

# PUBLIC ART PRIVATE VIEWS

Exploring art in public spaces: a documentary series

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## The Divide

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*Kevin King photo*

“Let’s Heal The Divide” is a neon artwork by Toni Latour, a commission for the 2014-2016 Vancouver Biennale. It is installed at the crossroads

between the impoverished, troubled downtown eastside and the financial district, on the front of Vancouver Community College, itself a victim of “the divide.”

The divide can be variously interpreted as rich/poor, immigrant/First Nations, or on gender identification, education, and other ways of grouping ourselves. The divide is what feeds misunderstanding: prejudice: violence. It is real but it can be bridged, by reaching out, listening, welcoming, being open to differences.

*Toni Latour is an East Vancouver artist and educator. Her works have been exhibited and collected nationally and internationally for 15 years, including an acquisition by the National Portrait Gallery of Canada. Toni is also a 2-time Vancouver Biennale artist, with work installed at the Brighthouse Skytrain Station in Richmond. She taught at Capilano University for 11 years before the Studio Art program closed in 2014. She currently teaches at Kwantlen University and the University of the Fraser Valley. Her work*

can be seen at [www.tonilatour.com](http://www.tonilatour.com).

The use of neon refers to Vancouver's history as one of the neon capitals of North America; where once we had over 19,000 neon signs, many of them animated, now only a few remain, the result of neglect, gentrification, and the city's policy of removing large advertising signs including billboards. Recently the [Museum of Vancouver](#) presented [The Visible City](#), a retrospective of the neon signage. The location specific work is also a celebration of the 50th anniversary of [Vancouver Community College](#), which has offered a diverse range of programming for the mosaic of cultures in the city. The Visible City is available as an [Google Play/Android](#) and [iPhone](#) app.

