

WAYWARD TOURS OF TORONTO: PART 4 IN A SERIES

Spiffing up the blandscape

Street artists take the detritus of city living and give fresh life to the old, the unused and the ugly

CHLOÉ FEDIO
STAFF REPORTER

Engraved padlocks on a park fence. An abandoned bike painted orange. A tree that commands, “Hug Me.” Toronto artists brighten up the urban landscape with spontaneous works.

Graffiti alley: Colourful murals in an alley south of Queen St. W. have so far escaped Mayor Rob Ford’s war against worthless graffiti — and it’s no wonder why. Street art that runs west of Spadina Ave. all the way to Portland St. brightens up an otherwise dank and dirty concrete lane with colourful images and words.

Planted car: Propped up on cinder blocks in the heart of Kensington Market, an old car repainted with cartoon flowers and wildlife sprouts greenery from its trunk and windows. Toronto City Council agreed in 2006 not to tow the vehicular garden from its spot on Augusta Ave. It sits in front of a bright mural on a street where it seems every spare bit of concrete has been covered in paint.

Neon bike: A solitary bike, abandoned outside the OCAD Student Gallery was spray-painted bright orange. The city initially threatened to remove it from the rack on Dundas St. W. near McCaul St., but reconsidered after a public outcry. Now similar neon bikes will be popping up all over the city, including two already in place in Regent Park.

Planter installation: On first glance it looks like a miniature beaver dam poking out of a concrete tree planter on McCaul St. just south of Dundas St. W. But the sticks and wires that contain the tree were placed there by artist Li Hill as part of a greater city-wide project to spruce up planter boxes.

Another artist used Lego to fill the cracks of a concrete planter on Bloor St. W. near Lansdowne Ave. but vandals have since destroyed it. You can still see shimmers of gold paint shining out of the cracks of another planter on the same street.



A car abandoned on Augusta Ave. in the heart of Kensington Market has been painted and turned into a planter.

Lovers' locks: Miranda and Billy met online but Grange Park is the place where they fell in love. Their names are engraved on a brass lock fixed to the park fence on Beverley St. Four smaller locks engraved with their childrens’ names tumble down like a chain. Theirs is just one of more than a dozen lovers’ locks attached to the fence. A self-described street artist collects love stories on the blog “Blade Diary” and creates personalized padlocks for each couple.

Hug Me tree: Take part in a Toronto tradition and wrap your arms around a painted tree. Graffiti artist Elicser Elliott first beautified the Queen St. W. stump in 1999 and has come back to apply fresh coats of red, yellow and blue several times since — always with the iconic “Hug Me” message. The deep gashes in the wood reveal just how tough it is to be an urban tree. It was moved indoors for about a year after being knocked over during the summer of 2008 but it is now back at the corner of Soho St.



Engraved padlocks on the Grange Park fence tell stories of love. The Hug Me tree on Queen St. W. has had its paint freshened often since 1999.



THE FIXER

Give cyclists some space and respect

JACK LAKEY
STAFF REPORTER

If respect is a two-way street, drivers can help reduce tensions with cyclists by trying harder to share the road.

We’ve been writing about that uneasy relationship, focusing on cyclists who don’t follow the rules. It has earned us the enmity of many riders who think we’re picking on them.

James Schwartz, who writes a cycling blog called The Urban Country, wrote to say our columns add to road rage by creating a sense among drivers that scofflaw cyclists are the root of the discord.

So we asked what drivers can do to achieve détente. He replied with simple ideas that are easy to follow to improve safety:

- “When passing cyclists, slow down and give them more space. A pothole could be enough to cause us to swerve, and if you’re passing too closely, a one-foot swerve could put me right in your path.”
- “When I’m making a legal left turn, please don’t get mad at me because you have to drive around me. I have every right to be in the left-turn lane, and getting angry at me doesn’t help — it only tempts me to break the law and do an illegal left turn to avoid angry drivers.”
- “When I’m in the right lane and a streetcar is in the left lane, please don’t try to squeeze between.”
- “Help us try to get better cycling infrastructure. It’s in your interest as a driver: It helps you get to your destination without bicycles getting in your way. It also makes my ride more comfortable and encourages more people to cycle.”
- “Please don’t park in the bike lane. It forces me into traffic, which creates unnecessary conflict with drivers.”
- “When turning right, please check your blind spot to make sure I’m not passing you. I’ll do my best to pass on the left side when it’s safe to do so, but sometimes the bike lane passes on your right. I’ll be cautious when I pass, but if you could take a look, I’d appreciate it.”
- “Please be sure to check your mirrors before opening your car door.”

Schwartz’s ideas are posited respectfully. They’re more than reasonable and the least drivers can do to improve the relationship with cyclists.

What’s broken in your neighbourhood? Wherever you are in Greater Toronto, we want to know. To email us, go to www.thestar.com/thefixer and click on the “submit a problem” link. Or call us at 416-869-4823.

Mississauga broke tax laws with annual gala

Tax receipts illegal as event not registered

SAN GREWAL
URBAN AFFAIRS REPORTER

The City of Mississauga broke the law when issuing charitable tax receipts on behalf of Mayor Hazel McCallion’s annual gala, the Canada Revenue Agency has confirmed. After questions were raised in

council in the spring about the city’s involvement with the mayor’s gala finances, a staff report confirmed the city had been issuing charitable tax receipts illegally to gala donors. The gala is billed as an arts fundraiser. The city reported that the practice of issuing receipts ended in 2006, but Councillor Nando Iannicca demanded that CRA be informed and called the city’s response to the illegal practice “cavalier.”

A memo to the city was received recently from CRA. “Their response was that they confirmed that since we have taken corrective measures and stopped issuing the receipts in 2006 we are compliant,” said Patti Elliott-Spencer, the city’s director of finance. “We were not compliant with the legislation up until that time. There was no penalty assessed in the letter.”

Iannicca was adamant that CRA be informed about the practice because a city report made it clear the gala is not a registered charity and only 7 cents on the dollar donated was going directly to arts groups. The gala’s organizers and McCallion came under fire when the report revealed that 80 per cent of the annual event’s ticket sales were actually used to cover the costs of the event itself.



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