

New West gets set to welcome Vancouver Biennale

[Theresa McManus](#) / New West Record

May 15, 2015 03:45 PM



As part of Public Furniture/Urban Trees, Hugo França has created a number of pieces of sculptural furniture from trees. It's one of three installations being planned for New West as part of the Vancouver Biennale. Photograph By Contributed/Vancouver Biennale

Colourful and controversial art is set to grace Royal City streets – but it's anyone's guess when the installations will be ready to wow residents.

Early last year, New Westminster city council approved three projects as part of the Vancouver Biennale: Blue Trees by Konstantin Dimopolous; Public Furniture/Urban Trees by Hugo Franca; and WOW New Westminster by Jose Resende. Originally slated to start arriving in the Royal City last fall, the installations have yet to arrive.

"Both parties, the Biennale and the city, are putting best efforts forward and working in good faith toward realizing those particular installations," Dean Gibson, the city's director of parks, culture and recreation, told the *Record*. "We hope to be in a position, jointly with the Biennale and the city, to make a much more formal announcements with more definite information in the very, very near future."

Barrie Mowatt, founder and president of the Vancouver Biennale, said the Hugo Franco piece will be the first to arrive in New Westminster.

"It is a really suburb, a really large piece," he said.

Next up is WOW Westminster, a piece that generated quite a debate when it was first proposed. The installation consists of four shipping containers positioned in the shape of two Vs.

"I am ecstatic about that. Of all the installations we have done, and we have done some pretty spectacular installations this Biennale, WOW is the coup de grace kind of thing," Mowatt said. "It's really, really site-specific work. It's really dramatic."

Vancouver Biennale organizers had hoped Public Furniture/Urban Trees would be installed on the waterfront esplanade in May and WOW New Westminster would be erected in Westminster Pier Park in June.

Gibson said the city had identified a location for the Hugo Franca piece, but that site became "a little bit more complicated," so it's now looking at a different waterfront location that would make installation easier and minimize impact on the infrastructure.

According to Gibson, the city is still trying to find "the right technical solution" to be able to have WOW New Westminster installed on the timber wharf section of Westminster Pier Park.

"That's the area that certainly is the preferred location from the Biennale's perspective," he said. "But, like everything in New Westminster, it is old, old infrastructure and sometimes there's a few surprises that come along the way, so we are trying to sort through the technical aspects of that."

Blue Trees features trees whose trunks have been coated with a blue pigment.

Although the original concept proposed siting Blue Trees in a one- or two-block section of Columbia Street, Mowatt said the artist has proposed doing something "much more dynamic" that would engage residents to apply blue pigment to trees on the front lawn of city hall.

"He is not talking about planting them in the ground there," Mowatt stressed. "He is talking about using it as a launching pad where people come together on a public site, help pigment them as a group. He reorganizes them on that site, in the sacks, in some creative and artistic manner and then over a period of months they will remain and the city makes a decision about where they want them to be."

City staff will soon present council with a recommendation from the city's public art advisory committee to have a "modest" installation of Blue Trees on the front lawn of city hall, as well as on Columbia Street.

New Westminster's 2014 budget included \$90,000 to participate in the Vancouver Biennale projects, which includes "open-air museums" featuring public art, an education program, an international artists' residency program, a lecture series and more.

Despite the delays in getting going in New West, Mowatt is thrilled that the city will soon be part of the Vancouver Biennale.

"The good thing is the Biennale runs through 2016, so that's cool," he said. "The universe works in mysterious ways. The good part is we can all focus on the spring of 2015 and have more of a wham-bang thing."

Mowatt said the city has already made its first payment for Vancouver Biennale installations.

"The second payment comes just before installation," he said. "We've got their money, so let's make it happen."

Mowatt said the Vancouver Biennale had given up on New Westminster and "written it off the books" because of delays in moving the projects forward, but credited Mayor Jonathon Cote for getting the project back on track as he contacted the Biennale for an update after being elected.

"I'm hopeful that the type of issues they are facing are all things that can be resolved and we will be able to move forward. The City of New Westminster created a public art fund a number of years ago and I think the community is excited to see some of the results of that and actually see some really interesting public art come to our community,

just like we see in other communities in Metro Vancouver,” Cote told the *Record*. “My understanding is there are still a few details to be worked out but they are being worked out between Biennale and city staff. I am fully expecting to see these art projects come to fruition.

© 2015 New West Record