

Arts

Toronto: gigantic art projections are coming to your neighbourhood

Public events might be cancelled, but BigArtTO aims to bring a bit of culture to where you live

[Leah Collins](#) · CBC Arts · Posted: Sep 23, 2020 5:00 PM ET | Last Updated: September 23



Artist Erika DeFreitas took this photo while testing her projection for BigArtTO. It's scheduled to appear on the Canada Malting Co. silos Sept. 30-Oct. 3. (Erika DeFreitas)

Toronto's Queen's Quay condo dwellers are in for a surprise. Every night between Sept. 30 and Oct. 3, the west side of the old Canada Malting Co. building will be wrapped in a 150-foot-wide video projection, an original work by [Erika DeFreitas](#). And from bike paths and balconies, locals should be able to see it light up the night — the flickering image of a super-sized hand caressing the towering silos.

For the piece, DeFreitas compiled footage of herself tracing the cracks and contours of buildings — including fragments of Toronto architectural artifacts (now installed at Scarborough's [Guild Park and Gardens](#)) and the Canadian Malting Co. itself.

"It's kind of paying homage to the past that we once knew because everybody talks about this 'new normal,'" she explains. "So it's thinking about the past, but thinking

about the idea of tomorrow, possibilities."

"I really love the idea of it being this moment where people can come upon it," she says. And there will be more moments like it to come, as the piece is just one of 25 that will appear throughout the city until Dec. 5.



Detail of Erika DeFreitas's "a composition for an elegy to what once was and all that remains; or, a score for the past, the present, the future tenses." The video will be projected on the Canada Malting Co. silos Sept. 30-Oct. 3 as part of BigArtTO. (Erika DeFreitas/Courtesy of the Bentway)

Last week, the City of Toronto launched something called [BigArtTO](#). A public art extension of a pandemic-borne community-engagement plan ([ShowLoveTO](#)), it's not a festival exactly. The city goes with the phrase "city-wide public art celebration," and in execution it means that art (by Toronto artists) will be projected onto walls throughout all 25 wards, with each piece appearing for four nights only.

"These are memorable moments for people to fall upon," says Joe Sellors, project manager of BigArtTO and Year of Public Art at the City of Toronto. [Last week](#), outdoor gatherings in the region were reduced to 25 people. Even Nuit Blanche is going online this year, and the ban on city events will likely be extended through [winter](#). BigArtTO doesn't fill the gap, exactly, but it does aim to bring a bit of art, a bit of spectacle and a bit of hope to Torontonians by potentially reaching them where they live.

Sellors says the project got rolling this summer, as an extension of the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild (TORR). "[We were] trying to create projects or opportunities for people in their neighbourhoods to get outside, leave their homes and still feel safe."



Installation view of Wawatay by Ben Kicknosway and Morgan Kagesheongai. As part of BigArtTO, the piece was projected Sept. 16-19, 2020, at Seneca College's Odeyto Indigenous Centre. (Mohammed Abdallah/Courtesy of OCAD U)

OCAD University was brought on as an early collaborator, and worked with the city in conceiving the idea of Toronto-wide projections. Their team selected 22 of the 25 works, which are either made by neighbourhood artists or engage with the history of the projection site. According to OCAD U's Glen Lowry, who serves as art director on the BigArtTO project, the selection process focused on BIPOC artists and recent grads — two communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

The remaining three projects, including DeFreitas's contribution, were curated by The Bentway under the title "[The Essentials](#)." A collection of original works that reflect on the world's COVID-assisted paradigm shift — and how we're setting priorities for a post-pandemic future — it's a sort of exhibition within BigArtTO. Complete details are still TBA, but it will illuminate waterfront properties — locations that nod to the Bentway's own history as a site that transitioned from one use to another. A third cultural collaborator, AVA Animation & Visual Arts Inc., is working with the artists on projection mapping.

And projections are a strategic choice, the organizers explain. Dazzling and able to be enjoyed from afar, they're suitable for social distancing. "I think there's some of the Nuit Blanche energy or zeitgeist behind it, but with some circumspection," says Lowry. The works themselves are purposefully short, as well. ("We're not showing movies in

each of the 25 wards that people are expected to bring a blanket and camp out," he chuckles.) And each video will play on loop, so there's no push to catch them at a particular time.



Detail of *The Elevator to You* by Ian Keteku. The piece appeared at Joseph J. Piccininni Community Centre from Sept. 16-19, 2020, as part of BigArtTO. (Vladimir Kanic/Courtesy of OCAD U)

Sellors says the locations were selected with safety in mind as well, with projection sites avoiding high-traffic locations. And while a [complete list of locations is available](#), organizers haven't conceived of BigArtTO as some kind of season-long scavenger hunt.

"Don't try and go to all 25 wards to see these pieces," says Lowry. "Enjoy what's happening. There's a kind of fantastical quality to it. People may not know that this is happening, and then suddenly a building or a site is lit up in their neighbourhood. There's an element of discovery built into it."



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