com.

The Vancouver Tour de Biennale, on Aug. 19, is a 110-kilometre self-paced urban ride or a 125-kilometre ride that takes cyclists roundtrip from Vancouver to Steveston to take in public art. For more information, see vancouverbiennale.com.

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