

Public Art will Interact with Passersby at Union Station

July 10, 2013 7:50 pm | by Craig White | [9 Comments \(/news/2013/07/public-art-will-interact-passersby-union-station#disqus_thread\)](#)

People like to complain about our waterfront, that there aren't enough parks. While Waterfront Toronto is now working some considerable magic reclaiming more of our Lake Ontario edge for we the people, our link to the lake, it turns out, was rather green way back when. There was a time when people in the growing Town of York knew that a green waterfront was a good idea, and in 1818 the 'Walks and Gardens' were set up to provide a public promenade along the shoreline south of Front between Berkeley and Peter Streets.

For anyone familiar with the hill along the south side of Front Street, it's likely a surprise to hear that we did have a park there at one time. What we do all know is the story of hundreds of acres of the Toronto harbour being filled in south of Front over the years to support growing shipping and then railway requirements.

So what happened to the Walks and Gardens? The City sold the 30 acre strip in 1853 and created the Walks and Gardens Trust with the proceeds. That money was spent acquiring and improving parks we've used and loved since, like Riverdale Park, High Park, and many more. In 1916 the Trust's remaining funds were merged with other parks-related accounts at the City.

Union Station stands on a portion of the original Walks and Gardens lands, so with a huge redevelopment now under way at the site, local historians saw this as a chance to commemorate the parkland that was once there with some well placed public art. A competition run by the City to find the right artwork attracted entries by 36 artists from around the world, with five making the short list, and late last month a winner was announced.

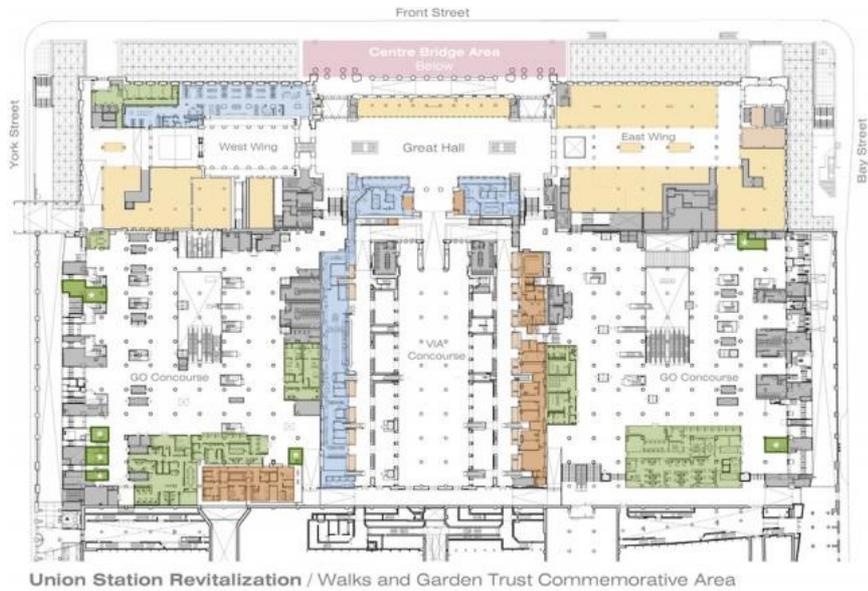


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fLUX by LAb[au], image courtesy of the City of Toronto

LAB[au] is an internationally renowned art studio based in Brussels, Belgium. Their proposal for fLUX, a 70-metre, permanent, interpretive art installation will be prominently featured on the north part of the pedestrian walkway under the Front Street pedestrian bridge. The bridge in question is the walkway that links the Front Street sidewalk to Union Station's Great Hall over the moat. That moat will soon be an integral piece of the station's Promenade level and the city's PATH network. While skylights will flood the walkway with light to the west and the east, fLUX will provide light, movement, and a little drama in a darker area.

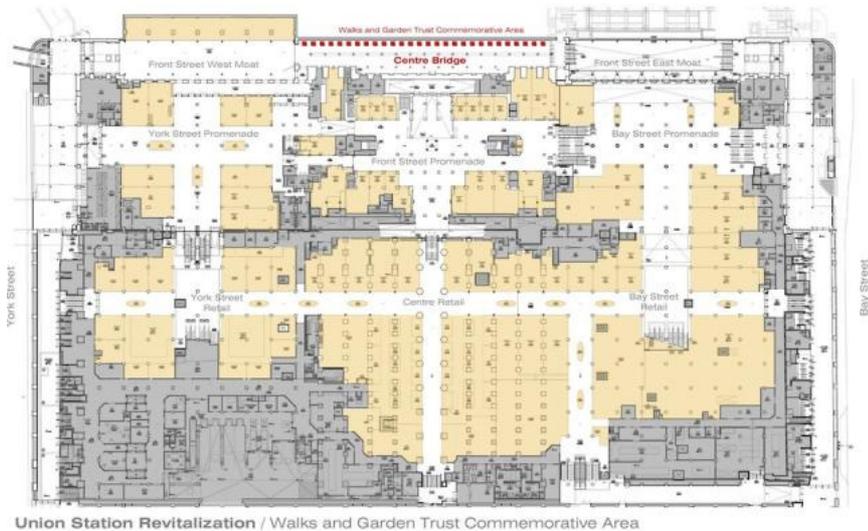
LAB[au]'s design works as an elegant metaphor for the Trust. The sophisticated installation incorporates light and sound to create a contemporary and tranquil experience in a busy, urban space. "FLUX, which is LAB[au]'s first North American permanent installation, will be a significant contribution to contemporary art and Toronto's public art collection," remarked Justin Ridgeway, an independent public art consultant who managed the artist selection process. Members of the public were encouraged to offer input into the five finalists' designs via a comment box at Union Station or online. The feedback helped a five-person selection panel, chosen for their expertise and knowledge of contemporary art, new media and local issues, to select the winning entry. They panel included Catherine Dean, independent curator, Micah Lexier, artist, Rollo Myers, community member, Yves Theoret, director, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, and Lisa Rochon, architecture and design columnist, Globe and Mail.



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Location of fLUX below the Front Street pedestrian bridge, plan courtesy of the City of Toronto

Councillor Pam McConnell (Ward 28 Toronto Centre-Rosedale) remarked that "The Walks and Gardens Trust was intended to create beautiful public spaces for the enjoyment of all. As an incredible piece of art, the winning art installation will achieve this goal by transforming an important public space into a stunning focal point. Torontonians and tourists will enjoy walking through and revisiting this garden of light and sound for years to come."



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Location of fLUX on the Union Station Concourse and PATH level, plan courtesy of the City of Toronto

Councillor Norm Kelly (Ward 40 Scarborough Agincourt), Chair of the Government Management Committee remarked that "This installation will engage the thousands of pedestrians traversing the walkway, providing an exciting attraction while celebrating Toronto's heritage". The City contributed \$200,000 towards the commemoration of the Trust at Union Station.

The artwork will be installed in the last half of 2014. It has the potential to be seen by the 250,000 passengers and visitors who come to Union Station daily, a number that will increase significantly over the coming years as the station's capacity is increased and as the PATH network is extended.