

New Westminster Blue Trees project points to problem of deforestation

BY GORDON MCINTYRE, THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 15, 2015

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Australian artist Konstantin Dimopoulos pigments a tree blue, as part of his Vancouver Biennale project called Blue Trees.

Song sung blue,
weeping like a maple.

It doesn't quite have the cachet of the old Neil Diamond tune that wept like a willow, but the art project Blue Trees would like you to take a moment and, if not weep, at least think about the plight of trees in parts of the world where deforestation is ongoing.

"The (deforestation) issue is invisible because it happens thousands of miles from cities," environmental and social-justice artist Konstantin Dimopoulos said of the Blue Trees project.

"We look around Vancouver and we've got lots of trees."

The public guests a very big welcome to enjoy the process hands-on, turning the bark and branches of maple and aspen trees blue.

This latest version of Blue Trees, following the launch in Richmond and Port Moody in 2011, kicks off Thursday evening in New Westminster.

Next week Blue Trees hits Squamish and the following week is the big finalé at Park Royal, where the public can help apply blue pigmentation to 125 maple and aspen, and to another 125 potted maples, just the right size for a deck or patio.

“This is a project where people can touch, feel and interact with art work, unlike other museums,” said Ammar Mahimwalla, co-ordinator of Vancouver Biennale Open Air Museum Projects.

In fact, since the 2011 introduction of Blue Trees, 14 other cities have adopted the idea, from Houston to Sydney to London.

“It’s gone global,” Mahimwalla said.

Dimopoulos, born in Egypt and raised in New Zealand, became fascinated with trees when his family moved to Melbourne, with its tracts of urban forests.

That’s when his attention was first drawn to photos of deforestation. He and associates began brainstorming ways to get the issue moved to the front pages.

Eventually he came up with the Blue Trees idea as a way to draw attention to something usually taken for granted in cities.

“If we coloured the trees brown in Vancouver, no one would care,” he said.

The blue pigmentation is made up of organic materials and washes off or fades away in a couple of months or so.

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