

NEWS RELEASE

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New artwork called 'One Song Staircase' for downtown Nanaimo

Humanity in Art collaborates with poet Tina Biello

Commissioned by the City of Nanaimo, artist team Lys Glassford and Lauren Semple of Humanity in Art have collaborated with poet Tina Biello to create a new artwork for downtown Nanaimo, called 'One Song Staircase.' Painting is underway and will be completed in the first few days of July.

Humanity in Art are known for painting and facilitating mural projects locally, and for their interest in urban rehabilitation. They were invited by the City of Nanaimo in early 2020 to create a small-scale artistic intervention into public space downtown. Reflecting on their core purpose as artists, and on the new reality of the COVID-19 health emergency and community efforts to flatten the curve, Glassford and Semple developed a relevant, vibrant new art project that responds to our current moment.

The staircase between Wharf Street and the rear of Diana Krall Plaza was identified by Humanity in Art as an ideal location for their attention; they describe it as an "unloved and under-utilized urban space located in the heart of Nanaimo's Arts District." The site itself is a place of transition and connection—Glassford and Semple point to the fact their work will be nestled between the plaza and The Port Theatre, and the Nanaimo Centre for the Arts building where organizations including Nanaimo Art Gallery, Crimson Coast Dance, and Vancouver Island Symphony have their home base.

Glassford and Semple invited Tina Biello, who served as Nanaimo's Poet Laureate from 2017 to 2020, to create a new poem as the basis for their artwork. Called 'One Song,' Biello's poem opens with the words "our mother / sent us all for a time out / stay home, be still." Glassford and Semple say the poem "perfectly expresses the interconnectedness that exists and grows in the spaces created by our community's distance during the pandemic."

Humanity in Art translates Biello's poem into space; soundwaves from an audio recording of Semple reading the poem aloud are featured as part of the design. Abstract shapes, line and colour are playfully introduced on and around the stairway in a way that evokes movement, sound, and the idea of travelling through space and time in parallel.

"Artistic interventions like 'One Song Staircase,' help us see and experience familiar spaces with new eyes and a fresh perspective," says Julie Bevan, Manager of Culture & Events, "this responsive, collaborative project gives physical presence and acknowledgement to what we've collectively been experiencing in different ways over the last months. Lauren and Lys approached this work with a lot of thoughtfulness and heart."

The artwork is intended to remain in place for the year. Images of the work and the process of installation will be shared via the City of Nanaimo's @Culture_Nanaimo Instagram channel.

ARTIST BIO: Nanaimo based street artists, Humanity in Art (Lys Glassford and Lauren Semple), have been rehabilitating the blank walls of the central island for the past several years, driven by their passion for big art, urban rehabilitation, and community. In 2018, Humanity in Community, the foundation created by Glassford and Semple, tackled the vacant A&B Sound building and transformed it into an Urban Art Gallery. They received special recognition from the City of Nanaimo at the 2019 Culture and Heritage Awards for that project. In summer 2020, Humanity in Community will launch Hub City Walls, commissioning three local artists to create murals for City-owned walls downtown.

Continued... New artwork called 'One Song Staircase' for downtown Nanaimo

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