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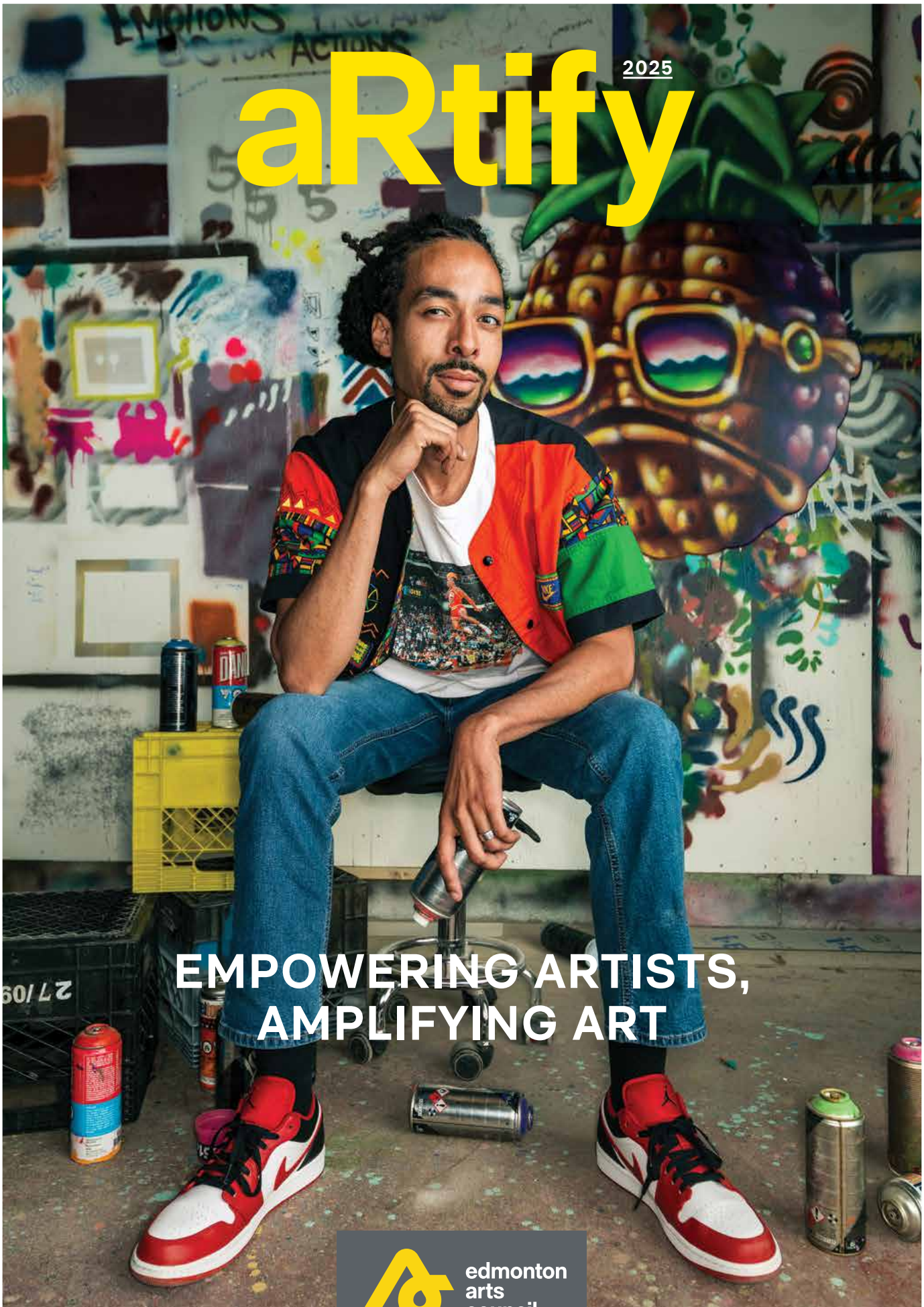

EMPOWERING ARTISTS, AMPLIFYING ART

edmonton arts council

➔ **ALEX JANVIER**, *Tsa Tsa Ke K'e* (Iron Foot Place)

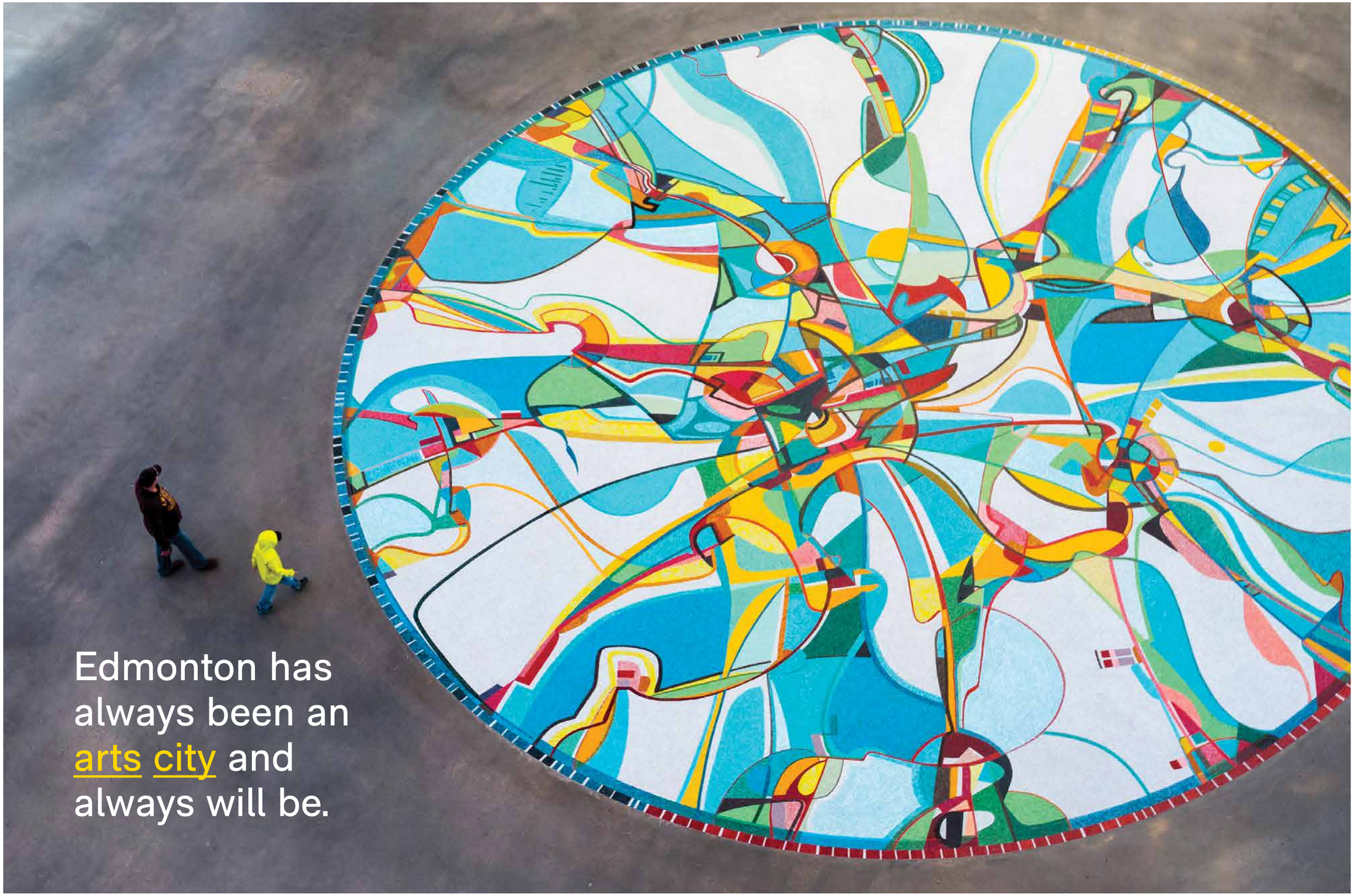

photo Laughing Dog Photography

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in his studio

Photography
Curtis Trent

→ **AJA LOUDEN**
in his studio

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BONJOUR!

As Edmonton grows and changes, our arts and culture community is expanding, too. Edmonton Arts Council (EAC) remains committed to serving the community, being the listening ear that works with artists to understand what they need and how we can help arts and culture flourish in Edmonton.

If you are new to Edmonton, know that there is a place for you in this community, too. We are always working to make the circle wider. Funding and nurturing art and culture that all Edmontonians can see themselves in is a guiding light in our work. There is so much potential in our city, from newcomers to youth to established artists.

Artists bring personality to our city. I hope the artists we support continue to tell the story of Edmonton, making our city the vibrant arts and culture hub we know it to be.

Art touches the soul and offers connection. Arts and culture are vital to our city, and we must keep the momentum going to maintain it and we cannot take our arts and cultural scene for granted. Behind every piece of art, performance and creation are artists, funders, educators and supporters who sustain this community as it continues to innovate and reinvent itself.

RENÉE WILLIAMS,
Executive Director,
Edmonton Arts Council

Q&A with Renée

1. What do you wish Edmontonians knew about Edmonton Arts Council?

I wish they knew the breadth and depth of what we do as an organization and a funder. They know we offer grants, but they might not know about the work we do to maintain public art, or that we put on events like the Green Shack Shows.

2. What has been the best part of your time as Executive Director?

I love getting to experience the significant amount of creative genius in Edmonton. Theatre, dance, visual art — there's so much talent in this city that it's breathtaking.

3. What would you say to Edmonton residents about our arts and culture community?

I hope every Edmontonian will take some time to engage, experience and enjoy our city's arts and cultural scene.

edmonton arts council

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photo Ryan Parker

DON ROSS
Board Chair,
Edmonton
Arts Council

MESSAGE FROM BOARD CHAIR DON ROSS

When the Edmonton Arts Council (EAC) was created 30 years ago, Edmonton's arts scene needed a boost. What started as a small team with a small budget is now recognized across the country as a unique and influential institution. EAC has spent the last 30 years funding, supporting and inspiring public art, theatre, music, dance, filmmaking and everything in between.

Edmonton is a city with a unique voice where the arts can thrive. As Edmonton grows, we need to integrate art through the whole culture of the city. I couldn't be more proud to be the chair of an organization so committed to uplifting artists and elevating the arts in Edmonton. EAC continues to be forward thinking and visionary — while staying practical and adapting to change.

Art makes cities more welcoming, liveable and vibrant — we will continue to serve the city through arts funding and initiatives.

We hope you enjoy this special publication. Keep supporting art in Edmonton.

DON ROSS, Board Chair,
Edmonton Arts Council

"I have a lot of favourite pieces of public art, but I really like the one in the northeast corner of Churchill Square by Erin Pankratz and Christian Pérès Gibaut called *A Mischief of Could-be(s).* It's fun and it's whimsical and kids love to climb on them."

–Don Ross, Board Chair Edmonton Arts Council

photos (L-R) Jody Bailey, Cole Crane

→ **ERIN PANKRATZ AND CHRISTIAN PÉRÈS GIBAUT (RED KNOT STUDIO),**
A Mischief of Could-be(s)

HIS WORSHIP AMARJEET SOHI
Mayor, Edmonton

"Arts and culture are the heart of our city. They bring people together, spark creativity and reflect who we are. When we invest and support artists and festivals, we build a more vibrant, connected and inclusive Edmonton."

–Amarjeet Sohi, Mayor of Edmonton

→ **DAVID GARNEAU** *Tawatinâ Bridge*

The Mayor's favourite public art is the art featured on the Tawatinâ bridge

"I love the artwork along the Tawatinâ Bridge pathway, not only is it beautifully accessible to the public, but it also honours both Indigenous and settler histories. To me, it stands as a powerful symbol of bridging histories. On a personal level, the Valley Line LRT represents years of hard work, so seeing Indigenous art integrated into the project is deeply meaningful. It reflects both our city's and my own commitment to reconciliation."

SILENT GUARDIANS

The art (and science) of maintaining public art

by **ZACHARY AYOTTE**

da Vinci's ***Mona Lisa*** is over 500 years old. Van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, though young by comparison, is well over a century old. Even *The Persistence of Memory,* Salvador Dali's iconic surrealist painting, is pushing 100. What these works have in common — other than the fact they are some of the more famous works of art in history — is that they look pretty good for their age. They owe their lasting appearance not to genes, diet or a good night's sleep, but to the work of art conservation.

If you don't know much about art conservation, that is, to some extent, by design. An art conservator's job, according to David Turnbull, director of public art at Edmonton Arts Council (EAC), is to be as invisible as possible. An art conservator should leave no trace they were there. That's because art conservation is done not only to preserve a work of art but an artist's intentions as well. If an art conservator's hand can be detected, it might alter or obscure an artist's original aim. "Our job is to make sure that the work of the artist is shown," says Turnbull. "So there really is an art and a science to being completely invisible."

The art and the science of it begins with careful documentation of a work of art. Conservators want to have a clear sense of what materials were used, why they were selected and how they were incorporated into the design of a work. They also use documentation to get a sense of how a work of art is aging and changing over time. The EAC's team of conservators use a rotating maintenance and inspection schedule to ensure all works are documented regularly. David Simmonds, collections technician for EAC, says that if he knows he will be visiting an artwork, he will also visit neighbouring artworks, meaning their collection is regularly inspected. The team also has to be aware of potential harm: "If a vulnerability occurs, such as a series of bronze thefts, I visit other artworks that might fall under this vulnerable category."

This allows a conservator to get a sense of what kind of work will be required. "Does it need remedial care? Does it require preventive work, or does it require more restorative action?" says Turnbull.

Those distinctions highlight the complexity of art conservation, which can include regular maintenance, restoration and repair. A conservator must understand an artist's intentions as well as their material choices. "Every material is going to age differently," says Turnbull. "Metals are going to corrode, plastics degrade, paint will always fade. Those are some of the things that we just have to reconcile, because there are no materials that are made specifically for public art."

Perhaps the biggest challenge conservators face is damage caused by vandalism, accidents or other unforeseen circumstances. When that happens, conservators determine if repairs can be made in-house or if they need to outsource the necessary work. They will consult the artist when possible and often fence off the work from the public. In rare instances, they even reach out to conservators outside of Edmonton.

→ **BRANDON VICKERD**, *Wild Life*
Preserved by David Turnbull, Director, Public Art

photo Adrien Veczan

LIKE A GOOD THIEF, AN ART CONSERVATOR SHOULD LEAVE NO TRACE THEY WERE THERE.

A conservator's knowledge base is always growing, in part because works of art can be made from so many different possible materials. When asked about works that required research and new approaches, Turnbull referenced *Soleil de Nuit*, the large neon installation by Laurent Grasso at the Commonwealth Community Recreation Centre. The work is around 60 metres long and installed outdoors, so it's exposed to the elements year round. "We couldn't have had that unless we had done the extensive research," says Turnbull. "How does neon age? How do we source it? How do we make sure that it's got the same colour, the same luminosity, the same colour temperature?"

Art conservation requires a breadth of knowledge about art ***and*** about the sciences. Mitra Saeedi, a conservator of public art at EAC, says people are often surprised by how much science is involved in art conservation. "We use chemistry, physics and materials science to understand what's happening to the artwork. We look at the materials, the environment and all the factors that might be causing damage, and then we choose a treatment based on that. Every piece is unique, so there's no one-method-fits-all approach." For Saeedi, this research is partly what drew her to the field. She thought she would be an artist, but realized that she liked studying art works and problem solving to help preserve them more. "It felt like the perfect mix of art and science," she says. "And honestly, it feels like such a privilege to work so closely with the pieces themselves!" **a**

photo Cooper & O'Hara

THE RENAISSANCE WOMAN

EMILY CHU's multi-faceted career brings together art and community

by **CAITLIN HART**

Emily Chu has been drawing for as long as she can remember. When she moved to Calgary from Beijing at the age of five, art became her way to communicate and overcome language barriers. Today, she uses art to tell her stories, on a much larger scale.

The illustrator, visual artist and community organizer has received a number of grants from Edmonton Arts Council (EAC) since 2018, including the Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund Award in 2021. The fund supports living and working expenses for exceptional local artists, so they can focus on their art.

"It's not really about money at all. It's about giving you the time, the focused time to work on something that you would never be able to do if it weren't for a grant," says Chu.

Time, Chu explains, also opens the door for artists to create more authentically. Like many visual artists, Chu has lent her skills to "advertising, business promotion, T-shirt designs" and other commissioned projects over the course of her career. But the opportunity to create her passion projects is the more rewarding part. It's what artists dream of doing.

The first project grant Chu received was for on-location drawing — bringing a sketch club to different locations around the city. Through that work, she says, "I figured out what I wanted to do with my artistic voice … nowadays, I'm talking more about my own personal story in my work."

Place is an important theme in Chu's work. Whether it's a graphic memoir exploring her experiences as an immigrant, sketching iconic locations around Edmonton's Chinatown, or making downtown more beautiful with a mural, her work is deeply connected to the theme of home, and informed by her unique perspective and experiences.

Over the last seven years, Chu has been a prolific creator and community builder, founding

➔ **EMILY CHU**, *Versus* mural located at the Edmonton West Soccer Centre

"GRANTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO ARTISTS, AND ART IS ESSENTIAL TO CITIES," CHU SAYS.

and participating in arts markets and festivals, creating the Chinatown Stories Map and co-organizing the Chinatown Greetings fundraiser. Stroll around downtown Edmonton and you'll find her bright, bold murals in the Loblaws City Market Ice District location, on the Alberta Craft Gallery and Shop exterior, and on the Edmonton Chinatown Multi-Cultural Centre, among many other buildings in the city's core and beyond. This year marked the opening of her first exhibit with the Art Gallery of Alberta, called *Preserving Fragments*. The exhibit, a mural inspired by her own experience of moving to Alberta in the 90s, explores themes of immigration, diaspora, grief, identity and language.

"Grants are essential to artists, and art is essential to cities," Chu says.

Continuing on her impressive career trajectory, she's recently completed another project with EAC — murals at three of Edmonton's indoor soccer centres, bringing creativity to public spaces in different corners of the city. In all her work, Chu says her goal is to spark dialogue, create connections and contribute to the city's vibrancy. **a**

photo AsimOverstands/BUMP Mural Festival

AN ESSAY BY JESSICA JOHNS

SACRED GATHERING

Finding cultural connection in Edmonton's Indigenous Art Park

➔ **MARIANNE NICOLSON** *Preparing to Cross the Sacred River*

photos Arsan Buffin

The first time I saw *ᐃᒋᒣᐤ (ÎNÎW) River Lot 11∞* in Queen Elizabeth Park, I was watching an Indigenous-written play featured by Found Festival in 2021. I sat in the grass with my friends and watched the performance, staged on the *Pehonan* art piece by Tiffany Shaw, a functional amphitheater, aptly named.

As I watched, I caught glimpses out of the corner of my eye at two of the other installations nearby in the park: Amy Malbeuf's *iskotew*, Cree syllabics that translate to "fire" and Mary Anne Barkhouse's *Reign*, a plinth-like structure a little further away. The pink, green and blue colours of the syllabics stood stark against the green trees behind it. It's in my teachings that syllabics, spirit markers, are a sacred language. For the syllabics to sit on the land, overlooking the city, is a special kind of ceremony. To see my traditional language anywhere is always a blessing, but to look upon a spirit marker that's as big as my body is to be awed. The brown plinth-like structure of *Reign* is more modest but just as impactful. Up close, the plinth depicts plants, animals and dinosaurs that have all made Edmonton their home, showing the expanse of time this land held, right where I sat.

THE RIVER VALLEY, AND THE SITE WHERE THESE ART PIECES SIT, HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT PLACE FOR *NEHIYAWAK* AND MANY OTHER INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, WHO HAVE GATHERED THERE FOR TRADE AND CEREMONY SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL.

➔ **AMY MALBEUF** *Iskotew*

After the play, my friends and I looked at the rest of the pieces: Duane Linklater's *mikikwan*, a concrete hide scraper sculpture; Jerry Whitehead's *mamohkamatowin (Helping One Another)*, turtles created by concrete and mosaic tiles; Marianne Nicolson's *Preparing to Cross the Sacred River,* petroglyph-like patterns sandblasted on stone slabs. We walked to each art piece, touched them, marvelled at them and talked about them together. We sat on the giant hide scraper and watched the sun go down behind the city. The art wasn't just something to look at, it was something to use, something that helped us gather and be together. Its function was as important as its beauty. And this was fitting. The river valley, and the site where these art pieces sit, has been an important place for *nehiyawak* and many other Indigenous peoples, who have gathered there for trade and ceremony since time immemorial. To see art pieces also gathered together in that way, in conversation with one another as if they were sitting over a fire, seems reminiscent of this practice, encouraging people visiting them to do the same.

Years later, I attended my first hide tanning camp in the river valley with Jess Sanderson-Barry, an artist and hide tanner passing on her traditional knowledge to urban Indigenous people wanting to learn. For a week, I used tools that helped me to flesh and scrape hides, and I kept thinking back to the hide scraper sculpture I sat on years earlier, at the time hoping that one day I'd have the opportunity to learn how to tan hides. I visited the park again after that. I learned that *mamohkamatowin (Helping One Another)* was made with the help of students from amiskwaciy Academy as they learned from Elders and knowledge holders about the stories and history of the river valley. It was moving to know that our youth had a hand in the history-making of the art piece, and that I was returning to the park and able to look at pieces, like the *Mikikwan* and see a tool I had used, one that is important to my cultural heritage, represented so visibly.

I have heard Elder Jo-Ann Saddleback share more than once the teaching that *nehiyawak* dress for the Creator. We can always be seen, from earliest accounts to now, wearing elaborate beadwork, colourful clothes and ribbon skirts and shirts. This practice isn't about vanity, but pride and respect. I see this teaching in this park, I see the pride and respect of my own culture, as well as the utility and reverence for the deep web of history and stories that live in the river valley. **a**

WHY PUBLIC ART MATTERS

"Public art makes art accessible to everyone. I was a student when I had kids, and one affordable and enriching thing we could do together was check out public art, whether in Borden Park or taking the dog for a walk in Terwillegar Park. It's interactive — the kids could climb on it, but then they started to ask questions about the art, too. Public art transforms ordinary spaces and beautifies them."
– Daniel Stadnicki, musician and educator

"Art makes a place feel safer and more alive. It's a fabric weaving us together through the city, uniting us and connecting us all. You really get to know a city and its residents through the arts. Having art in your community makes you feel part of something bigger, but it also makes a place feel like home."
– Sheldon Elter, Métis actor and writer

"There are many ways to look at public art in a city, but the main objective is to impact everyone who sees it. Good public art isn't decoration — it impacts the space it's in, and it impacts the people who encounter it every day. It has a real presence, and it makes people feel something. I think it's often controversial, but it's because people are passionate about it."
– Brian Webb, Artistic Director of Brian Webb Dance Company

the master

photo Aaron Pedersen

KEEP SAYING YES

Art takes courage to create

by **CAITLIN HART**

When he first moved to Edmonton in the 1980s, Darrin Hagen had no plans to become a drag performer, writer or filmmaker — his goal was to work as a composer. But a series of "rabbit holes" led him to build a truly unique career. Grants, including many from Edmonton Arts Council (EAC), are the reason he's been able to pursue new ideas and become the multi-hyphenate artist he is today. From his earliest days as Mz Flashback 9 and putting on a drag show at midnight in a Chinese restaurant during the Fringe Festival, to today, directing films and publishing books, including his memoir *The Edmonton Queen: Not a Riverboat Story*, his career is truly one-of-a-kind.

"Grants give us a chance to think bigger, right?" says Hagen. While he makes some of his living through work like sound design, funding allows him to create his most innovative and forward-thinking work.

"If we were completely dictated by what would sell … we wouldn't be pushing the art form at all," he adds.

Hagen was one of the first recipients of the EAC and Edmonton Community Foundation's Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund award (EATF) in 1997, awarded shortly after the publication of his debut book — marking a turning point in his career.

"It kind of launched me from being a drag queen who occasionally does sound design and Fringe shows to someone who's a published author," says Hagen. "It changed my life."

EATF awards are distributed to exceptional local artists every year, supporting living and working expenses so they can dedicate more time to their art. It's the kind of funding that has given Hagen the time and resources to create innovative and challenging work, without needing to focus so much on how to make money.

Hagen advises younger artists to "be brave enough to throw their name into the pile" — even if it seems like a long shot. The more an artist applies for grants and awards, the better they get at representing themselves and their art.

"Even if all you get out of it is spending an afternoon sitting down and making a plan, your dream becomes a little more viable and tangible … it's a learning process as much as it is an application process."

Beyond grants, Hagen says, his art has grown and evolved over the years by taking on projects that presented new challenges — including *Pride vs. Prejudice: The Delwin Vriend Story,* which has since been screened across Canada and Europe.

"You just constantly keep saying yes to things that you aren't sure that you can actually do, and that means you're always learning something." **a**

THE ART MAN

by **CORY SCHACHTEL**

photography **CURTIS TRENT**

Inspired by the people enriching the neighbourhood, the new Balwin art project by AJA Louden started with a seed

From Rogers Place and Churchill Square,

to parks and transit stations all around town, the City of Edmonton Public Art Collection has connected our city through beauty for decades. With the unveiling of the collection's 300th piece at Balwin Community League, this fall marks the continuation — not the culmination — of an ever-growing civic body of artistic expression.

The seeds of the collection were planted in the late 1950s, but they didn't start sprouting until the City's first Public Art Policy in 1991, which was later brought into the work of Edmonton Arts Council (EAC) and its mission to help artists flourish. AJA Louden, the artist behind the Balwin project, has worked with the EAC for years now. But unlike many local budding artists, Louden — whose first exposure to public art was graffiti-laden trains rolling through his various small Alberta hometowns — didn't even know of the EAC in his early years.

"My background is in graffiti and street art, so I got arrested a bunch and dealt with all that," he says. "And then I started working as a commercial artist with small businesses on a commission basis. I had no idea you could get funded through the EAC."

He finally encountered the EAC's projects in the 2000s, when it first reached out to his street-art community by providing a City-sanctioned "free wall" on which artists like Louden could legally work, through the Open Source Street Art pilot program. Louden says the project "was an important moment for me, because it kind of legitimized what I was already doing. And not just with my own street art — I was also reaching out to schools and teaching students about the history of graffiti. So I could tell parents that, yes, I'm gonna teach your kids about graffiti, but they won't get in trouble after."

Artist Michelle Campos Castillo, who grew up on the northside and played in Balwin parks, was one of three jurors who each brought three or four names of other artists to this project's roughly six-hour deliberations. Castillo says she included Louden in her group because "he has this super playful side to him. I feel like he's been pigeonholed as the graffiti guy, and I just really believe he could step into this role of public art."

Kristine Nutting knows the role of public art well, especially in Balwin, through her work over the last two years as a northeast neighbourhood resource coordinator for the City. For nearly a decade, she's worked to animate spaces and help marginalized groups access grants and resources to create better spaces for everyone.

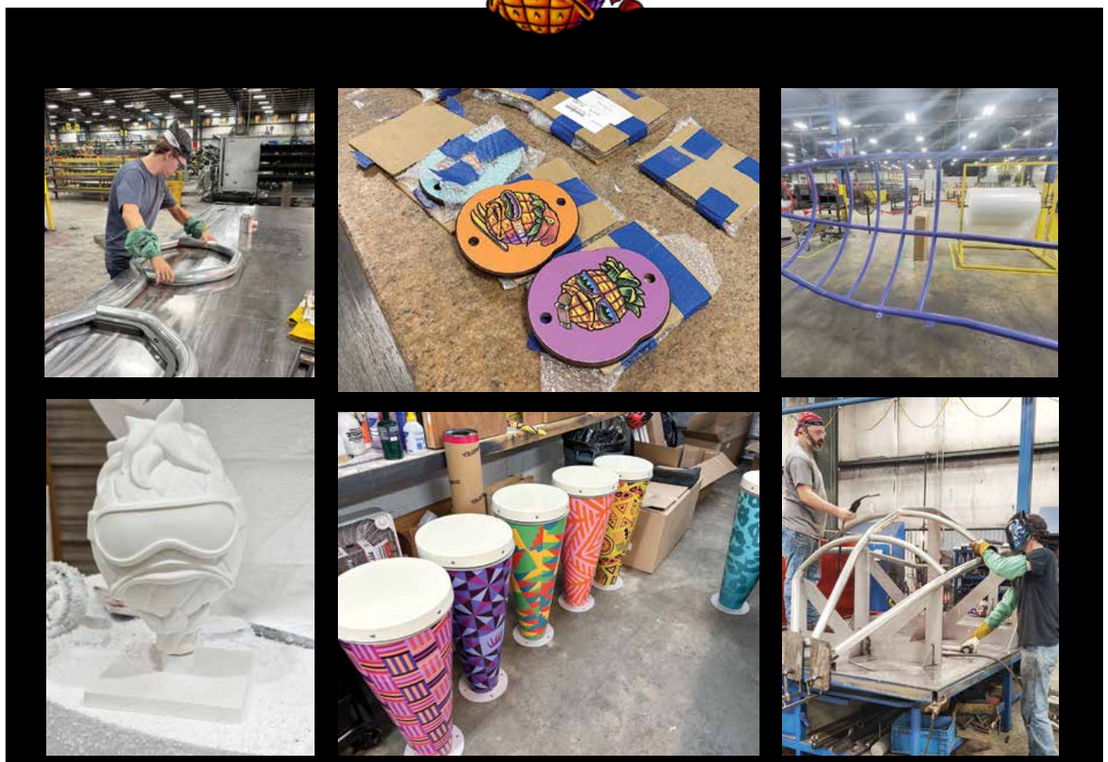
Nutting considers Balwin an interesting case. The neighbourhood, which has been part of Edmonton since 1912, has a mix of old bungalows and more recent community and social program housing, with generations of new and old Edmontonians filling both. Go back 40 years, Nutting says, and Balwin was populated by families, many of whom stayed and passed their properties onto their kids. Those kids then felt compelled to sustain their parks and community league.

Over the decades, more newcomer Canadians have made Balwin their home, and become involved in the community.

"One of the young gentlemen that I work with, Ahmed — his grandparents lived in Balwin, so he spent a lot of time there as a kid. Now he is doing community work in Balwin, particularly with Muslim newcomer Canadians. Another guy, Dale — his parents lived in Balwin, and he took over their house. Now he's running different seniors' programs out of the league to engage these beautiful seniors from different countries in Africa, saying, 'I want to get to know these folks in my neighbourhood!'"

Wanting to extend the Balwin welcome to newcomer kids, the EAC asked residents what they'd want a rebuilt community league park to be. Council then combined that feedback with demographic data and passed it all onto Louden, who also discussed his vision for the first-of-its-kind project with local kids. The fertile Balwin ground inspired a question in Louden's mind: What if playgrounds grew from seeds?

"I had this vision of a futuristic playground, where this giant seed came from the future, landed in Balwin, and slowly started to grow," Louden says. The seed, which sits near the centre of the kidney-shaped park, has cracked open and emerged above the rest of the playground it spawned. "It doesn't look like something that kids would see at any other playground, so I hope it sets off their imaginations a little bit, and it's not just a physical thing they play on."



Behind the scenes, building Balwin Park

PINEY P, CREATED BY AJA LOUDEN

With plenty of pink, purple, turquoise and green, the park's palette could've come from a kids' cereal box — mascot included. According to Louden lore, it turns out that Piney P — the pineapple cartoon character Louden's hidden in many of his works — actually arrived within the futuristic seed that spawned the Balwin park art exhibit and playground.

But as the son of a Jamaican father growing up in small-town Alberta, Louden knows what it's like to hear "Where are you *really* from?" in your own neighbourhood. So along with Piney P sitting atop the sprouted seed, kids will find patterns and colours inspired by African and Caribbean textiles throughout the park as "subtle touches of home."

Other elements … aren't so subtle.

"My heritage is Jamaican, but we came to Jamaica via Western Africa. Many African and Caribbean cultures use the drum as a culturally important instrument, and many Indigenous peoples do too. So I created this circle of drums in the playground for kids to play on," Louden says, adding that surrounding foliage acts as natural sound baffling, "so the sounds shouldn't travel too far."

After nearly a decade working in community development in the northeast, the neighbourhood's resource coordinator knows how much music this community can make. "For many community members, no matter how long they've been here, life has been tough," Nutting says. "They deserve to gather together to rest and play — and they deserve art."

CITY OF (ART) CHAMPIONS

CAROUSEL, NICOLE GALELLIS, BORDEN PARK

FROM A SMALL NON-PROFIT TO AN INFLUENTIAL ORGANIZATION, EDMONTON ARTS COUNCIL HAS TRANSFORMED THE CITY

by **JOSEPH CAOUETTE**

IT SOUNDS OBVIOUS NOW, but involving artists in decision making about arts funding wasn't a given when the Edmonton Arts Council (EAC) was founded in 1995.

At the time, Edmonton's Department of Parks and Recreation was responsible for awarding grants to the city's arts organizations. This unusual state of affairs meant that dance troupes and theatre companies were jostling for funding alongside community rec leagues and multicultural societies — and individuals with little direct knowledge of the arts were often deciding who would receive those funds.

ENTER THE EAC. People with experience working in the arts, including many artists themselves, formed the backbone of the council and ensured it was responsive to the unique challenges and needs of Edmonton's arts organizations. Josh Keller, the first executive director of the EAC from 1995 to 1997, describes the council's founding as "a coming-out party for the arts community."

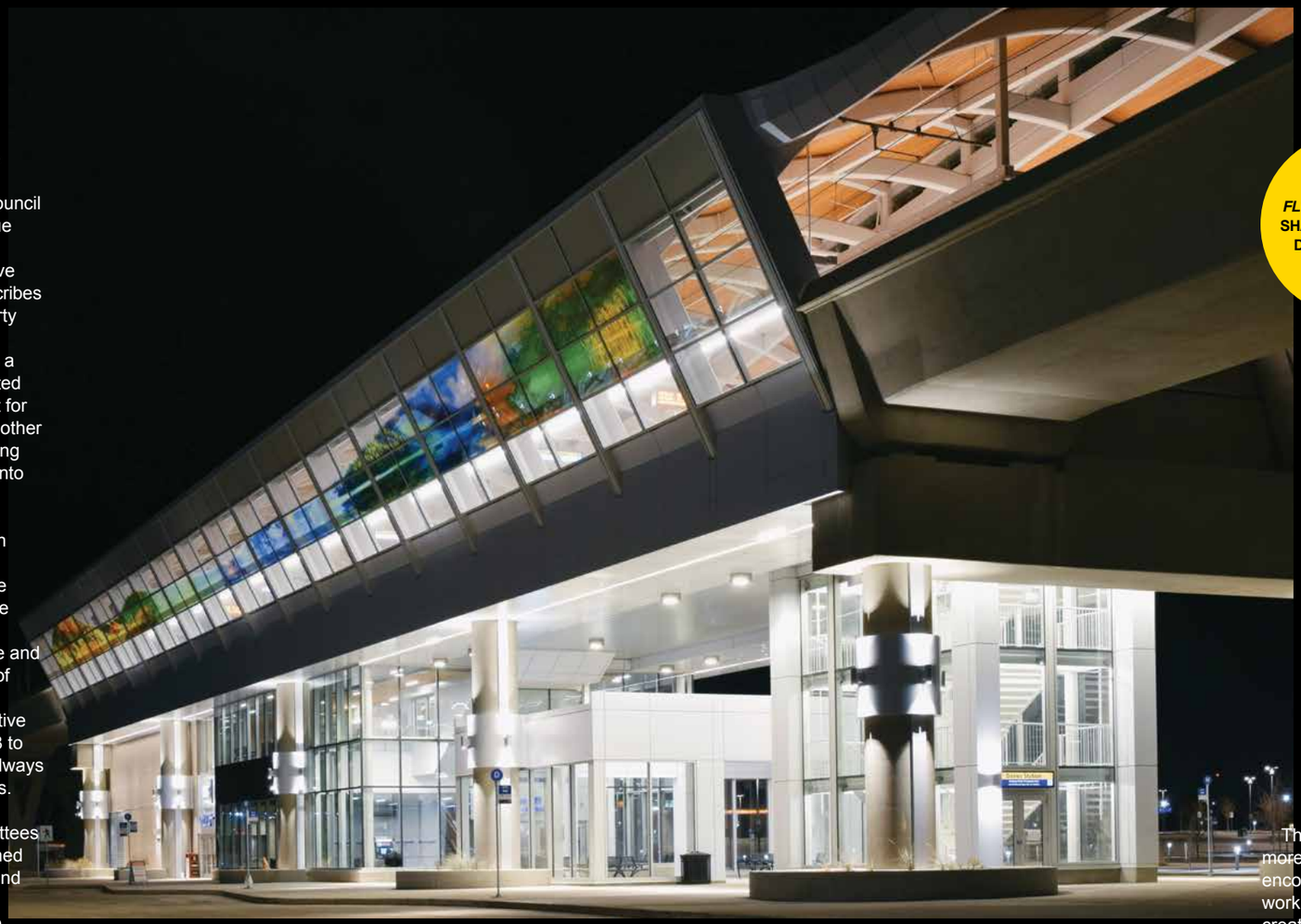
He remembers the EAC's early years as a whirlwind of activity. The organization created TIX on the Square to provide a ticket outlet for the city's burgeoning array of festivals and other arts events. ArtsHab was established to bring more living and working spaces for artists into downtown Edmonton. Multiple awareness campaigns highlighted the wealth of artists in the city while building the EAC's profile in the community.

"All the conditions for success were there — the support of city council, the supportive attitude towards the arts and a strong arts community that just needed more exposure and funding," Keller says. "It was just a matter of pulling them all together."

John Mahon succeeded Keller as executive director and led the organization from 1998 to 2013. He notes that EAC's mandate was always broader than simply making grant decisions. For instance, it advised city council on arts policy, added an arts perspective to committees and helped to define how the city approached decisions on commissioning, maintaining and decommissioning public art.

Paul Moulton took the reins as executive director from 2013 to 2015. During his time at the EAC, he saw first-hand how Edmonton's attitude toward public art has changed since the EAC's inception. Moulton points to the reception of Alex Janvier's *Iron Foot Place*, a 45-foot circular mosaic at Rogers Place.

"WE'RE REALLY LOOKING BEYOND OURSELVES TO MAKE SURE THAT WE'RE CONSIDERING ALL PARTS OF THE COMMUNITY THAT WE SERVE AND LIVE IN." - RENÉE WILLIAMS



***FLUID LANDSCAPE*, SHAN SHAN SHENG, DAVIES STATION**

The renowned Indigenous artist was commissioned by the EAC to provide a signature piece for the entry to the city's new arena. Moulton recalls Janvier being in attendance at an Edmonton Oilers game when a video segment on the creation of the piece was played during intermission.

"It got shown on the scoreboard at the hockey game, and Alex got a standing ovation from the hockey crowd," he says. "That was a case where public art engaged with the community."

Following Moulton's tenure, Sanjay Shahani served as executive director from 2016 to 2024. He presided over a period of remarkable evolution for the organization, with the EAC launching its current 10-year cultural plan, *Connections & Exchanges*, in 2019. The plan focuses on "embedding the arts in people's lives in a way that they haven't experienced before," he explains.

photos (previous page) Doyle C Marko Photography ; Dane Ryksen

Connections & Exchanges has served to guide the organization's growth in recent years. When Renée Williams became the EAC's latest executive director in 2024, she joined a much larger organization than the one founded back in 1995. EAC's staff has expanded from three to over 40 individuals. Its original funding allotment of around $1 million has grown closer to $20 million.

The EAC is now focused on supporting more diversity in the local arts community and encompassing Indigenous perspectives into its work, building on previous successes like the creation of the city's first Indigenous art park in 2018. Upcoming partnerships with social service organizations like iHuman and Boyle Street Community Services offer further opportunities for the council to grow and tap into equity-deserving communities.

"We're really looking beyond ourselves to make sure that we're considering all parts of the community that we serve and live in," Williams says.

Collaboration with other organizations will be key to the future of the EAC, she adds. Through new partnerships, the council hopes to create more opportunities for Edmonton artists — and guarantee a vibrant, thriving arts community in the city for years to come.

ART FOR ALL

EDMONTON'S UNIQUE COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC ART

by David Berry

Things I Knew to be True, Peter Von Tiesenhausen, Stanley A. Milner Library

photo Laughing Dog Photography

***The Migrants*,**
Lionel A. J.
Thomas,
City Hall

IF YOU WERE TRYING TO SUM UP SOMETHING ABOUT THE SPIRIT OF EDMONTON IN 1957,

Lionel A. J. Thomas's abstract bronze sculpture *The Migrants*, would be a strong contender. Commissioned for the opening of Edmonton's then-new city hall, it depicts — in decidedly non-literal but hardly non-figurative terms — nine Canadian geese in states of both flight and attention, with a vibrant and dynamic energy. To Thomas, the sculpture was meant to symbolize Edmonton as a home for people from around the world, while also alluding to its place as the gateway to Canada's north — especially its then very potent and pervasive status as an aviation hub.

The Migrants proved meaningful in unintended ways as well. Perhaps befitting a city that has never been entirely comfortable settling on a meaning, the optimistic dynamism of Thomas's sculpture was somewhat lost on the citizenry. After its unveiling, *The Migrants* was roundly mocked, decried as a waste of public resources; one local radio station commissioned a song about it, 'The Spaghetti Tree', that has stuck as a nickname for the statue to this day. Equally befitting a city that has always been more open-minded and thoughtful than initial impressions might suggest, the mockery isn't the end of the story. When the time came, 30 years later, to start planning for a new city hall, the suggestion that *The Migrants* be removed was met with outrage. The statue, one of the oldest pieces in the city's public art collection, now sits proudly in its own courtyard on the west end of city hall, offering its interpretation of Edmonton to anyone passing through the main atrium on their way to council chambers.

Edmonton's public art has always been about more than decorating our city. It is, in often *literally* concrete terms, about how we as a city see ourselves: what we value, where we place our attention, what we want out of our public spaces and what we want to be. By the same token, the way we go about creating, managing and proliferating these pieces tells a story not only about the city, but about the importance we place on this understanding, on figuring out what we mean, as much as where we are. At the time of *The Migrants*, and in the decades that followed, public art was a space of specific commission, haphazard gifts and occasional whims; nearly 80 years later, Edmonton has one of the most robust, unique and progressive public art collections and processes in North America.

***Vaulted Willow*,**
Marc Fornes &
THEVERYMANY,
Borden Park

photo supplied by EAC; Doyle C Marko Photography

The seed of this more focused approach to public art was planted in 1991, when the city adopted the Percent for Art policy. The idea was to make public art less of an afterthought by directing one per cent of the budget of all city capital projects towards the creation of some lasting piece, effectively embedding art into everything the city was building.

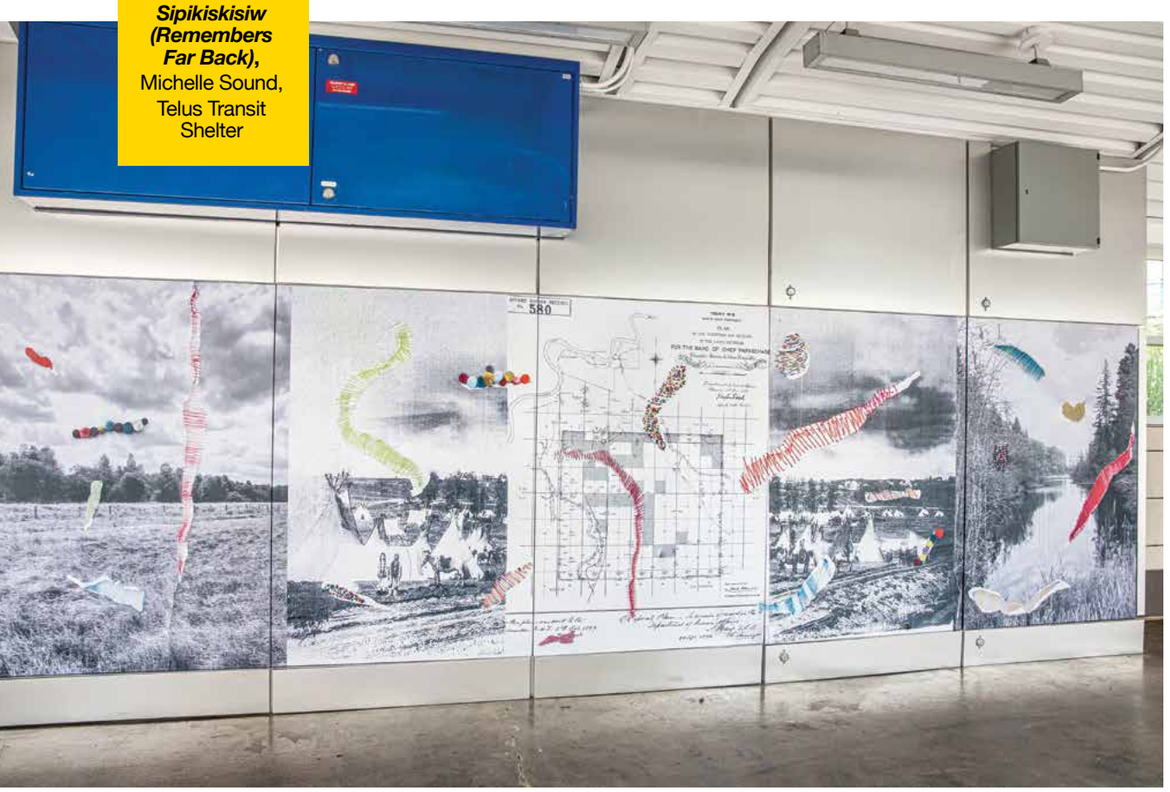
That was, at least, the idealistic vision council adopted. In practice, though, some of the city's less enthusiastic elements were quite happy to keep art as an afterthought. Carol Belanger, currently the city architect but in the early 2000s a project architect whose job it was to identify and support projects that qualified for Percent for Art, recalls more than one argument about how much of a project even qualified as public, in the hopes of making that mandated percentage as small as possible.

"They were really trying to calculate the minimum they could pay for art," recalls Belanger. "They would say, 'Well, it's a fire hall, but the public is really only going to see the entrance and the foyer, so that's all that should count.' They didn't think eco-stations should apply at all, because they were behind fences." Beyond these battles for basic legitimacy, the city needed help commissioning the art.

Enter the Edmonton Arts Council (EAC). Established in 1995 as an arm's-length not-for-profit to advise on arts policy and manage grants, it didn't take long for the city to turn to them for help figuring out the finer points of Percent for Art.

John Mahon, who would go on to run EAC for a decade and a half, was a grants officer when the city approached EAC in the early 2000s with the idea of running the art commission process for the LRT stations at Belvedere and Clareview.

"We said, 'Sure,'" Mahon recalls, though at the time they had a small staff with no particular experience in running arts competitions. "That was our inclination in those days, to always say sure, and then try and figure out how to do it."



Sipikiskisiw (Remembers Far Back), Michelle Sound, Telus Transit Shelter

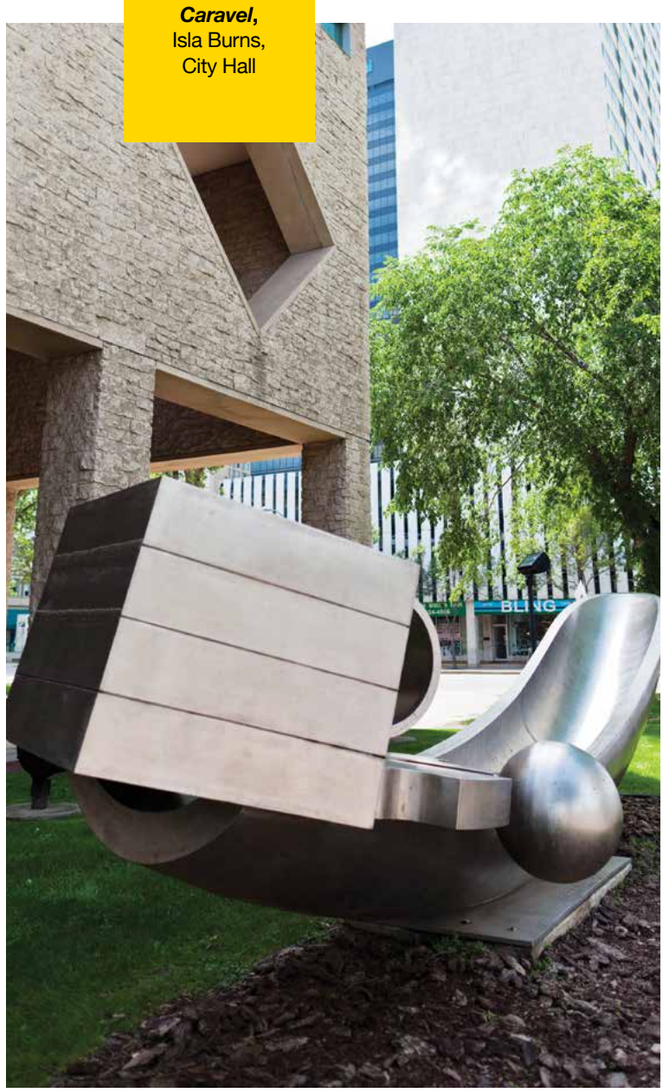
What they lacked in direct experience, though, they more than made up for in connections to the arts community in the city, across the country and abroad. EAC also benefited from an already established reputation for being passionate advocates that both city council and the public could count on. "I'm sure some of it was council wanting someone to point to if things went wrong," Mahon says with a knowing smile, "but they were always impressed by the rigour we brought to the process, and we were always willing to show up for the arts."

Political and technical practicalities aren't always the sorts of things we tend to think about when it comes to art, but as Mahon explains, they are exactly the sorts of things you need to master to give art the space it needs to provide something more. "I tend to agree with the belief that the city is essentially three things: it's safety, it's a market and it's sacred space," he explains. "That sacred space is what we're in the business of building, because without it, a city is just, 'Well, are the buses running on time?'"

Few in the Edmonton arts community are as aware of this balance of practicality and the sacred as David Turnbull, EAC's director of public art. He was originally hired as the city's first conservator of public art in 2009, shortly after EAC codified its vision of how to commission and manage its growing public art collection. That job was often brutally practical — the realities of keeping things looking the way they're supposed to in a climate that could not be further from a controlled gallery. But the job gave Turnbull a unique perspective on figuring out what artists cared about as he helped them create and care for pieces that can withstand both Edmonton and Edmontonians.

He put this knowledge into practice when he took over the full portfolio in 2018. Spearheading a survey of the works and artists that made up the collection, he has helped drive a process that is seeking to make sure Edmontonians of all backgrounds, and from all parts of the city, see themselves reflected in the public art around them. That has meant everything from balancing the number and kind of commissions local artists get to

photos (left to right) Arsan Buffin; Doyle C Marko Photography; supplied by EAC; Doyle C Marko Photography



Caravel, Isla Burns, City Hall

The Magpies' Nests, Kevin Sehn & Chai Duncan, Rossdale Linear Park

Platanos (Plantains), Michelle Campos Castillo, Belvedere LRT Station

balancing out the collection's historic bias towards predominantly white, male artists to shifting the city away from the Percent for Art policy, keeping the funding commitments but now allowing it to be spread around the city, as opposed to being tied to specific projects.

"I think we have a responsibility, and a desire, to create a collection that is accessible for people," Turnbull explains. "Part of that means we want people to see themselves reflected in the collection … but also that means we want art to be in every part of the city, and to speak to every part of the city."

This desire has changed not just the city policy but how EAC commissions artists, giving them more time and space to interact with the communities they are going to be creating art for, tying them less to specific proposals than to ways of thinking about and making the final works.

"I think the goal is for everyone to understand that this is a partnership," says Turnbull, "and to find ways that will spark everyone's interest — the artists in the community, the community in the arts or even people interacting with newer works to go explore the collection."

Though it will take some time for the full effects of these changes to be felt, the overall stewardship of EAC has already paid dividends. Though reactions like those that greeted *The Migrants* are still to be expected now and then, the burden of speaking for the city doesn't have to fall to any one particular piece. Spread across the city, reflecting the mosaic of influences, perspectives and ideas that make up our collective psyche, what comes across most is our desire to continually figure ourselves out, to create the time, space and art that we need to give ourselves not just sacred spaces, but some sacred time to reflect on ourselves.

Or, as Belanger — who has the opportunity to think about art and design much more holistically and practically in his current role — puts it, the city's public art portfolio is something like "a mutual fund of art — just because you don't like one thing doesn't mean there isn't something in there that will work for you."

CREATIVE RISK

Cheyenne Rain LeGrande's daring work honours her roots

by **BREANNA MROCZEK**

photo Carol Hallak

Deeply rooted in the land and her identity as a member of Bigstone Cree Nation, Cheyenne Rain LeGrande's multi-disciplinary work reflects a commitment to healing, storytelling and connection. Her work integrates performance art, video, sound and wearable sculpture. A standout performance piece, *Mullyanne Nîmito*, translates Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams" into Cree, pairing it with evocative visuals like a ribbon-woven shawl made of pop can tabs and platform moccasin shoes. "It was inspired by a traditional powwow dance called the fancy shawl," LeGrande explains, "but I wanted to use what I come across today and nod to the future, and it's also a way to reuse and recycle."

After studying at MacEwan University in *amiskwaciy-wâskahikan*/Edmonton, LeGrande moved to Vancouver to attend Emily Carr University of Art + Design. During the pandemic, LeGrande returned home where she found grounding in community and a renewed purpose. "(Edmonton) felt very welcoming, and there was a lot of comfort coming back home and knowing that I had that support," says LeGrande. Through a number of grants from the Edmonton Arts Council (EAC), including the Edmonton Artists' Trust Fund award, LeGrande's dream of being a professional artist became a tangible reality.

The financial stability provided by EAC gives LeGrande the ability to experiment, evolve and take creative risks — including a piece of public art that will be unveiled when Hawrelak Park reopens in 2026. LeGrande credits the EAC for not just sustaining her practice, but expanding its possibilities. "I think Edmonton is really supportive to their artists, in comparison to other cities." LeGrande says the goal of the piece is to bring "joy and love" to Edmonton and, like a lot of her work, celebrate Indigenous aesthetics and beadwork while embracing the past, present and future.

LeGrande hasn't just built a career — she's created a platform to share *nēhiyawēwin,* honour the land and inspire others through thoughtful, boundary-pushing art that's as expansive and layered as her own journey. "As an Indigenous artist, having support for my work has been huge for my career and I've already been able to achieve so much," LeGrande says. "I'm in the unique position of being in a place and a generation of healing and being able to express our stories through art. I feel really thankful and lucky to get to do that."

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Photo of EAC Festival in a Box Parade by Levi Manchak