

Local

Do these sculptures have our best interests at art?

Wawa has a giant goose. In St. Thomas, it's Jumbo the elephant. Windsor has an entire sculpture park.

Many cities have outdoor public art to reflect that community's character and generate a certain pride of place.

Does Sarnia have anything like that?

Absolutely, say a panel of artists and art lovers assembled by The Journal. But we could do better.

"It's really important to have a sculpture in your community that brands us, that would make people think of it when they think of Sarnia," says Corinne Schieman, owner of Artopia Gallery on Christina Street.

Though it's little known, Sarnia has a public sculpture committee, of which Schieman is a member.

"The committee was created about 15 years ago and the goal was to add to the public art we already have," she said.

Schieman has long envisioned a sizeable public sculpture on the waterfront; something like a sailboat to represent our local love of water and tell the world Sarnia is a place for aquatic recreation and beautiful views.

But it hasn't happened yet.

The committee is inactive without funding, al-



though Schieman remains hopeful volunteers and donors will surface.

The MacPherson Fountain in Centennial Park is the closest thing Sarnia has to a sculpture that reflects how residents feel about their city, panel members say.

"There's something really wonderful about that sculpture," says artist Cathy Earle.

The fountain was installed beside the St. Clair River nearly 30 years ago by Canadian artist Ron Baird.

The late philanthropist Jim MacPherson left most of the money needed to construct the work of stainless steel and ABS tubing, which creates an illusion of swimming black fish.

"I love the way the steel and the fish reflect light and shadow," Earle said.

Local artist and former gallery owner Lynne Brogden was thrilled with the fountain's original design, in which the water moved horizontally. It was a waterfront gem, she said.

"However, it succumbed to a lot of complaints that a fountain should have water spraying up. So they installed the jets shooting

water up and took away from the totally unique water fountain feature, tourist attraction I had envisioned."

Significant tax dollars have been poured into the MacPherson Fountain over the years for broken water pumps and other issues. It's possible more has been spent on its maintenance than all other sculptures in Sarnia combined.

An inventory of public sculpture includes Shawn McKnight's memorial to the Victims of Chemical Valley; The Secret Bench by artist Lea Vivot at the downtown library; the prime minister Alexander Mackenzie monument; and two unnamed and little known sculptures in Rainbow Park on Christina Street South.

There's also the Sarnia Cenotaph soldier, the Homeless Jesus outside River City Vineyard, and a collection of steel legacy boxes commemorating Lambton College's 50th anniversary.

Point Edward has at least two of note: the Souls Memorial under the Blue Water Bridge was a commission of artist Dennis Henry-Shawnoo in 2003, and seven bronze Canada Geese by sculptor Siggy Puchta at the travel information centre on Venetian



THE MACPHERSON FOUNTAIN was rated by many of our panel the best public sculpture in Sarnia.

CATHY DOBSON The Journal

Boulevard.

"To be honest, I would say there have been more misses than hits," said local artist and teacher Ian McLean.

"A couple of my favourites, however, would be the Alexander Mackenzie sculpture and the MacPherson Fountain on the waterfront."

McLean said progressive communities have lively and stimulating arts scenes that include public art projects curated by professionals.

Sarnia needs more public sculpture, said Leonard

Segall, a photographer and board member at the Lawrence House Centre for the Arts.

"I believe that public sculpture makes a statement about our commitment to community, shared values and artistic expression."

Less known — and loved — is a collection of metal figures that showed up in the downtown core nine years ago.

Though some panelists were gentle, none spoke kindly of the abstract works loaned to Sarnia in 2010 for two years and

never removed. One at the corner of Lochiel and Christina streets appears to be a man vomiting. Others are in Centennial Park.

"Any public art we have needs to be maintained and safe," said Schieman. "It has to have longevity and be well made."

"The ... sculptures are of cut metal and I worry someone will be hurt by its sharp edges."

The Arts Journal is about Sarnia's cultural fabric. Send your ideas to cathy.dobson@thesarniajournal.ca.



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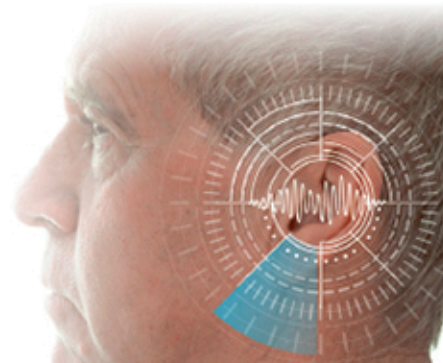
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Local



LEFT: These bronze Canada geese grace the entrance to the Ontario Travel Information Centre in Point Edward.

RIGHT: Castings of "The Secret Bench" by Canadian artist Lea Vivot are also proudly on display in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, New York and Prague in the Czech Republic.

CATHY DOBSON The Journal



LITTLE IS KNOWN about this cast bronze piece tucked into a quiet courtyard in Rainbow Park.

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ONE OF THE PIECES "loaned" to Sarnia in 2010 and never removed, to the chagrin of many.


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THE VICTIMS of Chemical Valley memorial in Centennial Park.

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