



Two of Canada’s foremost artists unveil public art works commissioned for Surrey’s new City Centre Library

Many would argue that Surrey’s new City Centre Library, designed by Bing Thom Architecture, is a sculpture in itself, so what kind of public art would complement this building? Bing Thom worked closely with the City’s Public Art Program, to issue a call to artists to develop proposals. The artists chosen to create the artworks include one of Canada’s foremost sculptors, Liz Magor, and one of Canada’s foremost painters, Gordon Smith.

The artists met with the architecture team and librarians, and discussed both the building’s design and function, and the sites and opportunities for artworks. The vision of the public art was to complement the regular activities within the library – reading, researching and discussion – and be meaningful to its diverse users and urban context.

Gordon Smith’s large scale diptych, *Surrey Library Commission*, presents a painting continuing his series of West Coast landscapes. Measuring over 6m (21 feet) wide, this acrylic on canvas is located near the entrance on the main floor and is one of the largest paintings created by Smith, who turns 91 this year. The artist has a long history of encouraging art in the lives of young people and was pleased to have his work located near the children’s area of the Library.

Councillor Judy Villeneuve, Council Liaison to the City’s Public Art Advisory Committee welcomes this artwork: “We are privileged to have had the opportunity to work with an artist as visionary and skilled as Gordon Smith. His west coast landscape is a magnificent painting that thoughtfully complements the striking architecture of the Library. This relationship mirrors the long-standing friendship between Gordon Smith and Bing Thom. It is a delight to see the result and to celebrate Gordon for his important contribution to the Library and to the City’s collection of public art.”

Mr. Jim Adams, Chair of the Public Art Advisory Committee commented: “This commission allowed us to bring the work of a major Canadian painter into the living room of the City. I expect that there will be generations of Library patrons who will make this painting part of their experience and future expectation of what a great painting and a great civic building should be.”

Liz Magor’s four sculptural forms titled “Marks” are installed in a group of three on the third floor and a single piece on the fourth floor of the Library. Liz Magor’s set of four sculptures challenges library visitors and their expectations. From a distance, it is difficult to tell if the forms are “realistic” like rocks? Or are they chairs we can sit on? Up close they continue to be mysterious in their textured surfaces until you sit on them. They’re made of soft black silicone, and are shaped by impressions of the human body – hands, legs, elbows.

Councillor Judy Villeneuve, Council Liaison to the City's Public Art Advisory Committee said: "I want to thank Liz Magor for bringing such strong works into this space. While at first we might find them mysterious, even a bit edgy perhaps "Marks" delivers an aesthetic experience in so many ways – up close one can touch the marks left in their creation, and they offer such a physical contrast to the clean white building."

Mr. Jim Adams, Chair of the Public Art Advisory Committee said: "They may look abstract from a distance, but if you look at them closely, or from the balcony of the floor above, you'll notice they are shaped like punctuation marks. We, as representatives of the diverse people of Surrey surrounding them, serve as the living stories they punctuate."

More about Liz Magor and the sculptures, Marks:

Warm to the touch and bearing the imprint of a reclining human body, the sculptures invite us to rest. When we do so, they yield to our weight, creating a private space in which to read or think. When viewed from above, the sculptures look like quotation marks. As we move between them, we become part of the narrative of the library: the story of people coming together in a public place to pursue solitary acts of reading, studying, or researching. The quotation marks also "record" the many stories of a diverse community.

In *Marks*, Magor ties the "literal" — our physical experience of how we occupy space — to the "abstract" — what we think about reading, recording, and punctuation. As Magor says about her work, "if there's a spectrum of representation from literal to abstract, I'm interested in pulling the two ends together to make work that is literally abstract."

Liz Magor is one of Canada's most highly acclaimed and distinctive sculptors. She has represented Canada internationally including the Venice Biennale and received many honours and awards, including the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts and the Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement. Her work includes public art in Vancouver, Edmonton, and Oakville, and widely exhibited sculptures and photographs.

More about Gordon Smith and his painting: Commission for Surrey Library (West Coast Landscape)

Gordon Smith's painting may seem familiar. But look more closely. This monumental work does more than reproduce a scene from nature. "You use it as a starting point," Smith says of landscape, "and then the paint takes over." Here colour and brushwork are as important as the wintry scene we see. Smith plays the dark shapes of the forest against the snowy white ground and cold blue sky. The thin verticals and sweeping diagonals of the trees create subtle abstract patterns. Like the library itself, with its sense of sanctuary, Smith's choice of colour and his painting method work together to create a mood of quiet introspection.

Gordon Smith is one of Canada's most esteemed and prolific painters of the west coast landscape. He is also an accomplished printmaker and has worked in sculpture, photography, and mixed-media installation. His work is in many public and private collections in Canada including the National Gallery of Canada, the United States including the Museum of Modern Art, and Britain including the Victoria and Albert Museum. In addition to his acclaimed art career, he is a generous teacher and arts patron, and

has received many honours and awards, including the Order of Canada, the Order of British Columbia, honorary doctorates, the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts, and the Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement.

Gordon Smith frequently remarks that he is “a hundred painters deep.” His influences have ranged from the Group of Seven to the Abstract Expressionists; although he makes each style he studies his own. He was an important proponent of the landscape-based “lyrical abstraction” that characterized West Coast Canadian painting in the mid-20th century.

More about the City of Surrey’s Public Art Program

The City of Surrey implemented a public art policy in 1999, and since that time 1.25% of the construction cost of new civic buildings has been invested in public art. The City’s public art collection includes 55 projects, located in civic parks and buildings in all of Surrey’s town centres. The artworks have been created in a range of materials from carved stone and bronze sculptures, to interactive sculptures, illuminated overpasses, and collaborative community art projects such as mosaics. For more information on Surrey’s public art collection, visit our website www.surrey.ca/arts