

Coming Soon (S'toon) - Placemaker 2016



Excerpt From Project Proposal

My project involves a contemporary approach to the notion of public sculpture. The basis for the project is a reflection on the notion of urban development, public anticipation, and a curiosity surrounding things in the public domain when they are still in the planning and pre-groundbreaking stages, but not yet underway.

These projects are often reliant on building a kind of “public buzz”. The energy of this anticipation is used as a marketing tool to get people interested in the possibility of what is to come on a potential site. Until construction begins and people can see dirt being moved, and actual building materials being poured, assembled, and erected, the projects often exist for the public only in the form of a slick architectural drawing, a few signs, and maybe a banner stating “Coming Soon”.

This stage of development places projects in a type of suspended utopia, free from all the possible complications, extra costs, and missed deadlines that large urban architectural projects often succumb to. This pre-construction phase is a time of optimistic admiration of the very marching signs of progress; new hip places to live, work, and shop.



Development can also bring controversy over land rights, environmental concerns, and the overall effects that less space and more buildings result in. **Coming Soon (S'toon)** is a nod to anticipation and progress in the past, present, and future of Saskatoon's changing urban landscape.

My Connection to Saskatoon

I grew up in Saskatoon from 1974-1991. My father is a carpenter and contractor, and we often lived in new areas of the city that were under development from the bald muddy prairie, like Lawson Heights and Silverwood. I have memories of those emerging neighbourhoods, and their concrete sidewalks and empty muddy lots waiting for houses to be built. I saw the malls go up, and lived across the street from Marion Graham High School when it was being built. Those boom years were full of anticipation, and the excitement that progress brings. I returned to Saskatoon in 2003 to do my MFA degree at U of S, and witnessed the many changes the city had gone through since I had moved out West. I look forward to seeing and responding to the changes that have occurred in this past decade of boom-times in Saskatoon.

Project-Physical Description

Coming Soon (S'toon) Is a large scale sculptural installation that will be placed at the foot of the Broadway Bridge, on a grass median. The installation consists of a large industrial forklift from 1973 that I have restored and modified. The forklift will be positioned next to a large wooden crate (8ftx8ftx8ft), and a series of 73 signs will be posted on the crate over the course of the projects duration. In addition, there will be nine smaller crates clustered in groups of three, at the individual corners of the triangular grass median. These smaller crates will also have signs affixed to them.

The aesthetic of the installation will resemble a construction site or loading dock, and the crates will age and weather over the duration of the project.

Jason Gress - Artist Bio

I am the son of a carpenter and I have been making things since I could walk. I am extremely passionate about navigating a world full of stuff. The universe of objects presents limitless possibilities for materials to be manipulated and combined to form a powerful language all their own.

I am contemporary artist with a primarily sculptural based practice. My work ranges from small-scale sculptures and installations to larger public art projects. I hold a Bachelor of Fine Arts with distinction from the University of Victoria (2003), And a Masters of Fine Arts from the University of Saskatchewan (2005). I am a full-time Professor of Visual Art and Sculpture at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo and have been since 2006.

In addition to this experience, I have 15 years experience in the construction industry, where I worked as an independent sub-contractor in residential construction. Over that time, I gained experience working with building codes, city building inspectors, various trades, and material supply companies.

Most recently, after purchasing a large studio space for myself, I have begun a relationship with a local structural engineering firm, and my past construction experience has allowed me to work seamlessly at turning my innate sense of materials and structural relationships into official plans and documents that form the standard visual communication tool for for the building industry.

This process is directly transferrable to my art practice, and has been invaluable in the proposing, constructing, and installing of my public projects.

***Coming Soon, S'toon* - Project Evolution**

Coming Soon S'toon began it's journey to Saskatoon in Nanaimo BC. The box, various crate materials, and signage were created from recycled salvaged plywood at my home studio.





Prepping the raw wood for painting.

Each sign is hand-painted, and sealed with a clear varnish. The fonts I chose are meant to be evoke the past, present, and future.



The first showing of the project in Nanaimo was titled *Coming Soon....* The addition of the *S'toon* updates the title while creating a play on words.

A series of smaller crates were created to accompany the larger crate.



The large crate was previously shown in Nanaimo, so it needed to be disassembled and refurbished.

Each piece needed to be carefully removed





Once disassembled, the large crate is ready for transport



The forklift is loaded and ready to be secured for transport to Saskatoon.

Next comes the loading of the 9 small crates and 1 large crate

Fun Fact: The forklift weighs over 5000 lbs!



The truck is loaded with the forklift, 10 crates, and all of the signage that will eventually be attached to the crates. I have also packed all the necessary tools to reassemble the crates, including some cinder blocks to help weigh down the small crates.

Total cargo weight 6500 lbs...very close to the trucks limit!





With the truck fully loaded, we left Nanaimo headed for Saskatoon, intending to take it slow and enjoy the beautiful stretch of Western Canada.

A glacial lake in Jasper National Park, AB.



Mount Robson

Taking in some public art on the way...



We finally arrived in Saskatoon, and set up at the city works yard.



The crate panels are unloaded and ready to be reassembled on a very hot summer day.

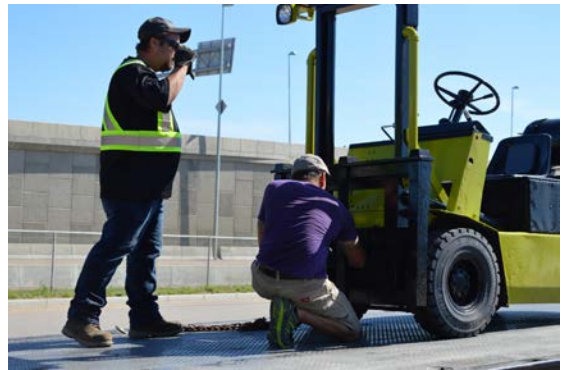
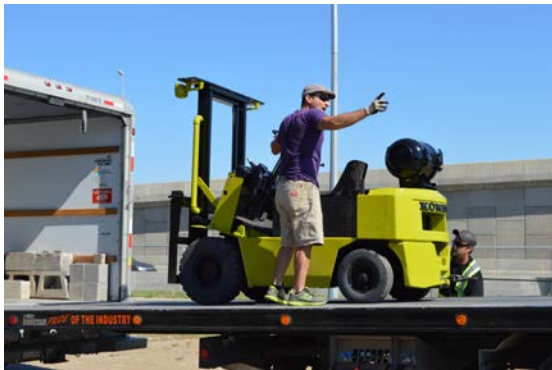
I begin the reassembly by creating a base frame for the panels from pre-cut lumber.



The large crate reaches completion after some onsite modifications (I put the panels together in the wrong order). Still hot!



A tow truck arrives to load the forklift and big crate for the 11km trip to the site.



The large crate and forklift are safely loaded and strapped down.



Scoping out the installation location for access with the tow truck driver.

Discussing the logistics of placement with City planner Jaybee DeCastro. Traffic sight-lines are a major concern.



We decide on the best location for the large crate and forklift, and agree the smaller 9 crates will be clustered in 3 groups in the corners of the site.



Blocking the road was the only option for unloading the large crate.

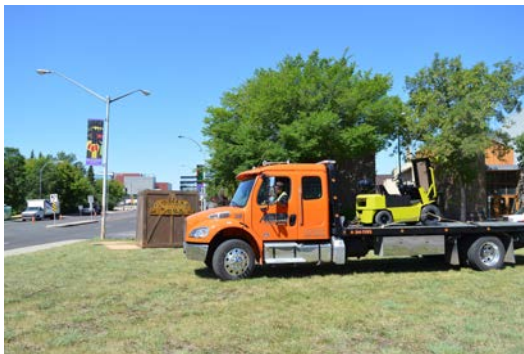
The large crate is lowered down off the flatbed truck onto plywood sheets. Not a very high-tech system, but pushing the crate across the lawn does the job. My uncle James provides extra muscle!



I had enough foresight to install large industrial casters on the crate back in Nanaimo, unsure of the access onsite. The casters are removed later to make the crate immobile.



A bit tense as the tow truck gently mounts the curb...steady!



A combination of logistics and heat make the job challenging.



Pushing the 5000 lb forklift on the soft turf is not an easy task...definitely no power steering involved here.

Getting ready to head inside the big crate through a trap door in the top. Temperature inside the crate is 45 degrees celsius! The wheels must be removed so the crate cannot be moved by potential vandals.



Bolts are used to secure the roll cage on top of the forklift - it was removed for shipping as it was too tall to be transported inside the truck. I also use a thick chain and lock to secure the forklift to the crate so it cannot be moved.



Preparing the small crates for installation in the 3 corners of the triangular median. Each crate will be filled with approximately 300 lbs of bricks to make sure they don't "walk away".

Signs are affixed to each crate, making reference to development, and emphasizing the element of anticipation that often builds with the promise of progress.



All the elements of the installation are now in place. The first set of signs are installed on the crates, with subsequent signs to be added over the course of the next year. In a matter of hours, this empty median is now teaming with anticipation.



With the installation now complete and the tow truck gone, it looks as if a forklift operator has left the site for lunch, or vanished into thin air. As the hours, days, weeks, and months go by, the promise and anticipation of new development fade, and the piece begins to take on an air of disappointment, confusion, and ultimate failure.

Sign Of The Times - Things To Come....

(a collection of signs)







Celebrate Remail-Modern's 100th anniversary
fall 2116

SPRING IS COMING

NUTANA JOINS
SASKATOON 1906

GOING SOON

THANKS
BUT
THAT'S
KINDA

SORTA

MOSTLY
PRETTY Much
ALL
THERE IS...

Epilogue - Project Takedown And Extension....



Twelve months after the initial installation I returned to Saskatoon on a cool overcast day to decommission the project. I was greeted by a weathered crate that had endured the prairie winter. It's aging surface had become a perfect metaphor for failed anticipation and promise. The forklift had been tagged with spray paint, and tufts of grass had grown from underneath the crate. The optimistic development so eagerly promised never came.



As I started to remove the panels from the large crate the interior space revealed the toolbox and extra signs I had stashed there the summer before.

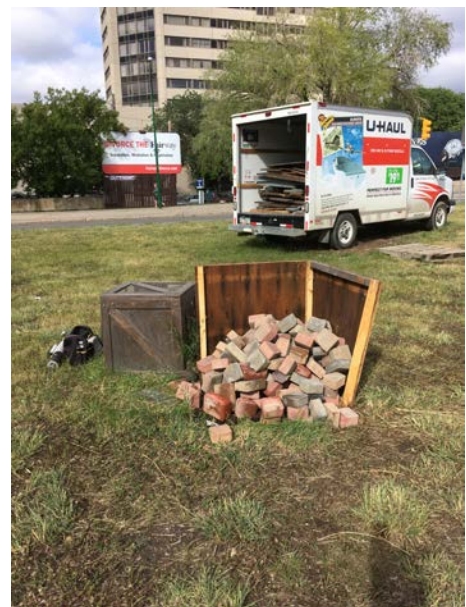
I thought a lot about the decaying state of the project, and how I had intended it to look just like this. It seemed to amplify how illusory our idea of constant progress and perpetual urban renewal really are.



The promise proposed by the signs- new exciting development never came, but the inside of the crate held a different, surprise development.....



I discovered several small grass nests inside the crate, complete with small burrow holes. Mice has created a small community of there own inside the shelter of the crate to weather the harsh prairie winter. Finding this miniature “development” brought a smile to my face, and added a dimension to the project, albeit if only for my benefit.



The forklift was taken away and recycled, and I removed the bricks from the crates.



The installation site on the median is now returned to its previous state. It is as if the project did not even exist. Like a predestined future that failed to pass, the site now becomes a place for reflection on what was once supposed to be developed here... even if that was only ever intended to be anticipation, and a conversation about public art.

Encore....



I forgot to mention that the project was originally proposed for the Broadway BID, and a “teaser” crate was installed on a plinth there, one month before the full-scale project was installed in the Downtown BID. At the end of the project, I collected all of the signs from the large crate, and installed them on the small crate on Broadway.



This was meant to extend the life of the project past the one year point, and draw the project to conclusion on the original site of its intended install.

As the number of signs I could install on the small crate was limited by its size, I also installed some signage temporarily around Saskatoon.



Sign installed on the construction fencing adjacent to the site of the old Traffic Bridge sign reads:

Traffic Bridge coming 1907- going February 2016

(bridge in background)

Sign installed on the railing at River Landing reads:

Celebrate Rемаi Modern's 100th Anniversary, Fall 2116

(Remai Modern shown in the background)





A Climate Change?



One aspect of the proposal for the project that changed, was my plan to encase the large crate and forklift in a block of ice in the winter of 2016. The original idea was to have the block of ice melt gradually, and reveal a new set of signs that I had installed before the freezing took place.

Unfortunately, Winter 2016 in Saskatoon was a bit unpredictable, and had sharp temperature changes, often going from -20 degrees to +1 degrees in a matter of days. This lack of sustained deep cold (when I was available to work on the project at least), made it impossible to realize that aspect of the project. With the volume of water required to freeze the forklift and crate estimated at around 8,000-10,000 litres, we could not risk a fast thaw of that volume of water near the onramp of the Broadway Bridge.

Press

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/coming-soon-saskatoon-public-art-1.3677543>

<http://thestarphoenix.com/news/local-news/outdoor-artwork-in-saskatoon-about-the-potential-of-new-development>

<http://www.sasknow.ca/local-news/new-art-installed-at-base-of-broadway-bridge>

<http://burningbridges.ca/ranked-publicart/>

For more information on my past work visit:

jasongress.art

Special Thanks to the following City of Saskatoon Staff for their support and guidance in making the project a reality. Some challenging logistics made their expertise, patience, and time invaluable.

Genevieve Russell

Alejandro Romero

Jaybee Decastro

Jonathan Epp

Dennis @ the works yard

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Jody Gress (sign installation and storage)

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