

VANCOUVER BIENNALE

Public art plans stir up debate

BY THERESA MCMANUS REPORTER
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If public art aims to spark conversation, an installation proposed for New Westminster is doing that before it even arrives.

New Westminster's public art advisory committee recently recommended that city council proceed with three installations as part of the Vancouver Biennale: *WOW New Westminster*, by Jose Resende, would be located at Westminster Pier Park in September; *Blue Trees*, by Konstantin Dimopolous, would go on Columbia Street in the spring of 2015; and *Public Furniture/Urban Trees*, by Hugo Franca, would be installed at a to-be-determined location this June.



Betty McIntosh
not impressed

"It's all or none," Barry Mowatt, president and founder of the Vancouver Biennale, told council Monday. "You bought in to be part of the Biennale. It's our decision. ... You don't tell the Olympics what they can do in your city."

While city council supports the *Blue Trees* and *Public Furniture/Urban Trees* installations, several council members aren't keen about the Resende piece, which was to be a legacy piece that could be a permanent fixture in the city.

Mowatt urged the city to trust the Vancouver Biennale, as it knows best how to make an impact with public art.

"We are about creating that wow factor," he said. "That is the wow factor."

Mowatt recalled the day he helped set up *A-Maze-Ing Laughter* at Davie and Denman streets as part of the 2009 to 2011 Vancouver Biennale. While he unwrapped the 14 bronze statues in the installation, passersby unleashed a barrage of criticism.

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Jason Lang/THE RECORD

Missing a chicken? Dan Perry with children Haydn, Reason and Keen – and the hen that they're currently fostering in their coop. The bird was found wandering down Garfield Street, and the family is searching for its owner.

Chicken flew the coop

BY NIKI HOPE REPORTER
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A freewheelin' fowl found on the east side of the city has a hen house to nest in, thanks to a family of backyard chicken keepers in Sapperton.

A brown hen was seen strutting on Garfield Street earlier this month. A woman who saw the feathered escapee thought it might belong to Dan Perry and Paula Cole, a local couple who keep chickens.

"People know us in the neighbourhood, that we have chickens," Cole says.

The neighbour knocked on the door of their house at Eighth Avenue and Braid Street to say she'd seen the roam-

ing chicken. Cole checked her coop, but her two hens were locked safely inside.

She was unable to find the woman who told her about the loose hen because by the time Cole made it outside, the woman was gone.

But Cole and a friend, who lives on Garfield Street, found the bird clucking about in someone's front yard. They cornered the feathered runaway and brought it to Cole's coop and started trying to find the owner. Cole didn't want to leave the chicken on the streets, where it would be vulnerable prey for coyotes or raccoons.

"It was really tame," Cole says. "I picked her right up. I thought it might have been a rooster at first. Then my hus-

band got home, and he knows way more about chickens, and he said, 'No, it's not a rooster; it's a hen.'"

Cole contacted Jen Arbo, another chicken keeper in the neighbourhood, but it wasn't one of her two birds.

Arbo blasted out a Tweet to her followers, but so far no one has turned up to claim the mystery hen. For now, Perry and Cole are fostering the bird.

"We still have no idea how it could have happened. Chickens are definitely not a wild animal," says Perry, who does the bulk of looking after their backyard hens.

He started keeping chickens as a self-sustainability project – Perry also keeps

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Art: Piece would be a 'significant cultural asset' to city

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"Today, they are so popular," he said.

Resende's installation consists of four shipping containers positioned in two V shapes on the northeastern end of the timber wharf section of Westminster Pier Park.

"I like it," said Coun. Bill Harper, who noted that Resende is considered the Picasso of South America.

As someone whose background includes working in industrial settings, Harper believes Resende's piece represents part of New Westminster's industrial history.

"The value, if you like, of the industry and the representation in our art, is a joy," he said.

Last week, Coun. Chuck Puchmayr said the installation featuring "rusty containers" was like a "twist of the knife" because the city is overwhelmed by tractor-trailer traffic.

"It's almost like a train wreck," Coun. Betty McIntosh said Monday. "That is fearful. It is not anything anyone wants to be near."

Coun. Lorrie Williams said she'd welcome *A-Maze-Ing Laughter* to the city but wonders if containers will be well received by the community.

Coun. Jonathan Cote said the more discussion he hears about a piece of art, the more intrigued he becomes. He said good public art is meant to initiate conversation.

"Sometimes I think communities need to take a chance, allow groups like yourselves, to push the borders," he said.

Mayor Wayne Wright voiced concerns about using shipping containers as art, saying they don't bring anything positive to the city. He said he has some

"angst" around the Resende piece being at Westminster Pier Park.

Representatives from the Vancouver Biennale attended a special council meeting on Monday to address some of the concerns raised at last week's meeting. Because some councillors were absent from Monday's meeting, council decided to hold off on making a decision until next week.

Miriam Blume, director of marketing and communications, said the Vancouver Biennale would help create a cultural hub that encourages exploration from people inside and outside the city. The goal is to create a destination and experience that would see people coming to the city for the day to explore the art and the other amenities in the city.

"We are not a drive-by, ad-hoc piece of art," she said.

Blume said the Vancouver Biennale's curatorial board identified legacy pieces that would remain in place after the event, including the Resende piece.

"We really see New Westminster as being one of the very important anchor points to the entire exhibition," she said. "We see that Jose Resende delivers on that."

Public art isn't without controversy, said Blume, noting the City of Vancouver received more than 100 letters when *A-Maze-Ing Laughter* was first proposed.

"It has become Vancouver's Eiffel Tower," she said of the artwork.

Like *A-Maze-Ing Laughter*, Blume said the Resende piece delivers on the "wow factor" and will provide a "new contemporary reference point" to New Westminster's history. Proposed for installation in September, the Resende piece would cost \$65,000 to install, \$17,500



Photo courtesy Vancouver Biennale/THE RECORD

Art talk: *Blue Trees* is one of the public art pieces that would come to New West.

to take down and \$70,560 to relocate to another location if the city chose to move it elsewhere.

Blume said the piece delivers something that is truly awe-inspiring and makes people stop in their tracks and start to wonder.

"That is really special. That is hard to do," she said. "Resende delivers on that in spades."

Because the Vancouver Biennale is a shared cost model with participating cities, Blume said the city's \$90,000 contribution doesn't begin to cover costs of the installations in New Westminster. She noted it would cost \$400,000 to commission the Resende work on its own so the

city is receiving "significant" value for its contribution.

"It really is a significant cultural asset for your community," she said.

In 2013, city council approved in principle a recommendation from the public art advisory committee for a series of projects in 2014, including the Vancouver Biennale. The city's 2014 budget includes \$90,000 for Vancouver Biennale projects.

In addition to "open-air museums" featuring public art, Vancouver Biennale includes a Big Ideas education program, an international artists residency program, a tour de Biennale charity bike ride, the Conversations lecture series, and Biennale CineFest, a documentary arts cinema initiative, as well as many marketing, press and social media opportunities.

While some council members aren't keen on the Resende piece, Blume encouraged council to let the Vancouver Biennale do what it does best. She noted it has a 10-year track record and a reputation at stake.

"We have a lot on the line here," she said. "That is why we have gone to the best curators around the world to ensure we don't blow it."

Blume encouraged the city to let the Vancouver Biennale take the city to a place it hasn't imagined and is unable to implement on its own.

New Westminster is one of several municipalities working with Vancouver Biennale on the event, which will feature artists from the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, Canada, Northern Europe and South America.

Mowatt said Resende is part of a new breed of Brazilian artists who are beginning to make their presence felt around the world.