

## PLACEMAKER PROGRAM: 2017

### FINAL REPORT: *We Are The River*

Lead Artists: Susan Shantz (lead artist; primary contact) & Barbara Reimer

Collaborators: Alex George & Samra Sheikh (mentees), Graham Strickert (water science researcher)

#### WE ARE THE RIVER: Physical and Cultural Contexts

*We are the River* connected people with water and the South Saskatchewan River that runs through Saskatoon on its path from mountain to ocean. City water is drawn from the river, treated for use and much of it returned to the river. Most of us turn on a tap and think little of where our water comes from: *We are the River* proposed to raise public awareness of our physical, embodied connection to the river which we drink and which becomes 70% of our body. The river is more than just a place of beauty and recreation – we depend on it in a very primary way that we often forget.

Saskatoon has one of the best water treatment facilities in the country; nevertheless, in an era of climate change and ecological challenges, we felt it was worth remembering and reflecting on our essential connection to water and our river. This public artwork included an interactive community-engaged, image-gathering component (in the Broadway and Riversdale BIDS as well as on the University of Saskatchewan campus) as well as digital and print cycles of these images at venues in the Downtown and Riversdale BIDS (where they supplanted advertising on billboards and signage in July and August). *We are the River* served to strengthen our personal and collective relationship to the river geography of Saskatoon.



Digital Billboard, 25<sup>th</sup> St. and 1<sup>st</sup> Ave N, Saskatoon  
July 10-16 & August 14 – 21, 2017

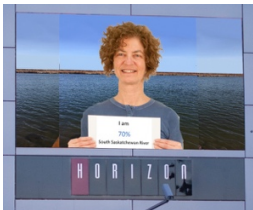


Supersize billboard, PAVED Arts, 424 20<sup>th</sup> St. W., Saskatoon, July 1- 31, 2017

## **WE ARE THE RIVER: Unique Collaborative, Community-engaged Public Art Project**

This project was unique in being a collaborative, team initiative with two lead artists (Susan Shantz as the senior artist and project designer/manager; Barbara Reimer as an established photo artist), two emerging “mentee” artists (Alex George and Samra Sheikh) and one water science researcher with expertise in community engagement (Graham Strickert). All five members of the collaborative team were involved in the community engaged photo booth events in May, June and July. Susan Shantz and Graham Strickert assisted with engaging community participation, answering questions and ensuring photo release forms while Barbara, Alex and Samra, all photo artists/students, did technical set-up and photo booth image production.

### **ARTISTS:**



Susan Shantz



Barbara Reimer



Alex George



Samra Sheikh

### **WATER SCIENCE RESEARCHER:**



Dr. Graham Strickert

This project was also unique in combining community-engagement with new media output. Several river-related events over the summer provided occasions for taking the photo booth images of Saskatoon citizens. Billboard locations in the Downtown BID (25<sup>th</sup> Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Ave N; digital billboard) and Riversdale BID (20<sup>th</sup> St W; partnership with PAVED Arts) provided locations for images to appear in cycles throughout the summer (July and August) and into the fall (on the digital billboard, Subject to Availability Bonus, courtesy of Outfront Media).

A portable banner with images and locations of the billboards served as mobile “signage” about the project and was used at the photo booth events to visually explain the project and connect it to related sites in each BID over the course of the summer/fall. This banner appeared at each of the five photo booth events in May/June/July at various Saskatoon locations (see below). The banner included sponsorship acknowledgements and links to an Instagram account where all the photo booth river images, and information about the project, “river facts,” and sponsorships were available. This was a cost-effective and environmentally-friendly way to provide information about the project to Saskatoon citizens. Use of social media to interface with other river-environmental events and groups and make available all 180 river **portraits** was another unique aspect of this public art project ([www.instagram.com/wearetheriver2](https://www.instagram.com/wearetheriver2)).





Every day we drink the river!

A photo booth project  
connecting Saskatoon citizens  
to remind us

# We are the River

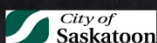
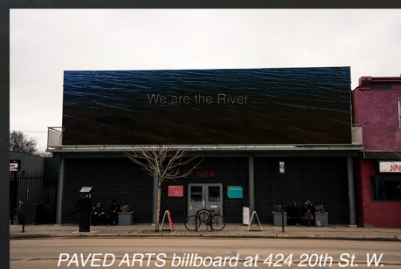


we are all sustained by the river: visit [www.instagram.com/WeAreTheRiver2](http://www.instagram.com/WeAreTheRiver2)

City of Saskatoon Public Art Placemaker Program 2017

Artists:

Susan Shantz  
Barbara Reimer  
Alex George  
Samra Sheikh  
+  
Graham Strickert



A related project, *I am the River* (Derek Besant, Calgary, 2010), celebrated the Bow River, part of our shared Saskatchewan River Basin.

This project was also unique in being supported with matching funds from several sources and in connecting the three BIDs. The digital billboard output (and associated budget) was in the Downtown BID and the superboard-size print billboard is in the Riversdale BID. Photo booth events took place in the Broadway BID (partnership with the Broadway Theatre and “Wild About Saskatoon,” May 23), the Downtown BID (Global Gathering Place, July) and Riversdale/Victoria Park (River Rendezvous, July; a Canada 150 project in partnership with Partners for the Saskatchewan River Basin, which included an interprovincial, Aboriginal canoe trek and race).

## **PARTNERSHIPS:**



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN  
**Office of Sustainability**  
FACILITIES MANAGEMENT DIVISION  
SUSTAINABILITY.USASK.CA

## *Saskatoon River Rendezvous Festival*

### **WE ARE THE RIVER: Community Engagement**

Images for *We are the River* were generated using the popular, participatory format of a “photo booth” where individuals chose a phrase from a selection of “signs” and were photographed against a green screen (which allowed layering with the river image in Photoshop). Five “sign” selections were provided that participants could choose from which articulated our connection to the South Saskatchewan river water that we drink and use every day and which becomes part of us:

*We are the River*  
*I am 70% Saskatchewan River*  
*We are kisiskāciwani-sīpiy*

*I am the River*  
*I am 70% South Saskatchewan Water*



Photo Booth at River Landing/Victoria Park, River Rendezvous, Saskatoon, July 13, 2017





Photo Booth at Global Gathering Place, 5h Ave N., Saskatoon, July 20, 2017

We gathered 180 images of individuals who comprised the diverse populations of Saskatoon at 5 photo booths in Saskatoon in May, June and July. All participants signed a photo release giving us permission to use their image on the digital billboard and Instagram sites (signed by parent/guardian for those under 18 years old).

### Schedule of Community Photo Booth Events:

**May 12, 2017:** Community Photo Booth #1 (Research Annex, University of Saskatchewan; in conjunction with *Becoming Water: Arts and Science in Conversation*, teaching collaboration (Shantz and Strickert); **13 river portrait photos** – some to be used to create the portable Banner for future photo booth events)  
Photographers: Barbara Reimer, Alex George, Samra Sheikh

**May 23, 2017:** Community Photo Booth #2 (Broadway Theatre; in conjunction with public lecture: *Reading the River: The Ecological Activist Art of Basia Irland* and “Wild About Saskatoon: Water”; **31 river portrait photos**. Photographers: Barbara Reimer, Alex George, Samra Sheikh

**June 21, 2017:** Community Photo Booth #3 (National Aboriginal Day; Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre, University of Saskatchewan); **36 river portrait photos**.  
Photographers: Barbara Reimer, Alex George, Samra Sheikh

**July 13:** Community Photo Booth #4 (River Landing/Victoria Park; in conjunction with River Rendezvous 150/Partners of the Saskatchewan River Watershed); **59 river portraits**.  
Photographers: Barbara Reimer, Alex George

**July 20:** Community Photo Booth #5 (Global Gathering Place; 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. N.); **41 river portraits**  
Photographers: Barbara Reimer, Alex George

Mentorship: Susan Shantz and Barbara Reimer mentored the two emerging artists, Alex George and Samra Sheikh, at each photo booth event. They assisted in explaining the project to the public and worked closely with photographer, Barbara Reimer, taking portraits and, after each event, using Photoshop processes to layer the river image to indicate the 70% mark/shoulder level of water in the body (background river photos were taken by Barbara Reimer in Saskatoon earlier in the spring). Completed digital files were provided to CVS/Outfront a week before the contract dates to be uploaded to their system and ready to run at Sunday midnight.

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## **WE ARE THE RIVER: Public Billboards**

**Digital Billboard**: 25<sup>th</sup> St. and 1<sup>st</sup> Ave N., Saskatoon  
**July 10 – 16 & August 14 – 21, 2017**

Three photo booths in May and June resulted in 80 portraits for the 24/7, week-long digital billboard in July. An additional 100 portraits were added to these 80 for the August week-long digital billboard.

Portraits appeared for 8-second duration/each on a continuous loop, with all 8 ad spaces booked for the duration of each week (see video: <https://vimeo.com/242697173>) The digital billboards ran continuously for 168 hours each week from midnight, Sunday July 10/August 14 until 11:59 p.m. the following Saturday July 16/August 21.

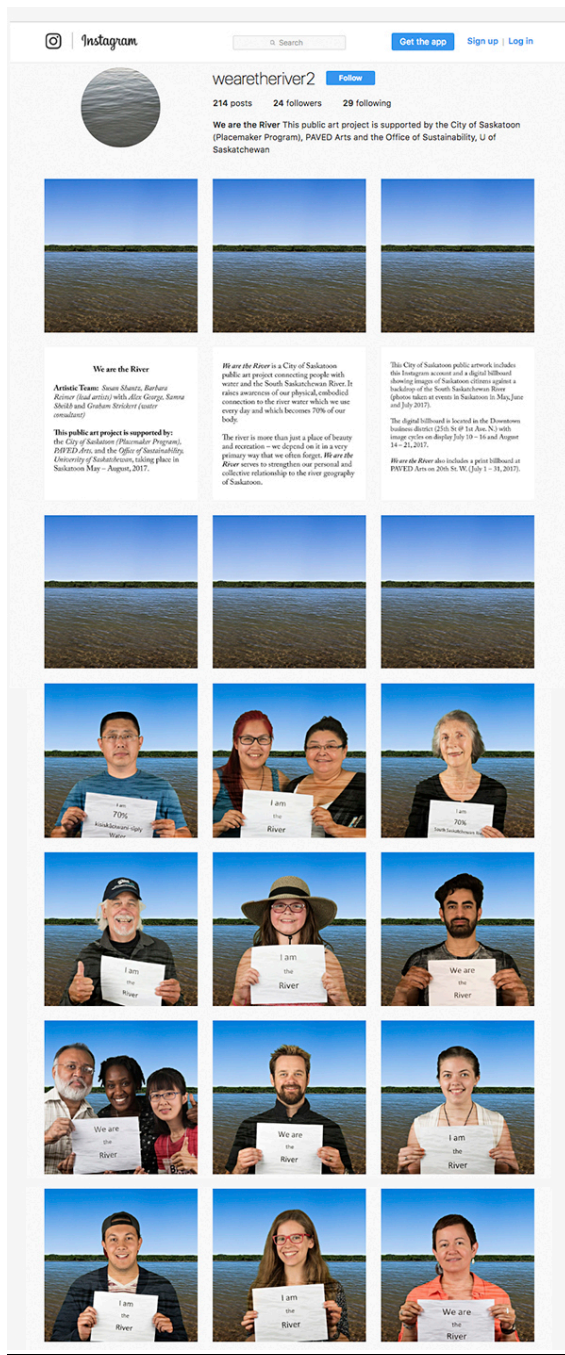
CVS/Outfront Media ran “free” (Space as Available) cycles of *We are the River* portraits in the fall of 2017, interspersed with reserved commercial advertising.





**Social Media: <https://www.instagram.com/wearetheriver2/>**

All 180 portrait images from the digital billboard cycle were uploaded to an Instagram account, **wearetheriver2**, for information and further public dissemination of this project. Individuals could also find their portrait there and share it on other social media sites. Below are compilation images of the Instagram site.



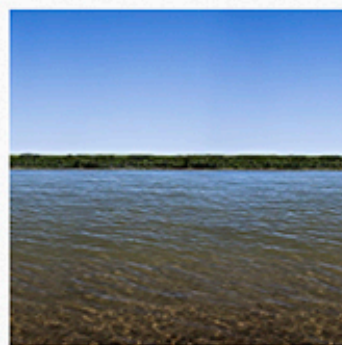
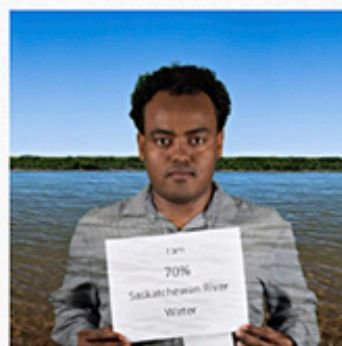
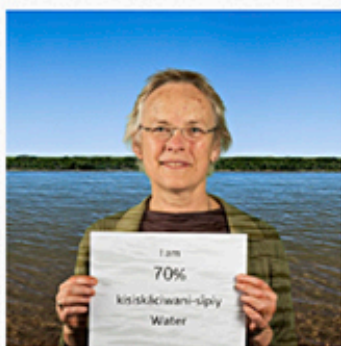
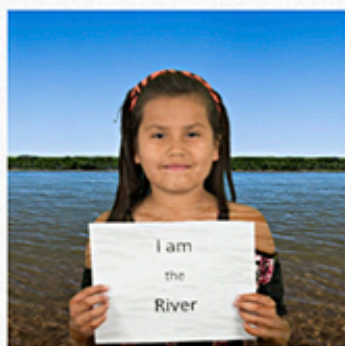
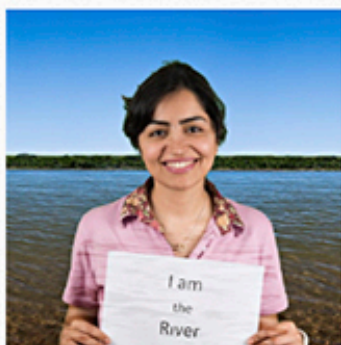














**Print Billboard:** PAVED Arts, 424 20<sup>th</sup> St. W., Saskatoon, **July 1 – 31, 2017**

The supersize, print billboard at *PAVED Arts* was applied for and awarded for a one-month period in July, installed late June. It was scheduled to correspond with River Rendezvous events in nearby Victoria Park, July 13/14, when the fourth photo booth was held. This opportunity to collaborate with PAVED Arts provided a very successful partnership extension of the Placemaker program in the Riversdale BID!



## **Biographies: Lead Artists and Collaborators**

### **Susan Shantz**



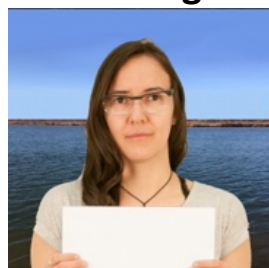
is a mixed-media artist whose work explores embodied ways of knowing. She is interested in ritual and gesture, and the ways in which art arises from these and becomes a cultural performance. Her materials and processes derive from a range of conceptual concerns including questioning the dualities of nature/culture and matter/spirit. Recent work has included the traveling solo exhibition which used collaborative processes of making, *creatures in translation*, and community-engaged, partnership projects with the Saskatoon Tribal Council (*The Child Taken*) and the School of Sustainability and the Environment (*Delta Days* traveling exhibition). She teaches sculpture and multi-media studio practices at the University of Saskatchewan where she recently received the College of Arts and Science Teaching Excellence Award and the Provost's Award for Collaborative Teaching and Learning. Her work has been exhibited across the country and internationally and can be seen at: [www.ccca.ca](http://www.ccca.ca) (Shantz)

### **Barbara Reimer**



works with installation, photo, and material art practices. Educated in Saskatchewan and Toronto, she is well-versed in historical and contemporary photographic and digital technologies. Barbara has been researching and testing the science of developing in coffee since 2007 and is interested in a mobile, "darkroomless" photo practice. Interests and influences of past and present work lie in ideas of documentary sculpture, the responsible photograph, the institution, travel, waste, and the processes and materiality thereof. Barbara has exhibited both locally and internationally, as well as taken part in solo and group shows in Nicaragua, Toronto, Michigan, and Saskatoon.

### **Alex George**



has been taking photographs since she bought her first DSLR camera in 2008. She has been a feature guest writer and photographer for Tea and Bannock, an indigenous women's photography blog, and has worked with Sweetmoon Photography company on several commercial First Nations projects. She is studying Indigenous Studies and Studio Art at the U of S and will graduate in 2017. She is Dene from English River First Nation (Treaty 10).

## **Samra Kanwal Sheikh**



moved to Saskatoon from Pakistan with her family in 2012. She completed her BFA exhibition and is currently adding a Minor in Digital Culture and New Media to her degree. Her main focus in arts is photography, mixed media and sculpture. She enjoys learning about world history, is fluent in four languages (English, Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi) and is part of The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at.

## **Graham Strickert**



is a founding member of the Global Institute for Water Security at the University of Saskatchewan and Assistant Professor at the School of Environment and Sustainability. His community-engaged research seeks to better understand how different people think about and use water and how their thinking influences behavior, water use and governance. His research also focuses on effective communication of multiple ways of knowing (science, arts, and traditional) through collaboration between artists' scientists and a wide range of community partners. Graham is the theme leader of Outreach and Engagement for the Changing Cold Regions Network and a co-investigator with the Delta Dialogue network. He recently facilitated the collaborative design process for the traveling Delta exhibition and traveled with it to remote communities in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Northwest Territories (images attached). Graham received the 2014 University of Saskatchewan Award for Distinction in Outreach for Public Service.