

International luminaries flock to third Vancouver Biennale of public art

Chinese artist Ai Weiwei among major names attracted by 2014-2016 instalment

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 4, 2014



Artist's rendition of Brazil's Jose Rensende's sculptural installation of four shipping containers in Pier Park in New Westminster.

A sculptural work by China's Ai Weiwei, one of the most famous artists in the world, will be among numerous other public art works by a roster of major international artists being featured in the third Vancouver Biennale.

Starting later this month, about 20 public art sculptures will be installed throughout parks and open spaces in Vancouver and another 10 in New Westminster, North Vancouver and Squamish. The biennale will feature works by other big name artists that include Vic Muniz from Brazil, Jonathan Borofsky from the U.S., and Andy Goldsworthy from the United Kingdom.

Later this summer, Os Gemeos, the name twin brothers Otavio and Gustavo Pandolfo from Brazil are known by, will create a 360-degree, 23-metre tall mural around a building on Granville Island. Once it's finished, the mural will feature animation later in the year by Graphics e-Motion, a Montreal-based company.

One of the higher profile works is destined for Pier Park in New Westminster. Brazilian artist Jose

Rensende, who trained as an engineer, has taken his inspiration from the freight transported on nearby train tracks to create a public art work of four big metal containers balanced on their ends to create two giant V shapes.

Traditionally, most people have viewed public art works in previous biennales in the popular Open Air Museum, and that will remain for the 2014-2016 version. One of the biennale's new initiatives is an international residency program — a total of 92 international artists along with 12 Canadians and 16 curators will come to Vancouver for four to six weeks at a time from March to November to live and work in groups of six to eight, said Barrie Mowatt, the biennale's artistic director and founder.

"The exciting part is the fact that we're bringing artists from around the world," he said.

They'll be creating art works during their residencies, which are being organized around an idea expressed by Martin Luther King in his famous speech I Have a Dream where he calls on the brotherhood of nations to come together in open dialogue.

Mowatt said the biennale will be working with host cities to see which temporary works installed for the biennale can become permanent installations. That's what happened to A-Maze-Ing Laughter at Davie and Denmany. It was installed temporarily in 2009 for a previous biennale and became permanent after it was purchased by the Wilson5 Foundation for \$1.5 million in 2012 and donated to the city.

Some biennale artists have already arrived. In North Vancouver by Lonsdale Quay, a group of seven Brazilians are transforming the interior of the old pipefitters building into a pavilion to host a series of rotating exhibitions of about six months duration. The 840-square-metre space is expected to open in May with the first exhibition of works from Brazil curated by Marcello Dantas.

Miriam Blume, media spokesperson for the biennale, said the theme of Open Borders/ Crossroads Vancouver is meant to focus attention on the leadership role artists can play on issues of social and political importance.

"The biennale is about bringing a diversity of artists from different cultures and different political histories and religions to celebrate freedom of artistic expression and use that for an open dialogue on issues of global impact," she said.

Blume said Ai Weiwei's piece will be going into a park in Vancouver that still has to be approved by the parks board. She said the biennale expects to have his finished design within a few weeks.

Also new this year is Cinefest Live, a series of film retrospectives on individual artists and filmmakers. The biennale has also commissioned a new orchestral work by Juno Award winning composer Vivian Fung.

The biennale's BIG IDEAS education program will continue its interdisciplinary approach of building curriculum to use the art works in the biennale to teach students about biology, physics and social studies.

The 2014-2016 Vancouver Biennale's first public event will take place Wednesday, March 12 at Emily Carr University from 5 to 7 p.m. Moderated by Toni Latour, it will include Sam Carter as well as the first contingent of Brazilian artists working on the North Vancouver pavilion.

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