



RC Harris: Artwork: "Día de los Muertos" by Emma Lopez and Pedro Narvaez, with OCAD student collaborators: Mohammed Abdullah, Rebecca Van Fraassen, Simone Northey, Peter Rahul, and Gabriel Masewich. Photo Credit to Alan Ye

BigArtTO Case Study

Projected art reengages Toronto in the wake of Covid-19



CHALLENGE

In response to the economic and cultural impacts of COVID-19, the City of Toronto launched a multi-initiative campaign to drive economic and civic development while boosting civic pride. One such initiative, BigArtTO, aims to bring temporary art installations to all 25 wards of the city between September 16, 2020 and January, 2021. To achieve this goal, the city needed lightweight, zero maintenance projectors that could be easily installed at two to three locations across the city per week while still having the power and brightness to compete with ambient city lights at throw distances up to 200 feet at some locations.

SOLUTION

The city opted to use Panasonic's high-brightness laser projectors, through its partnership program for cultural institutes, to bring these works of art to life and transform city landmarks into canvases for art. These projectors can produce images at a brightness that cuts through the ambient city lights while requiring minimal installation once on site. They are also lightweight enough to accommodate the portability needs of the project.

RESULT

The ability of these high-brightness laser projectors to meet the specific needs for displaying this artwork has provided the city with the opportunity to meet its broader goals of the BigArtTO initiative and those of its parent program, ShowLoveTO. The program has provided paid opportunities for local creators, with a focus on BIPOC artists. It has also created a welcoming environment for Torontonians as they transition to post-lockdown life and engage with local businesses and restaurants as a part of the city's economic recovery.

From economic and cultural to emotional and psychological impacts, Covid-19 has had major ramifications on communities across the globe. To address these impacts, the City of Toronto launched ShowLoveTO, a multi-initiative campaign with a mandate to strengthen civic pride and engagement throughout the city. The initiatives aim to invite Torontonians back to their city after the extended period of isolation to help drive economic and cultural development as the city rebuilds.

One such initiative, BigArtTO, is a city-wide temporary public art campaign to help residents feel comfortable exploring their neighborhoods again and to inspire hope through art and creativity. The program is part of a hyperlocal initiative that will reach all 25 wards of Toronto while still meeting every health and safety guideline to ensure citizens' welfare. BigArtTO also provides paid opportunities to local artists, with a specific focus on providing positive impacts for Indigenous, Black and equity-seeking groups in Toronto through ease of access, engagement, respectful inclusion and community participation.

"Toronto's new, shared reality will be defined by a hyperlocal focus, as travel, tourism and supply chains all draw inward," said Joe Sellors, Project Lead, City of Toronto. "There is an opportunity to welcome Torontonians back to their reopening city in ways that can strengthen the bonds between them and also drive cultural and economic development across the entire city."

The program is comprised of 25 sites, one in each ward, to promote access to artwork across the entire city, without residents having to leave their local area. Each site will have a neighborhood-specific customized artwork, created by Toronto artists, that will be digitally projected onto a local building or landmark. This program will run from September 16th, 2020 - January 2021, with each week featuring two or three locations. Each projection will play for three to four hours, Wednesday through Saturday. At the conclusion of the program, these events will have provided over 200 hours of free, temporary public art.

Equity Impact

The BigArtTO program is committed to creating space and opportunities for communities most impacted by the economic effects of Covid-19. In terms of selecting artists, the city is partnering with OCAD University and a diverse working group to find creative content for each site, with an emphasis on Black, Indigenous, and equity-seeking artists. Artists are often amongst the most precariously employed and suffered many cancellations due to Covid-19. In response to these needs, the program is providing paid opportunities for Toronto-based artists and industry workers as a part of the city's economic recovery initiatives.



Earl Bales Community Centre: Artwork: "Snow Scene Social" by Lily Yunru Lu Photo credit to Vladimir Kanic

Identifying needs

As the team began looking for solutions that could be mobilized to display art throughout the city, they first recognized they needed the ability to quickly and quietly install and remove the displays. Given the current health crisis, it was important to minimize the amount of crew needed to execute the project, but they also needed the installations to be ready with only 45 minutes of time on site.

"We realized that we would not be able to set up equipment the traditional way with scaffolding and shelter for a typical outdoor installation," said Stefan Lenzi, Production Supervisor, BigArtTO, City of Toronto. "Researching the available options, we needed equipment with high impact, easily handled by two to three crew members, as well as low power requirements."



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Katriina Campitelli
Arts Program Officer,
City of Toronto

Big ideas, fitting solutions

The city ultimately decided to utilize projectors to display the art in outdoor public spaces – a modern approach that offered the scope they needed to provide gatherers with an engrossing experience while maintaining social-distancing guidelines. With throw distances ranging from 50 to 200 feet, the city needed projectors that could cast images bright enough to compete with the ambient city lights of these populated space without drawing too much power.

After exploring options that met these requirements, the city decided to utilize Panasonic's high-brightness laser projection solutions – and its experience in projection mapping and art-related projects – to bring these sites to life. The Panasonic team also offered technical support and expertise so the city could focus on making these sites as fluid and engaging for visitors as possible.

"With the [Panasonic] projectors, we don't have to unload them from the back of the cube truck being used for transport," Lenzi said. "Everything is contained and protected from the elements, and we have enough room to place up to four projectors at one site for blending."

Competing with city lights - and winning

The City of Toronto has found that these projectors produce unparalleled high contrast and clear visuals for such low-resource projectors, particularly considering the throw distances and the significant amount of ambient light around the sites. The lightweight and minimal installation requirements of the projectors allow the program to visit two to three sites per week to meet their mandate of bringing an installation to each of the 25 wards in the city.

"The results have been outstanding," Katriina Campitelli, Arts Program Officer, City of Toronto said. "The images cut through, and we are really happy with the results. We hope to be able to partner again with Panasonic in the new year as we look at expanding our program."



Mimico/Amos Waites Park: Artwork: "Song of the Water" by Akshata Naik Photo credit to Vladimir Kanic



Christie Pits Park: Artwork: "Online/Offline 1" by Enna Kim Photo credit to Vladimir Kanic

Civic impacts

The ability to meet these technical requirements of the initiatives has helped to facilitate the meeting of its other goals such as providing a real platform and paid opportunities for local and emerging artists and cultural producers, with special consideration for underrepresented and BIPOC artists.

"It's been a great joy to be on site and see local residents enjoying the artwork," Campitelli said. "In some instances, this is their first opportunity to come explore their city safely after lockdown, and it's been a pleasure to share these experiences with other Torontonians."

These events have allowed communities to drive economic and cultural development in the wake of Covid-19 and to create and strengthen relationships with local arts organizations. It's also worked to generate excitement for the upcoming ArtworxTO: Toronto's Year of Public Art 2021.

For Panasonic, involvement in this project was an extension of their partnership program for cultural institutes. The program supports Canadian cultural institutions that contribute to arts and culture in the country, including science centers, theaters, museums, libraries and others.

For more on how Panasonic projectors are bringing art to life, read our case study about an immersive exhibit highlighting the works of Vincent van Gogh.

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