



TORONTO ART OF INCLUSION

An Indigenous Torontonion shares the feeling of finding herself in the city.

by **KELLY BOUTSALIS**

IN NATHAN PHILLIPS SQUARE, I'm standing in front of a large, illuminated, 3D "Toronto" sign. The part that speaks to me most kicks off the line of letters, before the T: a medicine wheel honouring Indigenous cultural values and symbolizing wholeness and strength. The sign attracts a steady stream of visitors, and to me, as an Indigenous person living in Toronto—a city large enough to easily make someone feel invisible—the acknowledgment feels incredible.

Toronto celebrates its Indigenous people. The former traditional territories of First Nations groups—the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, Haudenosaunee, the Wendat peoples—is now home to many cultures, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. Rather than treat Indigenous art as artefacts of the past, museums, galleries and a few building exteriors proudly spotlight contemporary artworks by Indigenous people, with more on the way.

The large-scale works of world-renowned Anishinaabe artist Robert Houle are on display at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) through April 3. "Robert Houle: Red Is Beautiful" reflects on resistance movements, Indigenous identity and Houle's own experience in residential schools. AGO is also home to the McLean Centre for Indigenous and Canadian Art, a showcase for contemporary Indigenous artists including Carl Beam, Daphne Odjig, Kent Monkman and Annie Pootoogook.

Cree painter and printmaker Jane Ash Poitras explores colonialism and traditional knowledge of plants in four paintings newly added to the Royal Ontario Museum. At the Daphne Cockwell Gallery, dedicated to First Peoples art and culture, an Indigenous Knowledge Resource Teacher provides context for a collection of 1,000-plus works of art and cultural heritage spanning from pre-European times to present.

A short drive north of the city, in Vaughan, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection examines how we look at the country's canon of artists in its exhibition "Uninvited: Canadian Women Artists in the Modern Moment," with more than 200 works from early 20th-century Indigenous and Canadian artists. Award-winning Anishinaabe artist Bonnie Devine has partnered with the McMichael on a forthcoming mural inspired by the important Indigenous waterway-adjacent route called the Carrying Place Trail—which includes the land on which the museum sits.

In Toronto, you don't have to search for Indigenous art; very often, it finds you. Downtown, it's easy to spot murals by Indigenous artists. At the southwest corner of Parliament and Dundas, adorning the exterior of the Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, is the Creation Story Mural by Anishinaabe artist Phil Côté. The 24-by-7.6-metre (80-by-25-foot) piece bursts with vibrant colour. Côté will paint the other side of the building in 2022. A stroll on Kew Beach turns up similar treasure: The



MILESTONE DESTINATION

Today's Four Seasons Hotel London at Park Lane was once Inn on the Park, the first Four Seasons hotel outside Canada (1970). fourseasons.com/london

Leuty Boathouse is home to a large-scale digital mural on vinyl, the largest work yet by Chippewa and Potawatomi artist Chief Lady Bird.

Walking through the underpass on Lower Simcoe Street, I stumbled upon 28 realist portraits of notable Indigenous people, wrapped in lace-like florals. The Elder/Honour Wall murals were painted by Métis/Anishinaabe and Danish artist Tannis Nielsen, who invited young Indigenous artists to help finish the piece. I was struck by the discovery and enjoyed identifying faces I recognized, like Elder Lee Maracle. And the faces I didn't know felt like they were giving me—and hopefully others—a nod and a nudge to keep learning more.

Kelly Boutsalis is a Mohawk journalist from the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve. Now living in Toronto, she devotes the bulk of her work to highlighting Indigenous stories.

Photography (previous spread) Bir Fatos / Stockimo / Alamy Stock Photo; (this spread) Adrian Tusca / Alamy Stock Photo



LONDON A NEW SPIN

A cyclist looks into a program that's giving Londoners a leg up.

by **SIMON PARKER**

HERE, UNDER A RAILWAY arch in Southeast London, the air is rich with grease and coffee. To the beat of house music and clinking spanners, half a dozen mechanics in beanie hats and face masks are busy fixing saddles, gear cables, tyres and brake pads. This is The Bike Project, a charity that donates bicycles to refugees and asylum seekers. Since 2013, the project has given away more than 8,000 to people from countries such as Syria, Eritrea and Albania.

“Without The Bike Project, I don’t know what might have happened to me,” says David, from Guinea-Bissau, a volunteer who has been appealing for residency in Britain for more than 14 years. “This is like my family.”

While seeking asylum, people like David are not allowed to work and must survive on less than GBP 40 a week, in a city where the average weekly wage is more than GBP 500. “Not only does having a bike save people about 20 pounds a week in transport costs, but it also

gives them the means to access the services they need,” says The Bike Project’s founder and CEO, Jem Stein. “Bicycles allow people to travel to schools and hospitals, but they also give them access to exercise. This is about physical and mental well-being.”

Biking’s popularity boomed here after Great Britain’s success in cycling competitions at the London 2012 Olympic Games. I too saddled up in Britain’s “year of the bike,” and it quickly became my transport, my gym, my psychotherapist. Almost a decade on, cycling has enjoyed an even bigger explosion during the pandemic. In 2020 the U.K. industry grew by 45% to more than GBP 2 billion. Adult bike sales, in particular, increased by 193%.

“As well as giving away 150 bikes each month, we also sell them and reinvest that money into the project,” Stein says. Concerns around using public transport during COVID-19 contributed to more business, he adds. “We’re selling about four times more bikes now than we were pre-pandemic.”

In response to falling numbers on London’s trains and buses, the U.K. government has announced a GBP 2 billion investment in the city’s cycling and walking infrastructure, and is aiming to elect a National Cycling and Walking commissioner. It all plays into a wider plan to make London a greener, healthier city, with thousands of new electric car charging stations and rentable e-scooters. Doctors, meanwhile, are being encouraged to prescribe cycling instead of antidepressants.

As for asylum seekers like David, bicycles can help them stay strong through challenging times. “It makes me so happy to fix up bikes and help change people’s lives—I’m so proud of myself,” he tells me. “My bike also helped me during lockdown; it gave me a reason to get out of my house.” He’s preaching to the converted on that. During the dark days of the pandemic, my bike became my lifeline.

Now The Bike Project is linking refugees with cycling “buddies” and encouraging refugee women to cycle for the first time via the Pedal Power project. It reminds me that a bike is more than an object; it’s a symbol of freedom and adventure, empowerment and friendship. Regardless of who you are and where you’re from, many of life’s sharpest corners are better tackled at the gentle pace of a bicycle.

Simon Parker is a travel writer who has embarked upon many epic cycling journeys for The Telegraph, the BBC and Amazon Prime. His new book, Riding Out, about his 3,427-mile (5,515-kilometre) ride around Britain as it entered lockdown, will be published in April.