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# THE SQUAMISH CHIEF

## International art star wowed by Squamish Vancouver Biennale hit Squamish

KRISZTINA EGYED SPECIAL TO THE SQUAMISH CHIEF / SQUAMISH CHIEF  
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A little boy climbs on an art piece created by Hugo Franca.

Vancouver Biennale is ramping up and Squamish continues to rock the international art stage welcoming two world-renowned artists over the course of only a few short weeks.

Brazilian artist Vik Muniz, featured in the Oscar-nominated documentary *Waste Land*, touches down in Squamish the week of July 21 to create a major art installation in our town, while artist Konstantin Dimopoulos breezed through Squamish last week on a reconnaissance trip scouting sites for his sought after *Blue Trees* installations – and fell in love with the very sculptural

industrial relics that code our oceanfront heritage.

Both artists are surprising headliners for a small community such as Squamish and come as part of the Open Air Museum portion of the 2014-2016 Vancouver Biennale Open Borders/Crossroads Exhibition hosted by Vancouver, Richmond, New Westminster, North Vancouver and Squamish. Earlier this year, Brazilian artist Hugo Franca was in Squamish to create his Urban Furniture series out of recycled giant debris wood pieces.

The multi-faceted Vancouver Biennale also includes an artist residency program, where 92 artists from five continents will come to the region to create in an unprecedented cultural exchange between nations. Squamish will host up to 18 hot, up and coming international talents between now and 2016. They will make their temporary home here and create cutting edge works in a variety of art forms, including video, sound, light, performance, and installation, all to the theme of Martin Luther King's famous speech, I Have a Dream. The Vancouver Biennale program is designed to ensure multi-layered cultural exchange and community involvement at all levels, including local artists, youth and schools, and the general public.

A biennale residency artist open house takes place on Monday from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at StartUp Squamish, 38192 Cleveland Ave., where three newly-arrived artists will share brief presentations and attendees will be given opportunities to participate, something locals are excited about.

"This is huge for Squamish – a golden opportunity for us to host some of the most exciting and gifted artists in the world," said local Luisa Nitrato Izzo. "It's about cultural exchange and opening horizons, and that's exactly what the biennale is doing for our town – not only through the art itself but through all the related community events such as open houses, school programs and artists' receptions. I think it's absolutely fantastic for our community and am thrilled to see the Vancouver Biennale come here."



Residency artists include India's Sumakshi Singh, who is creating Breath Song, a mixed media symphony using sound, vapours, and video projection. Sumakshi is hoping to find 108 local participants to briefly record the sound of their individual breath cycles. By incorporating written word and sound, the anticipation is that the piece will be projected out in nature upon an ephemeral cloud like form. A sound booth at the reception will be used to record the breath cycles of interested participants.

Shweta Bhattad, also from India, comes with his I Have A Dream project, a two-year Global Art Farming Peace Project between 26 countries and 30 collaborators comprised of farmers and artists each sowing seeds in the form of "I Have A Dream" in their native language on their own land. Their discussions on farming and growing issues will be documented via video installations in

Squamish. Shweta is looking for locals to collaborate in the project and help voice the stories of our food providers to the world.

Hasan Hujairi, a sound artist, composer and independent researcher, from Bahrain currently based in Seoul, South Korea said his project is a reflection of Squamish relative to his homeland.

“My project involves compiling a series of miscellaneous working papers and sketches surrounding my observations on Squamish and their relation to where I come from. My project also includes a workshop element on sound art and music composition,” said Hujairi, adding he plans on dedicating some “important books” on music to the public library.

All visiting artists have been overwhelmed by both the natural beauty of Squamish and the breadth of community support across all sectors, including logging, construction, education, hospitality, health, tourism and the First Nations community, as illustrated in Singh’s *Squamish Breath Poem*:

“The stunning landscape here is the best kind of creative fuel and soul food and a whole new set of artistic ideas are erupting. A quality of spaciousness permeates everything here and I can feel it seep into my mind, creating space between my thoughts so that I can see them more clearly, less cluttered. A fellow artist gazing up at the landscape echoed my sentiments “The mind has more clarity here.”

Some artists are already planning return visits and apart from the art projects, Squamish is gaining a highly regarded team of international artist ambassadors.

“Our project gave us the opportunity to engage in the community of Squamish in a truly meaningful and rewarding experience, said Miguel Antonio Horn of Philadelphia who came to produce a co-creation called Salish Sea Lab project. “We hoped to achieve a connection to the region through the process of creating our installation with locally sourced materials. We found, however, the most treasured resource was the professional, friendly and family ties that make Squamish such an incredible place to work as an artist.

“The resulting installation exceeded our expectations and we have the generous, welcoming people of Squamish to thank for that. It was an honour to work with such a receptive community, and a pleasure to learn so much from you in the process.”

Horn and fellow artist Chris Landau’s elegant Salish Sea Lab, interweaves sculpture with advanced projection technology. The canoe-shaped piece is installed at the Squamish Adventure Centre. Night viewing is recommended to allow the full dreamy narrative to unfold via a series of finely detailed light projections that flood the sculpted interior of the piece.

“Being in Squamish really gave us the opportunity to think big. The surroundings and histories of the area were perfect for examining the topics of big change and interdependence,” said co-creator Landau.

Another completed Squamish collaboration is by Pallavi Paul and Sahej Rahal, both of India. Reservoir is a cutting edge sci-fi art film about the “last piece of data” as it roams an imagined post-apocalyptic Squamish. A reflection on change, technology, infinity, history and life itself, this film proposes a new way of seeing. Pallavi and Sahej said they were overwhelmed by the physical beauty of Squamish, having never seen anything like it before.

“The biennale experience was about the possibility of seeing connections between everyday community experiences and multiversal propositions. Squamish was for us the perfect playground to test the porosity of these boundaries.”

Another biennale program component, Cinefest Live, features the best of the best documentaries

from around the world about masters of art who have transcended boundaries, redefined their genre and influenced their generation. Squamish participation includes a by donation screening of Oliver Stone's 10-part series The Untold History Of The United States, at the Adventure Centre.

Local culture vulture and municipal councillor Susan Chapelle said she found inspiration in the Vancouver Biennale activities she attended and the dialogue that followed.

"Seeing the artists in residence be excited about Squamish in ways that have not yet been explored was exciting to my family and me," said Chapelle. "The Salish boat project, Hugo Franca and the other artists have opened conversations on the value of arts and culture that may not have happened otherwise. The biennale has been a great community building project."

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