

Squamish is their canvas

International artists creating public art projects during next five weeks

[Christine Endicott](#) / Squamish Chief

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Mayor Patricia Heintzman plays ukelele for the visiting international artists, who are creating public art projects in Squamish during the next five weeks. Photo: Christine Endicott

They have come from all corners of the world with one goal: to create public art in Squamish.

On Monday, artists Tammam Azzam of Syria, Kristen McIver of Australia, Rathin Barman of India and Canadian Jonathan Luckhurst met with Mayor Patricia Heintzman, who welcomed them with a ukelele tune at city hall.

She asked their impressions of Squamish and the reply was unanimous: “quiet.”

All currently live in much larger cities – Dubai, New York City, Edmonton and Calcutta, where there is a cacophony of noise and activity at all times.

“It’s so quiet. Nothing is happening here,” Barman said of Squamish. “It’s like a union strike – no one is doing anything.”

In Calcutta, he said, you simply need to leave your room to find inspiration.

However, McIver is pleased that Squamish provides her with a peaceful place to think and create. “New York is amazing with the stimulation... but it can be overwhelming.”

Luckhurst also doesn’t mind the quiet here. “I love it,” he said. “I drove right through Squamish when I lived in

Vancouver.... Now, I am blown away by this place. I'm thinking of moving back to B.C. and Squamish is topping my list right now."

The artists hope they can find inspiration from the people here as they create their projects during the next five weeks while living at Quest University. The residency program is organized and funded by Vancouver Biennale.

Azzam's plan is to use cement to create "a colourful and destroyed room, full of memories and stories of local people." He said Squamish reminds him of the village where he grew up in Syria.

McIver said she's not yet sure what she will produce as her public art project, but she hopes to connect with First Nations people and create something involving text. "I'm hoping to be inspired by the community here."

Driving to Squamish, she said, "I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the landscape."

Social media is often the inspiration behind the work she creates, the Australian artist explained. Her art includes sculpture, painting and installation and sometimes explores themes of desire and consumerism.

Luckhurst is a photographer, but he wants to do something a little different here, using both projection and photography. His plans involve creating wooden blocks, photographing them and projecting the images onto existing structures in the community – or onto birch panels.

The theme of his work is often "the ecological crossroads that we face as a society," he explained.

Barman hopes to create surprising artistic elements in Squamish, perhaps things that are out of place and get people thinking, maybe created from cardboard, he said. It will be his way of bringing a little of the cacophony of Calcutta to Squamish. He said he's not worried if his art blows away in the wind.

Mayor Heintzman told the group that Squamish welcomes public art and it's relatively new here. "It's just sort of hitting our vernacular," she said. "We're starting to become a culturally robust city."

Projects coordinator Camila Ramos Bravo said of the four artist projects, some will be temporary or "performative" and others permanent. "We would like to create some legacy for Squamish as well... The idea is to invigorate the community in different ways."

The program will wrap up with community engagement events to create dialogue, she said.

Last year, seven international artists were in town to create projects, said Ramos Bravo. "The community has been so supportive."

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