

BY ROBIN LAURENCE

On this hot August morning, five months after the 2010 Winter Games have left town, Olympic Plaza is a lively place. At one end of the public square, located at the corner of Manitoba Street and Athletes Way, bicyclists in racing stripes psych up for a hard ride. At the other end, in front of the Creekside Community Recreation Centre, a TV crew shifts equipment as the coffee wagon arrives. In between, tourists amble around the plaza, all of them—truly, all of them—stopping to pose for photos in front of Myfanwy MacLeod's outrageous public artwork, *The Birds*.

Each of its two sculptures, naturalistically proportioned but ominously enlarged depictions of male and female English sparrows, stands 5.5 metres high, about the size of a perching pterodactyl—a really cute pterodactyl. Constructed out of painted polystyrene over steel frames, the sculptures startle, amuse, then confound. The effect of their scale, ultimately, is to make us think about the huge consequences of introducing a foreign species into a delicately balanced ecosystem. Launched in late May, the work was commissioned as part of the City of Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Public Art Program, and speaks to the sustainability theme of the Olympic Village development.

English sparrows, along with starlings and domestic pigeons, are among the drab but clamorous aliens that have proliferated and prospered in this place at



Myfanwy MacLeod's *The Birds* monumentalizes the sparrow in one of the more prominent examples of public art that's in town long after the Olympics.

The unsung art after the Games

Tourists still gawk at Olympic Plaza's jumbo sparrows, but other works commissioned for the event remain largely undiscovered

the expense of indigenous species. But who, besides the quirkily conceptual MacLeod, would think to monumentalize them while riffing, too, on Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 cult horror movie, *The Birds*?

MacLeod's sculptures are among the more assertive reminders of the various public-art projects associated with the 2010 Winter Games. Still, not all the art created in conjunction with the Olympics was permanent. Neither is the visual-arts legacy of the games entirely monumental—or in any other way conspicuous. Some of it, in fact, is modest and understated, tucked away in unexpected places, awaiting discovery.

Silent Song, a wall-mounted sculpture by local artists Ruth Beer and Charlotte Wall, occupies a small chapel in Christ Church Cathedral in downtown Vancouver. Created with assistance from Emily Carr University of Art and Design students, it is composed of retired wooden organ parts, left over from the church's recent restoration and refurbishment. The work was commissioned by the cathedral to coincide with the Winter Games and to enhance a space set aside for peaceful contemplation. Since then, it's taken on a more permanent presence.

The soaring verticals of the sculpture's components, along with deft touches of gold leaf, speak to ecclesiastic music and architecture without being

public, including the wide audiences for the musical performances that take place in the cathedral. "*Silent Song* is intended to evoke remembered or imagined sounds," says cross-disciplinary artist Beer, in a telephone interview with the *Straight*. "We see it as a metaphor for many diverse individual voices joined together in musical patterns."

The source of Fiona Bowie's *Surface* is also hidden away: it's a live video feed from two submerged cameras, attached to the hull of one of the little Aquabuses that carry foot passengers across False Creek. "I want to bring what is below and out of sight into view," Bowie says by phone. Live footage of underwater life, including herring, eels, and crustaceans, can be viewed on a TV monitor mounted inside the boat, on large and small screens on Granville Island, and on-line at www.surface.ca. "False Creek has definitely been hit by industrialization for over 100 years," Bowie explains. It's slowly starting to come back to life, she adds, but is in a vulnerable state. "What we see down there is a reflection of where our oceans are, globally." From its curious perspective within that murky and often unrevealing body of water, *Surface* encourages us to connect with a commitment to stewardship.

Landon Mackenzie's *Vancouver as the Centre of the World* is a big, gorgeous, ambitious painting,

singularly faith-based. Both the space and the artwork appeal to a multid denominational inspired by the Winter Games, shaped by a formidable visual intelligence, and thrumming with life. Temporarily housed—unsold and uncollected—in a second-floor hallway at Emily Carr University, the multilayered work, expressively depicts an oval-shaped, raspberry-coloured globe floating on a striped ground of dislocated time zones. Alluding to many different forms of historic and contemporary map-making, it focuses us on the geopolitical forces that shape our vision of the world.

"It's about the creation of a complex fiction," Mackenzie recounted in a recent studio conversation with the *Straight*. Oceans and land forms shift and merge, national boundaries are erased, and cities like Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, and Timbuktu seem to rotate around our hometown. During the first few months of 2010, reproductions of *Vancouver as the Centre of the World* were displayed at the Canada Line's Oakridge Station and on ceiling panels in some of its train cars. Mackenzie had hoped that Cultural Olympiad organizers would also print it on the back of transit maps, for Canada Line travelers to take with them. This didn't happen. "Giving the map to the public was paramount," she insists. Exasperated, she published 10,000 of them herself—and is still distributing them at public events.

In the meantime, visitors continue to saunter in the sunlight of Olympic Plaza, smiling into cameras, puzzling over huge sculptures of small birds, and remembering a time when Vancouver was, indeed, the centre of the world. ♦

ARTS NOTES >>>

FORMER ARTS COUNCIL CHAIR SPEAKS OUT The former chair of the B.C. Arts Council has slammed the provincial government for cuts that are hobbling arts groups. She is also speaking out about the Liberals' lack of support for the council.

Jane Danzo, who left her post on August 11, said she resigned from the position she held for a year to protest the government's lack of consultation with the B.C. Arts Council and its slashing of core funding.

"It was a very difficult decision, but I thought I could probably effect more change by stepping down than I could by staying," Danzo, past president of Pacific Opera Victoria, told the *Straight*. "The main factor was that the council was challenged in what it was mandated to do."

In her letter of resignation to Kevin Krueger, the minister of tourism, culture, and the arts, Danzo criticized the government's refusal to take the recommendation of the legislature committee on finance and government services in November 2009

the B.C. Arts Council when it established a new \$10 million Arts Legacy Fund. Her letter states: "Even after the announcement, the Board was not consulted for input, nor was it permitted to know the details as they were developed by ministry staff over a four-month period. Meanwhile, the arts community struggled, some members with life-threatening uncertainty, as they reduced their programming, laid off staff, and made poignant appeals to patrons and donors for further support."

When asked what she thought of the new B.C. Spirit Festivals, which the government has set up with \$3 million from the legacy fund, Danzo said: "I can see that the government would want to celebrate the success of the Cultural Olympiad—we all enjoyed it—but a lot of that talent was made possible through arts funding and through the organizations that allow people to show their art. So if I was going to consider something as a legacy, I would rather see a large portion of that go to the core funding in

Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, not to mention the Canada Council for the Arts, all have more independence and can better advocate for the arts.

Meanwhile, some local groups are reeling from the cuts they've just received in this year's first round of grant allocations. B.C. Arts Council acting executive director Gillian Wood confirmed to the *Straight* that the peer-review advisory committee decided to prioritize arts organizations for funding rather than make even cuts across the board.

The result is that some groups are being hit harder than others. Among the badly cut is the Vancouver Chamber Choir, which was shocked to see its provincial funding reduced by 75 percent—from \$70,000 to \$17,500—just as it's embarking on its 2010-11 season. It's akin to being "sucker-punched," said exasperated general manager Violet Goosen.

"Fifty-two thousand is more than any of us make on salary here, and

even as my season is opening."

Goosen, who has managed the choir for 21 years, added: "I've dealt with every government that's ever governed in this province, and I've never experienced anything like this. In the '80s, we were in a recession and we all got cuts, but nowhere near what these have been."

As for the \$3 million in funding for new Spirit Festivals projects and other Arts Legacy promises that recently came down from the government, Goosen says there isn't enough clarity on specific amounts that might be handed out.

Goosen is questioning the decision of the peer-review committee in ranking groups. "I would be interested to know what criteria they used, because the jury comments we received were all very positive," she said.

Sandy Garossino, chair of the advocacy committee at the Alliance for Arts and Culture, said that although her organization supports the B.C. Arts Council in prin-

one-thousandth of the [provincial] budget," she said.

> JANET SMITH

VENUE UNDER PRESSURE

Main Street's volunteer-run Little Mountain Gallery has taken steps toward becoming "legitimate" after facing scrutiny from the city over its use as a live-music venue.

Gallery spokesperson Ehren Salazar said a city inspector visited the multi-use arts space in late July following a neighbour's complaint.

Salazar said the gallery is zoned "art retail" but has regularly hosted all-ages concerts, even though the events do not fit its zoning. Since the inspector's visit, which sparked fears of closure, gallery representatives have met with city officials to discuss how they can "legitimize the space."

Little Mountain is eyeing city cultural funding, upgrades, and rezoning. "They need to know that we're working to be legitimate instead of being an underground space," Salazar explained.