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# What We Heard.”

AURORA PUBLIC ART FORUM  
MARCH 31, 2022



# Land Acknowledgement

The Town of Aurora acknowledges that the Anishinaabe lands on which we live and work are the traditional and Treaty #20 territories of the Chippewas of Georgina Island, as well as many other Nations whose presence here continues to this day.

As the closest First Nation community to Aurora, we recognize the special relationship the Chippewas have with the lands and waters of this territory. They are the water protectors and environmental stewards of these lands, and as a municipality we join them in these responsibilities.

We further acknowledge that Aurora is part of the treaty lands of the Mississaugas and Chippewas, recognized through Treaty #13 as well as the Williams Treaties of 1923.

A shared understanding of the rich cultural heritage that has existed for centuries, and how our collective past brought us to where we are today, will help us walk together into a better future.



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## About this Report

This report provides an overview of what we heard at the Aurora Public Art Forum held on March 31, 2022. It summarizes attendees' perceptions, hopes and priorities related to Public Art in Aurora, and provides direction to Town of Aurora staff and the Public Art Working Group in preparing the Public Art Master Plan.

# 1.0 Overview

## 1.1 About the Public Art Master Plan

The Town of Aurora is developing its first-ever Public Art Master Plan (PAMP). This strategic document will act as a roadmap for years to come, setting direction for public art in Aurora and enhancing the impact of current efforts. A strong public art program will foster creativity and innovation in our community, share our collective histories and animate our public spaces.

## 1.2 About the Public Art Forum

**Aurora Public Art Forum**  
**March 31, 2022 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

**THE ARMOURY**  
EST. 1874

**89 Mosley Street**

- **Panel discussion** about creative placemaking and public art, featuring:
  - **Queen Kikoyi and Nico Taylor**, Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM)
  - **Catherine Dean**, Public Art Officer, City of Toronto
  - **Collin Zipp**, Public Art Manager, STEPS Public Art
- **Playful co-creation of miniature works of art** for two Little Free Art Galleries to be installed in the community.
- **Interactive workshops** focused on designing Aurora's first public art project and Vision Statement.
- **Talk by Artist, Clarissa M. Lewis**, whose focus is on creating intimate experiences in public places.



Queen Kikoyi and Nico Taylor  
BSAM



Collin Zipp  
STEPS Public Art



Clarissa Lewis  
Artist

The Public Art Forum is a major piece of the PAMP's public engagement strategy. Organized by the Town of Aurora, in collaboration with the Public Art Working Group and STEPS Public Art, the Forum brought together leaders from across various sectors for a day of presentations, co-creation, discussion and learning.

The Forum began with a Land Acknowledgement, followed by a Smudging Ceremony by Ojibwe Elder, Shelley Charles, from Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. Mayor Tom Mrakas also welcomed participants and brought greetings on behalf of the municipality.



Ojibwe Elder, Shelley Charles.



Town of Aurora Mayor, Tom Mrakas.

One of the day's highlights was a Panel Discussion facilitated by the Town's Special Events Program Assistant, Andrea Araujo, which featured Queen Kukoyi and Nico Taylor (Executive Directors of the Black Speculative Arts Movement), Catherine Dean (Public Art Officer for the City of Toronto), and Collin Zipp (Public Art Manager for STEPS Public Art). Panelists shared their unique perspectives on creative placemaking and the public art process, followed by discussion with Forum attendees.



L to R: Nico Taylor and Queen Kukoyi, Black Speculative Arts Movement; Andrea Araujo, Town of Aurora; on the left screen, Collin Zipp, STEPS Public Art. On the right screen, Catherine Dean, City of Toronto.



After the Panel Discussion, participants were invited to create miniature works of art to be placed in the first two Little Free Art Galleries that will be installed on Town property in the coming weeks. Facilitated by Artist, Clarissa M. Lewis, guests created several pieces of art using a variety of mediums and material.

Based on the Little Free Libraires concept, in which passers-by are invited to take a book and/or leave a book, the Little Free Art Galleries will be openable to allow the public to contribute a piece of art and/or take one. Once installed, the Town's Cultural Services Division will be responsible for keeping the galleries stocked with new art and maintained in good repair.



One of two Little Free Art Galleries adorned with artwork created by Forum participants.



Workshop participant creating a miniature work of art for one of the Little Free Art Galleries.

During the afternoon, participants were asked to share their thoughts on what Aurora's first official public art project could look like, where it might be located, and what themes it could explore. Participants provided practical feedback into the multi-step process of creating art in public places that will inform the development of the PAMP.

A second workshop facilitated by Aurora Cultural Centre Executive Director, Suzanne Haines, provided an opportunity for attendees to weigh in on the guiding principles that should form the identity of Aurora's public art program.



Phil Rose, Town of Aurora, discussing different types of public art.



Suzanne Haines, Aurora Cultural Centre, facilitating the afternoon Visioning Session.

The Forum concluded with an engaging talk by Artist, Clarissa M. Lewis. Working sometimes by her own name and sometimes under the pseudonym, The Stealth Art Collective, Clarissa has told visual stories in her by-the-sidewalk art gallery, in an urban wilderness, and in the cityscape with intervention installations. During her talk, Clarissa shared her passion for creating intimate experiences in public places. She also shared stories about her private-public art making – stories about enchantment, mystery, 'thin' places, going covert, being ambushed, falling in love and some lessons she has learned over her celebrated career.



Artist, Clarissa M. Lewis



# 2.0 What We Heard



## 2.1 Panel Discussion

Overall, the following ideas emerged during the Panel Discussion:

- The importance of developing a municipal public art plan that reduces barriers for participation and provides emerging artists with resources that help them navigate the often bureaucratic process associated with municipal governments (e.g., help with permits, insurance requirements, etc.).
- The value of knowledge transfer among artists involved in public art and how public art plans should help build capacity among the artistic community by incorporating educational programming, such as residencies and mentorship opportunities.
- How Aurora's Public Art Master Plan, at least in the short term, might distinguish itself by focusing on smaller temporary public art projects that are more economical to undertake than permanent pieces, take less time to create, and are better situated to address contemporary issues facing the community.
- The value of embedding diverse perspectives into the entire public art process, from developing guidelines to selecting artists to evaluating the success of a project.
- Acknowledging that there are multiple "pathways" to public art and that public art creation is most successful when viewed as a flexible partnership between all stakeholders, especially between artists and municipalities.
- The need for artists to have access to affordable studio space where they can work on public art projects.
- The importance of collecting relevant data to inform future public art projects, tell the stories of the artists that created them, and provide tangible links between public art and positive social outcomes.

## 2.2 Workshop 1: Aurora's First Public Art Project

When asked what Aurora's first "official" public art project should look like, participants offered a range of feedback. They ranked their top choices for Site Category, Medium, Type, and Theme, the results of which are as follows:

### Site Category

- Top Choice: Streetscapes
- Second Choice: Parks and Trails
- Third Choice: Gateways, Key Civic Sites, Transit Hubs (tie)

Other site categories not listed, but which participants expressed interest in include:

- Hidden areas/unexpected places (alleys, backlots, etc.)
- New residential and commercials developments
- Industrial areas
- Crosswalks at key intersections

### Medium

- Top Choice: Mural, Installation (tie)
- Second Choice: Sculpture, Street Art (tie)
- Third Choice: Digital

### Type

- Top Choice: Temporary, Permanent (tie)
- Second Choice: Interactive
- Third Choice: Functional

### Theme

- First Choice: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- Second Choice: Truth and Reconciliation, Education, Environment and Climate Action (tie)
- Third Choice: Immigration/Changing Demographics

Other themes not listed, but which participants put forward, include:

- Place specific (i.e., public art about a certain location or neighbourhood)
- Joy, happiness, and optimism
- None, leave it open for artists to decide
- Mental health
- The future
- Industry, agriculture and manufacturing
- Entrepreneurship
- Where history and the future converge

The feedback received during the Forum will be combined with the results of the online Public Art survey released in June 2021 to inform the ongoing development of the Public Art Master Plan.

## **2.3 Workshop 2: Guiding Principles for Aurora's Public Art Master Plan**

During the second afternoon workshop, participants were asked to provide high-level direction on the value, role and future hopes for Public Art in Aurora.

They were asked '*What does Public Art mean to you?*' and '*What 1-2 words do you think of when you think about Public Art?*'

Based on a synthesis of the responses, we heard the following thematic groupings emerge:

- Community
- Emotion
- To Challenge/Provoke
- Engage

Participants were then asked, '*What do you want Public Art to do for the community?*'

The following thematic groupings emerged:

- Bring People Together
- Advocate for Art
- Promote Cultural Tourism/Attract Visitors
- Make Us Feel
- Educate/Stimulate Conversation

The final questions for participants included, '*In 10 years, what do you want Public Art to be like in this community? How do you want it to have changed the community? What do you want the community to notice?*'

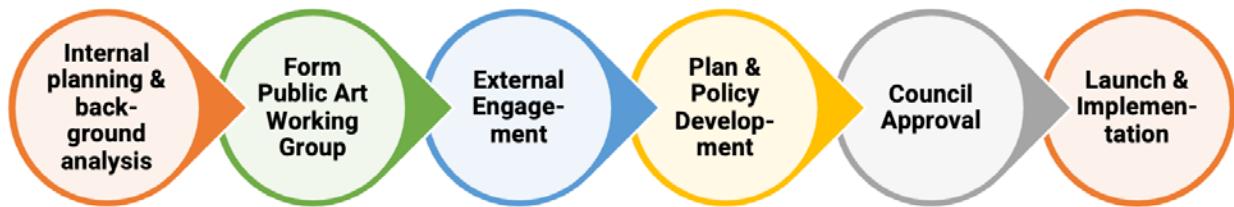
We heard the following thematic groupings expressed:

- Represent the community
- Exhibit diversity of form
- Create and support a viable and diverse arts community
- Celebrate and support connectedness, sameness, unified community
- Pride in Aurora for being known as a place of Public Art

As the project advances, these guiding principles may evolve based on further feedback from stakeholders, political leadership, and the community.

## 3.0 Next Steps

The following diagram provides an overview of the process taken to create Aurora's Public Art Master Plan.



With the completion of the Public Art Forum and the publication of this report, the process will move to the Plan and Policy Development stage, which the Public Art Working Group will start by meeting to refine the Vision and Guiding Principles that will form the Plan's foundation. Town staff will then create a draft Plan that includes sections on Priority Public Art Zones, Site Selection Criteria, Phased Implementation, Funding Strategy, and more. The targeted completion date for the draft Public Art Master Plan is early 2023, which will then be presented to Council for review.

Once approved, staff will begin the work of implementing the plan over the coming years, with annual updates issued to ensure the public and Council are informed on the status of local public art efforts.

## 4.0 Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by the Town of Aurora Public Art Working Group:

- Andrea Araujo, Special Events Program Assistant, Town of Aurora
- Suzanne Haines, Executive Director, Aurora Cultural Centre
- Lisa Hausz, Manager of Economic Development & Policy, Town of Aurora
- Robin McDougall, Director of Community Services, Town of Aurora
- Phil Rose, Manager of Aurora Town Square, Town of Aurora
- Grazyna Tonkiel, Music and Visual Artist
- Jennifer Worden, Community Member

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- Queen Kukoyi and Nico Taylor, Executive Directors, Black Speculative Arts Movement
- Catherine Dean, Public Art Officer, City of Toronto
- Collin Zipp, Public Art Manager, STEPS Public Art
- Clarissa M. Lewis, Artist



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