

going out

Earthquake-proof sculpture shake-up



DAN FAIRCHILD

Heinz Aeschlimann's *Composer* (left) attracts onlookers; Dennis Oppenheim's upended church, titled *Device to Root Out Evil*, was welcomed in Vancouver, but not in the U.S.

ART

Danielle Egan

It's not always easy enticing Vancouverites out to artistic events, but getting a dose of culture is about to become a literal walk in the park with the Vancouver International Sculpture Biennale. Showcasing 30 sculptures from artists around the globe, the 18-month event officially kicks off on Oct. 21 at green spaces all over the city.

Some pieces have been up for a month, but most are currently being installed and locals may stumble on the artists at work. "It's a quark under construction," explains John Henry of his 25,000-kilogram, 25-metre tall *Jaguar* at Devonian Harbour Park. The red metal sculpture was inspired by

Nobel Prize-winning physicist Murray Gell-Mann's book *The Quark and the Jaguar*. "I'm interested in the nature of the universe, how things fit together," says the sculptor from Chattanooga, Tenn.

But Henry adds as he puts on a hard hat and gets in a crane to continue assembling his sculpture: "Ideas are a dime a dozen. You have to know how to build and make it happen."

Meanwhile, about 15 metres away, Swiss sculptor Heinz Aeschlimann, a civil engineer by day, fields questions from locals praising his piece, called *Composer*.

The admiration goes both ways as Aeschlimann says he is already contemplating a new work "inspired by Vancouver, the harmony of people from all over the world living together."

The Vancouver International Sculpture Biennale brings together sculptors from China to Canada. Some are showcasing here for the

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first time, others have participated in previous Open Spaces events started by Buschlen Mowatt Galleries in 1998. Since then, the number of sculptures has grown so much, along with public enthusiasm, that gallery owner Barrie Mowatt decided to develop a citywide, non-profit affair, which will culminate next fall in a People's Choice vote to keep two pieces in the city permanently.

To mount the biennale, Mowatt has spent the past two years working with international curators and local politicians. "There are so many bureaucratic restrictions with public art: engineering approvals, earthquake-proofing regulations, Parks Board approval, insurance, lighting," he says. "But just imagine what all of this will look like in the snow or next spring. These pieces will open up dialogue all over the city."

Yoko Ono's *Imagine Peace* billboard included in the show will certainly get tongues wagging. But it is

one of the few items in the biennale with an obvious political message. Others, such as Magdalena Abakanowicz's giant headless marching bodies called *Vancouver Ancestors Shadow* are better understood knowing that the artist lived in Poland through German, then Russian occupation.

Device to Root Out Evil by renowned American sculptor Dennis Oppenheim might also spark some controversy. "I couldn't believe Vancouver wanted *Device*. It was rejected by every institution in America," the artist says. His upside-down church, a steeple seemingly pitchforked into the ground, has been interpreted as religious blasphemy.

"Sure, the pieces can seem loaded, but context is nothing to be afraid of."

For more information visit www.vancouverbiennale.com.

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