



Underfoot yet Overhead (Part II)

Karen Kazmer

July 2009

City Centre Walking Loop Greenway, Holland Park at King George Boulevard

Underfoot yet Overhead is two different, yet related, series of visual markers installed on SkyTrain pillars along the City Centre Walking Loop Greenway. Artist Karen Kazmer calls each series “a microscopic hunt for meaning.” The works are based on enlargements of microscopic forms or particles associated with human activities and natural processes in Whalley Athletic Park and Holland Park. Their intent is to create a visible presence for what is normally unseen or overlooked.

Underfoot yet Overhead is one of six site-specific public art projects produced under Surrey’s 2008 Cultural Capital of Canada initiative and supported by the Department of Canadian Heritage and the City of Surrey. The works explore Surrey’s natural and built heritage, First Nations history, cultural diversity and community activity. They provide a lasting legacy for each of Surrey’s six town centres.

Holland Park Installation

The imagery of the Holland Park series of Underfoot yet Overhead refers to microscopic organisms, specifically bacteria, that form an invisible, yet essential, part of our ecosystem. The artist focussed on bacteria that live in the soil and cause dead matter to decompose. Such decomposition returns essential nutrients to the soil and enables new life to emerge.

Here, colourful sculptures cut from metal sheets are mounted on the SkyTrain pillars. Their abstract, organic forms reflect types of bacteria, shifting what is unseen beneath our feet into high visibility above our heads. The perforated metal sheets increase in number from pillar to pillar, reflecting how bacteria increase in nature. Motion-sensored, solar-powered lights and reflective plastic domes illuminate the work at night.





The artist engaged the community in this project by conducting art and science workshops with grade-five classes in the neighbourhood. Students investigated soil bacteria and made mixed media collages of their discoveries. Their work inspired the final fabrication of the shapes.

About the Artist

Karen Kazmer is a Vancouver-based visual artist who specializes in mixed-media installations and public art projects. Her work is often site-specific and addresses both the human body and the ways we position ourselves within social spaces. For her City Centre Walking Loop public art projects, she has drawn on her recent interest in the microscopic world and its unseen relationships to our everyday lives and activities.



Born in the Chicago area, Kazmer studied at Loyola University, the University of British Columbia and York University. She has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in both the United States and Canada, from Toronto to San Francisco and from Burnaby to Portland. Her public-art commissions and purchases include projects for the City of Vancouver, the City of Richmond, and the City and District of North Vancouver.

