

Vancouver Biennale raises city 'onto a world-class stage'

Grand finale will be celebrated at the Chan Centre on April 30, with an auction to fund future public exhibitions

BY KIM PEMBERTON, VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 14, 2011

The number of public art installations in the City of Vancouver is set to shrink dramatically with the closing of the Vancouver Biennale exhibition, but organizers are hoping at least one of the sculptures will find a permanent home here.

Biennale president Barrie Mowatt singled out A-mazing Laughter, whose larger-than-life laughing figures on English Bay have been a hit with the public. The sculpture, by Beijing-born artist Yue Minjun, is on display at Morton Triangle, at the foot of Davie Street, and retails for \$5 million.

"People can't imagine that place [Morton Triangle] being empty," said Mowatt, adding people take it for granted that great works of art such as Minjun's work will remain in place.

He's hoping local developers will consider banding together so A-mazing Laughter won't be lost to another city.

Mowatt said he is also negotiating with the city to have four of the art works remain here from this Biennale. They are Walking Figures, Engagement, 217.5 Arc X 13 and Jasper.

The Biennale has already gifted the city the \$180,000 art work called Echoes, by Michel Goulet, which is at Kits Beach.

The 2009-2011 Vancouver Biennale's grand finale will be celebrated April 30 at the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts.

Mowatt said tickets for celebration have been priced so most people — not just wealthy art patrons — can afford to attend. Tickets are \$250, but Mowatt said it's a deal considering what is planned for the evening, including performances by vocalists Cody Karey and Hannah Georgas. Some of the internationally renowned contemporary artists whose works have been on display outdoors over the past two years will also be at the celebration.

"The quality of what we're presenting for the price is what you would get at a much more expensive fundraiser. We've gone away from a sit-down dinner to a more special event," he said.

The cost of the evening, Mowatt said, is being paid by 10 special patrons of the arts, who are paying \$12,000 each for their ticket, and two "ambassadors" of the arts, who are paying \$25,000 each.

Mowatt said the Vancouver Biennale has put "Vancouver onto a world-class stage."

There will be an auction at the April 30 event by Phillips de Pury & Company of New York. Net proceeds will go to the Vancouver Biennale, so it can continue its work to fund future public exhibitions and its educational program in schools and public lecture series.

“We want this next generation to be conscious of how important art is to our lives. Just as sports is supported and considered important to the nation, the same is true for art,” Mowatt said, noting through the Biennale’s fundraising efforts they have been able to offer an education program in 40 high schools.

Mowatt said the last Vancouver Biennale auction raised \$3.4 million.

The next Biennale is scheduled to be held in another two years, starting June 2013 and lasting for two years.

Mowatt noted one of the major pieces from the previous Biennale, called Device to Root Out Evil, was snapped up by Calgary’s Bow Museum after no one came forward to help pay the \$55,000 re-installation cost necessary to move it from its outdoor location to another Vancouver location after the event ended.

The Calgary museum took the sculpture, valued at more than \$1 million, for a five-year loan period. Mowatt said he’s in discussion to have it possibly returned to Vancouver at the end of the loan period.

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