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Co-operative programs create strong base of public art

In the past five years, the Percent for Public Art Program has seen the completion of about \$25 million in public art, Dave Wiles writes.



We Are All Animals, a public art installation at Daniels High Park condo, engages people on a visceral level. (URBAN TORONTO)

By **DAVE WILKES** BILD President & CEO
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As development in our region intensifies, [public art is flourishing](#) in our communities. These sculptures, murals and LED installations not only beautify the places where we live and work, but also create a sense of community, evoke civic pride and invite tourism.

Many of these works are the result of [creative partnerships](#) between our industry, municipalities and artists.

In the City of Toronto, a large proportion of public art is funded through the [Percent for Public Art Program](#), which has developers contribute one per cent of the gross construction cost of projects toward public art. In return, the city may allow developers to increase the height of a building or build a denser development, an exchange permitted by Section 37 of the Ontario Planning Act. Depending on the size of the contribution, the funds may be used to commission an art installation on site, or go into the City's Public Art Reserve Fund — or a combination of the two options.

In the past five years, the program has seen the completion of about \$25 million in public art, with additional funding secured that has not yet been spent. Since its inception, the Percent for Public Art Program has enriched Toronto with more than 150 pieces of public art. Many are part of condominium developments and are enjoyed by residents and passersby alike.

An example is a work titled *We Are All Animals*, in a public plaza in front of a condo near High Park. The installation, commissioned by the developer from a Toronto-based art studio, consists of a long bronze bench, a trio of coyote sculptures and an LED screen showing High Park's various landscapes.

Another collaboration between our industry and the city is *Guard with Balloon Dog*, a stencil attributed to the anonymous graffiti artist Banksy, which is on display in the PATH system near 1 York St. It was found on the wall of a former office building in the Harbourfront area. Before the building was demolished, the developer salvaged the panels, had them professionally restored and installed, along with a commissioned companion piece, as a public art contribution accompanying its major mixed-use project in the area.

Other municipalities in the GTA also are building their public art collections thanks to partnerships with our industry, despite the fact that public art contributions are voluntary. For example, in Mississauga, a two-part metal and glass sculpture called *Migration*, depicting birds in flight, forms a gateway over Duke of York Blvd. where it meets Burnhamthorpe Rd. The work was jointly funded by developers behind two nearby condo projects and the City of Mississauga.

And in Markham, kids and kids at heart can ride a colourful piece of public art, a merry-go-round featuring characters that evoke Canada, such as a beaver, a Mountie, a moose and a salmon. The carousel, made by Canadian-born California-based artist Patrick Amiot, is called *Pride of Canada*. It is the centerpiece of an extensive public art initiative that is being spearheaded by the developer behind the major mixed-use development in downtown Markham.

As our region continues to grow, we will need more of this kind of collaboration to create thriving complete communities where people can live, work and enjoy their leisure time. With elections approaching this year, BILD will be asking questions about how we can work together to make this vision a reality.

Dave Wilkes is President and CEO of the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), the voice of the home building, land development and professional renovation industry in the GTA. For the latest industry news and new home data, follow BILD on Twitter, @bildgta, or visit bildgta.ca.

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