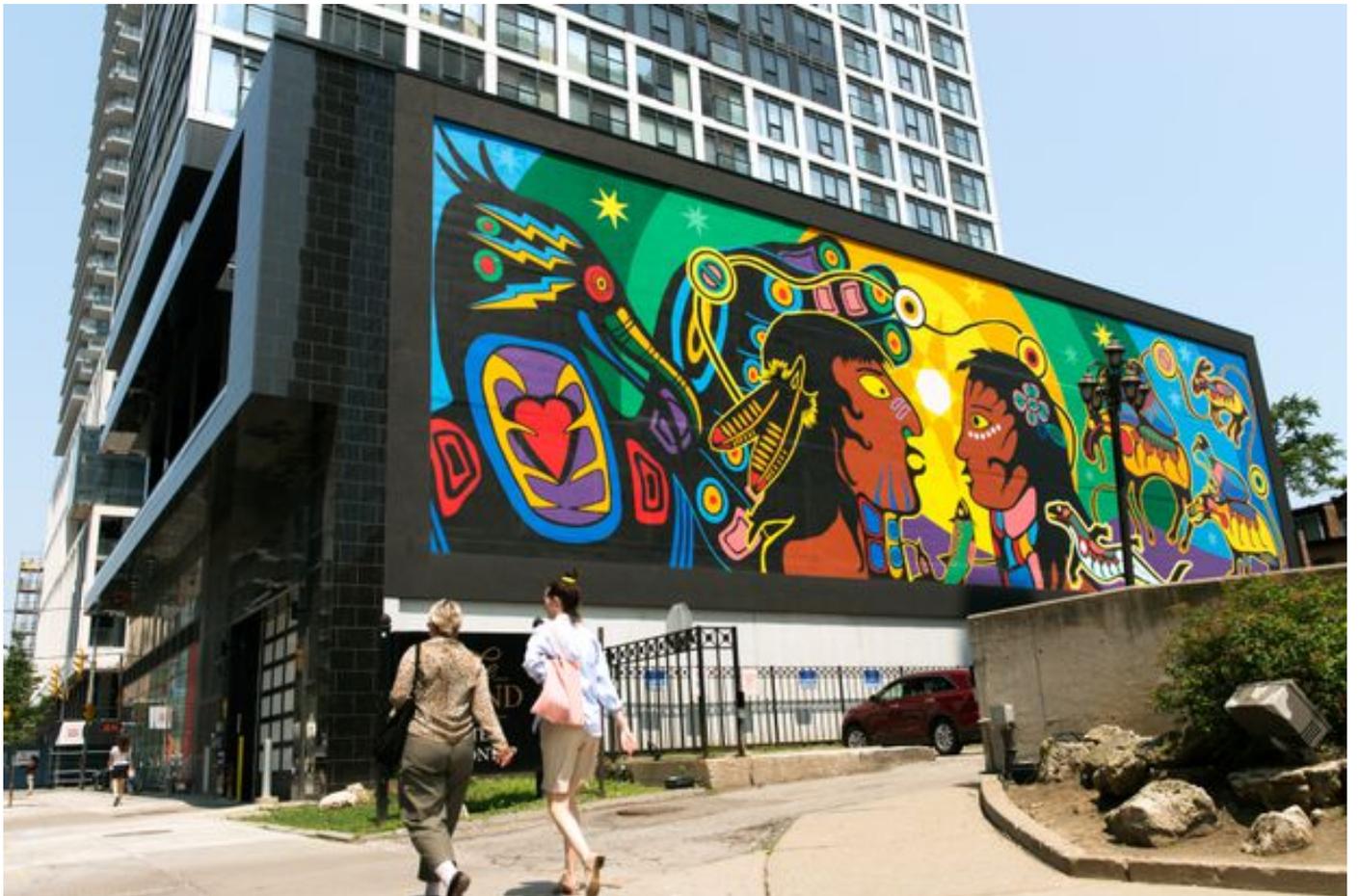


A look at Toronto's murals and the messages behind them

Toronto boasts hundreds of murals on telephone boxes, TTC platforms, benches and brick exteriors. The art can be huge and overpowering, but the artists behind them are often invisible. Photographer Solana Cain found the creators behind the paint and asked them about the messages they hope to share through their work

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1 COMMENT



The Original Family on Jarvis Street near Dundas Street.

SOLANA CAIN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Philip Cote's mural tells the creation story of the Anishinaabe people. It shows the first man, the first woman and their sacred union. "I'm really interested in telling our story because I couldn't hear that story anywhere when I was growing up," Mr. Cote says. "I know that it's important for our young people to have a sense of place, a sense of belonging and a sense of identity." The mural also opens the door for non-Indigenous people to broaden their perspective. Commissioned by CentreCourt Condos, Mr. Cote painted the mural in November and December of 2018. Scaffolding had to be set up, with levels all the way up to the top of the wall. He used a Renaissance art technique called pouncing, where an image is transferred from one surface to another using paper that has been perforated allowing ink to pass through it.



SOLANA CAIN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL





The Birds Under The Bridge at Cherry Street and Lakeshore Boulevard.

SOLANA CAIN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The Birds Under The Bridge at Cherry Street and Lakeshore Boulevard

The artist known as Fatspatrol uses her work to consider how the natural and human worlds intersect. Her work, which often features birds, appears in public spaces in Toronto, New Jersey, Ireland, Australia and Dubai. She researches birds local to each area – pigeons seem prevalent in most cities – and other times she is sharing messages of conservation or mythology. “I find it really interesting that birds symbolize things that are really important to human beings like freedom of flight.” The mural under the Gardiner Expressway was created with support from STEPS Initiative and took the artist about a week to create in the summer of 2017 with the help of scissor lift. Fatspatrol recalls that sometimes she found herself painting alone under the bridge and vulnerable. But she realizes that vulnerability is also present in the public artwork – there’s no way to know how long the work will last. Fatspatrol used anti-graffiti paint on the portions closer to the street, which means it can be cleaned if someone does spray paint on it, but she didn’t apply that same measure to the parts of the

mural that are higher up. She reckons no one will be able to reach that height – except the birds.



Tiger on Dundas Street near Euclid Avenue.

SOLANA CAIN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Tiger on Dundas Street near Euclid Avenue

In various neighbourhoods in Toronto you will come across spray painted tigers. There's one at St. Clair Avenue and Keele Street, another near Church Street and Wellesley Street, one at Bathurst Street and College Street, in Kensington Market and this one on the side of Sovereign State on Dundas Street West. "The first tiger I painted was at Humber College, it represented an inner tiger that has been with me and helped me through traumatic times in my life," said the artist known as Luvsumone. Eight years ago, he approached the business owner of Sovereign State, Joel Gregorio, and asked to paint his exterior wall. Mr. Gregorio turned him down. But last year, Luvsumone walked into Sovereign State again and to his surprise Mr. Gregorio had just received funding from the city for public art and was willing to work with him. A skateboarding accident postponed the artist from creating the mural until April of this year. Spray painting in the rain and moving every time a car needed to pass, Luvsumone completed the wall in four days.



SOLANA CAIN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL



From Whence You Came in a laneway off Ossington Avenue near Argyle Street.

SOLANA CAIN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

From Whence You Came in a laneway off Ossington Avenue near Argyle Street

American artist Lauren YS has been thinking lately a lot about global warming. She travels the world mainly spreading messages about feminism. But the two themes collided in the mural she painted adjacent to Ossington Avenue. “As I was painting, I was thinking about subtle concepts of global warming, and how you need to respect the world that you came from, and I wanted to express the feeling of sinking back into the Earth – something I find really comforting but also a little unsettling,” she said. She was invited to Toronto in July by Andrew Kelly and Lyal Abu Lawi, who curate murals from local and international artists around the city. Lauren freehand spray painted the female character, who is sitting in water surrounded by snails and mushrooms. The mural is one of the smaller pieces of public art that she has created. (A year ago she painted a wall on a seven-storey building in Long Beach.) She says her most memorable experience thus far was travelling to Nepal to paint a mural inside a school for children that had lost their parents in the 2015 earthquake. Lauren completed the mural in Toronto in two days.



Divine Femininity found off McCaul Street near Dundas Street

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SOLANA CAIN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Divine Femininity found off McCaul Street near Dundas Street

Going from canvas to outdoor exteriors, Désiré Betty faced challenges such as using spray paint for the first time. Ms. Betty was selected last year to take part in Womxn Paint’s second annual project that brings together professional artists and community members. Garage doors that had been defaced with graffiti were transformed and beautified by the participating artists. Ms. Betty’s mural was painted over three days and depicts the divine feminine. “I perceive the sun as female energy, the giver of warm light and life in general,” she said. “And the sun represents strength and endurance because it provides the energy we need to sustain life on Earth.” Recently, Ms. Betty painted her second mural in Womxn Paint’s third installment along Finch Street between Kipling Avenue and Islington Avenue.



Untitled found off McCaul Street near Dundas Street.

SOLANA CAIN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Untitled found off McCaul Street near Dundas Street

Lacey Jane Wilburn and Layla Folkamann have been painting murals together for the last decade. Originally from Edmonton, the pair met in fine art school and have been painting together ever since. Their murals have a strong connection with the local community they paint in, often depicting community members. Using photographs of people, they create Photoshop mockups ensuring it is the right proportions. When they arrive at the site, they chalk out a grid and then fill it in using paint brushes and rollers. They work with acrylic straight out of the paint gallon bucket. Ms. Wilburn and Ms. Folkamann were a part of a group of female artists selected by Womxn Paint to cover graffitied garages in the laneway off McCaul last summer. The mural is about age diversity and recognizing seniors.

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