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Official Day of Laughter lights up English Bay

by Holly McKenzie-Sutter on July 14th, 2017 at 11:57 AM

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Thursday was Vancouver's day of laughter at Morton Park, home of the iconic *A-maze-ing Laughter* sculpture by Yue Minjun. HOLLY MCKENZIE-SUTTER

It was a typical overcast morning on Thursday (July 13), but English Bay's Morton Park was lit up with balloons, streamers, and smiles as Mayor Gregor Robertson declared the Official Day of Laughter.

The date and location were chosen by the Vancouver Biennale to coincide with the first visit from one of the neighbourhood's most recognizable faces—Chinese artist Yue Minjun, whose sculpture installation *A-maze-ing Laughter* depicts fourteen bronze men, all featuring Yue's laughing face.

The day's programming offered Vancouverites a chance to meet—and snap a photo with—the artist who has shaped their neighbourhood. The event also included live music and a laughing yoga session, as well as speeches from representatives of the biennale, the West End BIA, the Vancouver Parks Board, Robertson, and Chip and Shannon Wilson, who donated \$1.5 million to purchase the art piece for the city in 2011.

Speaking to the gathered crowd, Robertson spoke to the importance of art and laughter as essential to freedom of expression and human rights. The mayor also mentioned that Vancouver boasts the highest public spending on art per person of any Canadian city.

Chinese artist Yue Minjun brought his family to Vancouver to see his piece installed at Morton Park. HOLLY MCKENZIE-SUTTER

Barrie Mowatt, artistic director of the Vancouver Biennale, spoke to the *Straight* after the ceremony about his excitement at finally having Yue visit Vancouver, and to host the Day of Laughter, both of which had been discussed since the biennale first brought *A-maze-ing Laughter* to Vancouver in 2009.

The biennale is not funded by the city. The "open-air museum" is a nonprofit organization that relies on donations to bring art installations from around the world to Vancouver.

"It's not the city's public-art program yet," said Mowatt. He expressed hope that moving forward, the city could set aside funding for the biennale so that more pieces like Yue's can be purchased without solely relying on citizen donations like the Wilsons'.

"We need someone who not just talks, we've been talking for years," said Mowatt. "We need someone to stand up and make it happen."

The afternoon portion of the day's programming included a laughing yoga session. HOLLY MCKENZIE-SUTTER

Jacqui McMullen, member of the board for the West End Business Improvement Association, also spoke briefly at the event. A long-time resident of the neighbourhood, McMullen told the *Straight* that she appreciates the piece from a few difference perspectives—as a landmark that draws people to the area, and as a piece of art that's enlivened her neighbourhood.

"On a grey day like today, it really speaks volumes about what these statues can do for people," McMullen said.

Guest of honour Yue Minjun spent much of the morning posing with his bronze likenesses, and with appreciators of his work.

Every sculpture in the set of fourteen has the same face, but each one is posed differently. HOLLY MCKENZIE-SUTTER

In between photo-ops, Yue spoke to the *Straight* with a translator about seeing his piece installed in Vancouver. He said the wide open space is perfect for his work, and didn't expect to see the wear and tear on the sculptures from people touching them over the years—something he feels good about.

While posing for photo after photo may seem overwhelming, Yue said he was amazed by the public's reaction. At the art openings he's used to in China, Yue said people usually stand still while they take in the work. This wasn't the case at the Day of Laughter.

"Here people are very intimate and they show their gratitude to him, making him feel very good about it. He really likes Vancouver, he's so happy that his work is here and people have a good reaction to it," his translator said.

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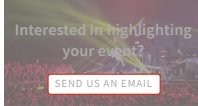
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