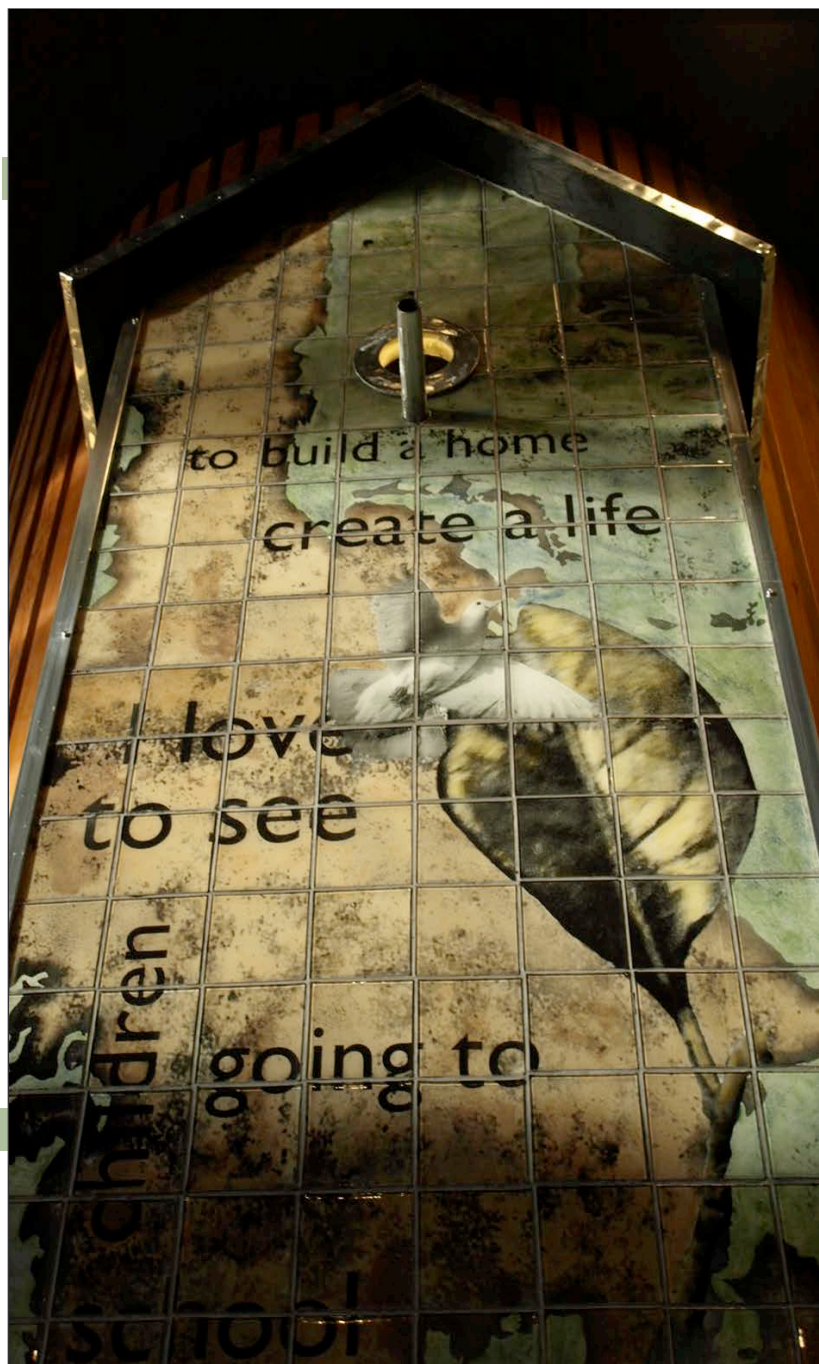


The Welcome Project

The background of the slide is a dark, textured surface, possibly a wall or a piece of fabric, with a prominent diagonal streak of bright green and white light. In the lower right corner, there is a white, bird-like shape, possibly a dove, with its wings spread, facing left. The overall mood is dramatic and hopeful.

Migration



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it's the migration in immigration

The Call

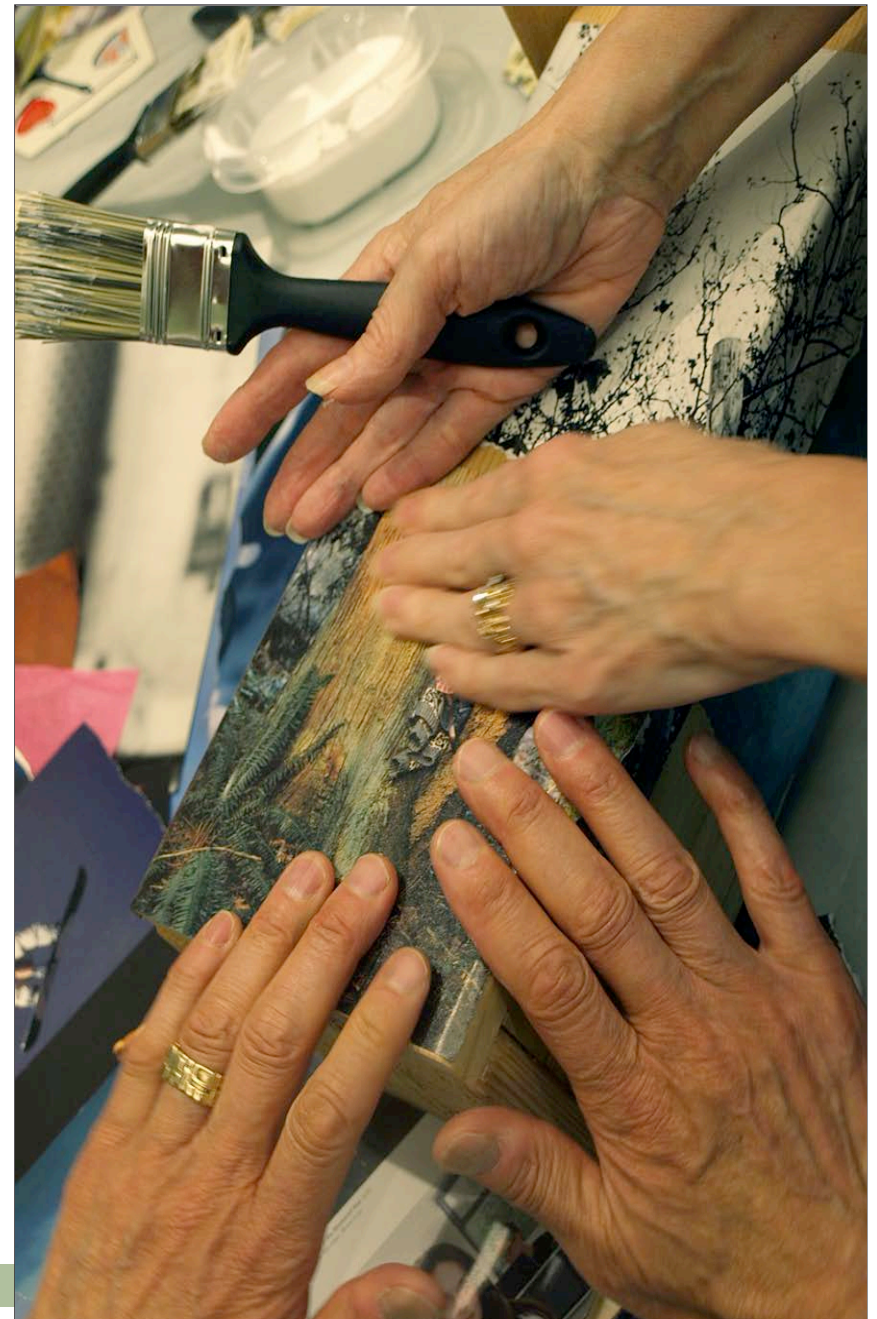
In January 2013, an open Request for Information and Qualifications (RFIQ) was released for public art at the Coquitlam Public Library, City Centre Location.

In total there were thirty-six expressions of interest from artists who have public installations around the world. Four artists were shortlisted for Jury consideration. On March 8, 2013 they presented their project concepts to the Community Project Committee.

The project's intent was to honour the new Coquitlam City Centre Library with a significant piece of public artwork. The artwork was to give pride of place, educate and inspire.

The artist would create a professional artwork by engaging the community in a dialogue through art practice and to examine the issues of racism, diversity, integration and inclusion. These difficult conversations would be held during several community workshops both structured and unstructured. The artist would take the ideas developed through the workshops to inform the creation of the artwork.

The successful artist was Blake Williams with his proposal "Migration."



Blake Williams

Proposal

When I first started thinking about the themes for this project, I thought about the various cultural groups within Coquitlam. It struck me how immigration creates an ongoing process of change with global forces at play.

The people arriving in the Coquitlam community are part of a massive flow of humanity across the face of the earth, with thousands in motion looking for a new home. I visualized and considered the huge impact and benefits this change could bring to a community.



*“A massive flow
of humanity.”*

Blake Williams

People leave their ancestral homes for many reasons: economic, social, environmental or to escape the ravages of war and oppression. They cross continents to find a new home. We are part of the largest migration mankind has ever known.

I wondered how I could use art to engage the community to reflect on racism, diversity and inclusion issues. I felt I needed a metaphor to illustrate the theme and to capture the imagination of the participants. I kept returning to the idea of migration. I thought of birds, the obvious connection to migration, and then a bird house. When a family arrives the first essentials to be addressed are shelter, safety and food. The birdhouse acts as a metaphor for a place of safety which is needed to live successful lives.

Process



The participants were provided with bird houses on which they attached imagery and personal stories to express their feelings about their community.

Decorating the birdhouses, using collage, allowed the process to be dramatic, easy and less intimidating for participants not comfortable with art, drawing and painting. It provided the opportunity for all ages and abilities to be involved. It democratized the art making process.

I remember as a teenager, coming home early on a summer evening as my dad was gardening and cleaning up the yard. I would sit on the steps, talking little, mainly just enjoying the moment. For me it was a safe place, a refuge from the teenage wars.

Home is a place where families and individuals can express their culture through food, art and history.





*"We hoped to learn from them but
they also learned about each other."*

Blake Williams

Workshops were held at eight different locations with over one hundred people participating. People came alone, in couples and families with children. They enthusiastically immersed themselves in the project. Some participants brought materials and photos which represented their lives or family histories, while others used the materials which were supplied to illustrate their experiences.

At each workshop facilitators offered translation services if necessary while encouraging participants to discuss the issues with each other.





Migration is changing the world. It offers an opportunity to create new, diverse, successful communities or it can create communities which fall into the trap of bigotry, racism and intolerance. It is clear we want the former not the latter.



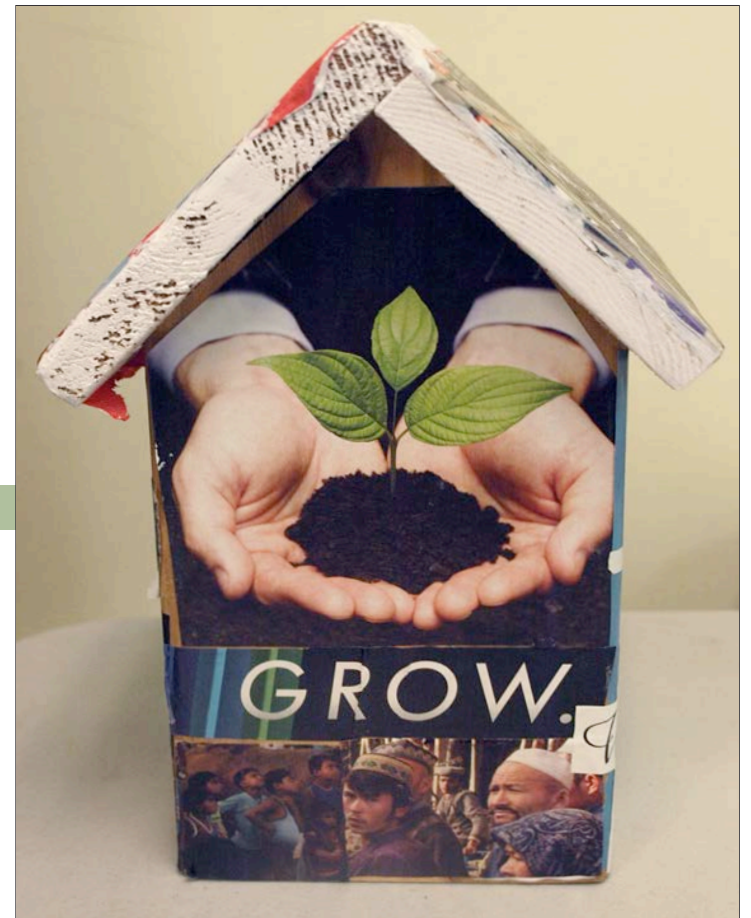
"When we first arrived we were so surprised to find people from all over the world, this is a very special part of what we love about our new home."

workshop participant



*"My birdhouse is a timeline of Me!
As a baby to a mother, as a
Malaysian becoming Canadian."*

workshop participant



*"Immigration is a very difficult process, and it needs
courage and persistence. I love "sharing the love"
with people here in Canada...it is a long way to success...
it is hanging in the sky."*

workshop participant



*"Gayle is of First Nation bloodline.
She has Spirit running through her and our
lives all time...we are two women who were
married in Squamish with all our family
camping around us."*

workshop participant

*"I love to see the children
going to school unafraid."*

workshop participant











Fabrication

When the workshops were completed, I needed to process what I had learned and decide how it could inform the public art I was to create for the City Centre Library. My original intention was not to follow the birdhouse theme; however, the metaphor was so well received, I decided to design and build two - twelve foot structures mimicking the basic birdhouse form. I would clad the forms in glass with images which told the Migration story along with text to communicate the experiences of the workshop participants.



The photographic images and text were selected, then exposed onto screen printing frames. Ceramic enamels were applied through the screen mesh depositing the image onto glass.





The glass was cut into three inch squares and heated in a kiln to fourteen hundred and fifty degrees fahrenheit, then cooled over a period of 10 hours. This firing process fuses the image to the glass. Each piece is hand painted on the back of the glass using ceramic enamels, re-fired and installed onto the “birdhouse” form.



Artist's Studio



Installation



*"Sometimes I am still afraid but I
feel safe to start a new life and to
build our home."*

workshop participant



Celebration





On December 5, 2013 Migration was unveiled with Coquitlam Mayor Richard Stewart, Members of Council, Library Board Representatives, the Public Art Selection Committee, as well as some participants from the Welcome Project workshops. Participants were able to see how the stories they told informed the work.



"I grew up in Canada in the 1970's and was often the only minority in my class. This led me to want to find a home or City that reflected my love of art, diversity and nature. I feel that I found it here in this city."

workshop participant



"I was struck by the strength and resilience of all those who came to the workshops. From the new immigrants I heard how they are torn between the appreciation of what their new country offers while memories of what they have left behind lingers."

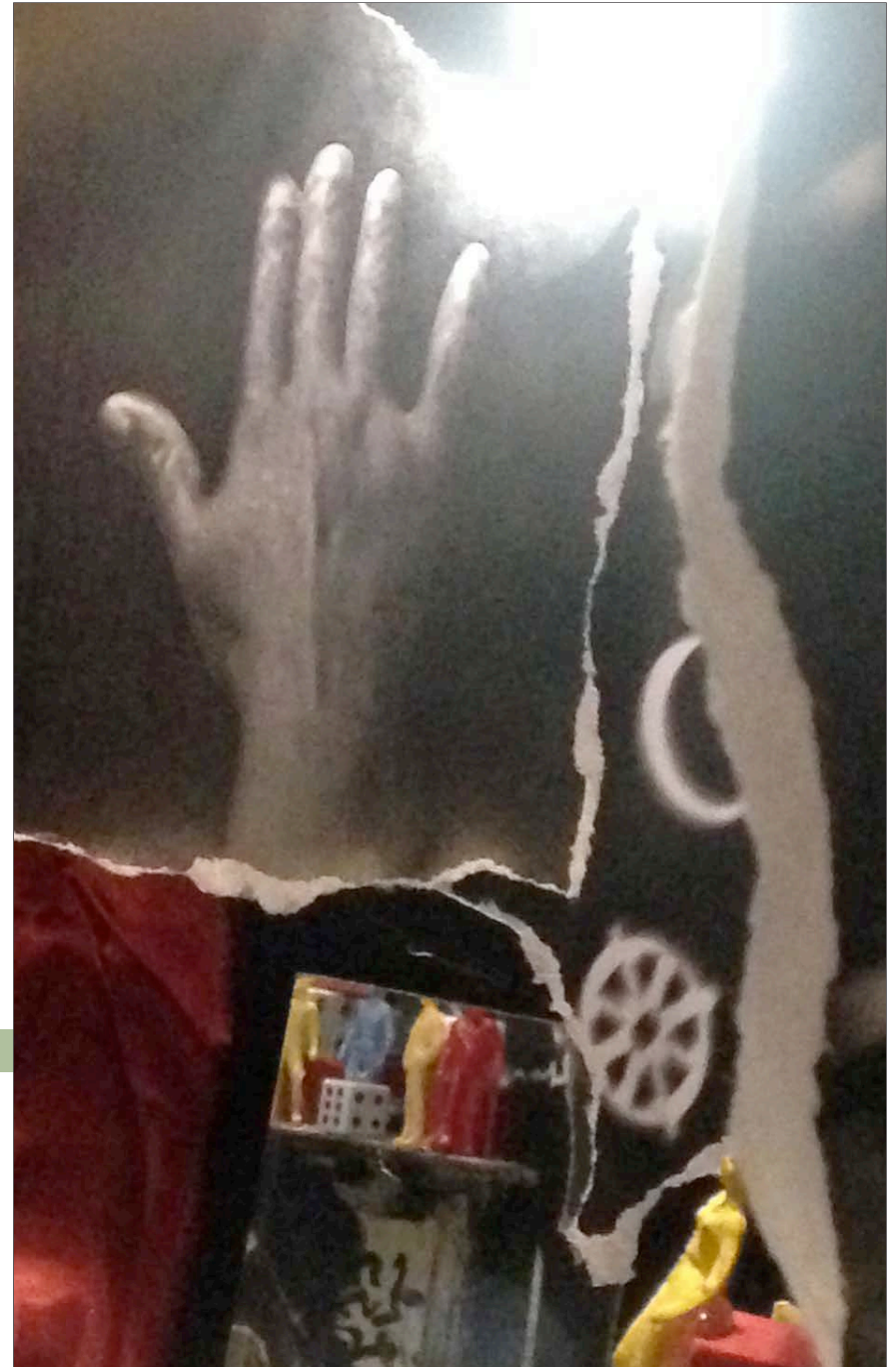
Blake Williams

Discovery



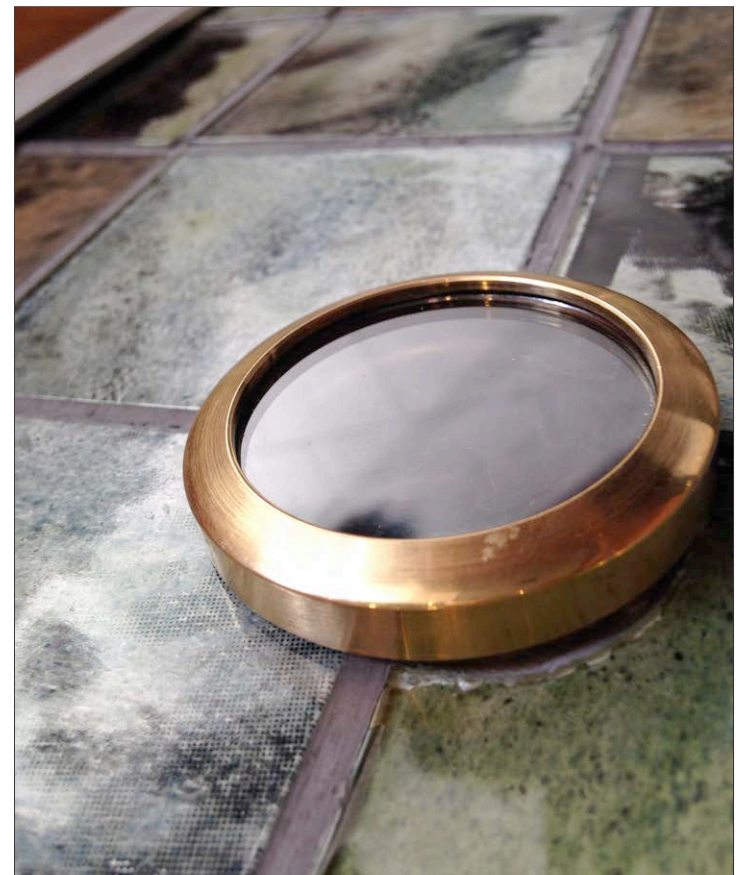
"I wanted the work to be interactive. I decided the work would speak to the themes of the project on the inside as well as the outside, to integrate the inner and outer worlds."

Blake Williams





Brass and glass “spy holes” are set into the sides of the forms to allow visitors to view the installation on the inside which is lit by programmable LED lighting.





*"Before I came to Canada my life in my home
had to be hidden from my life in public ...
here my inner and outer lives are one."*

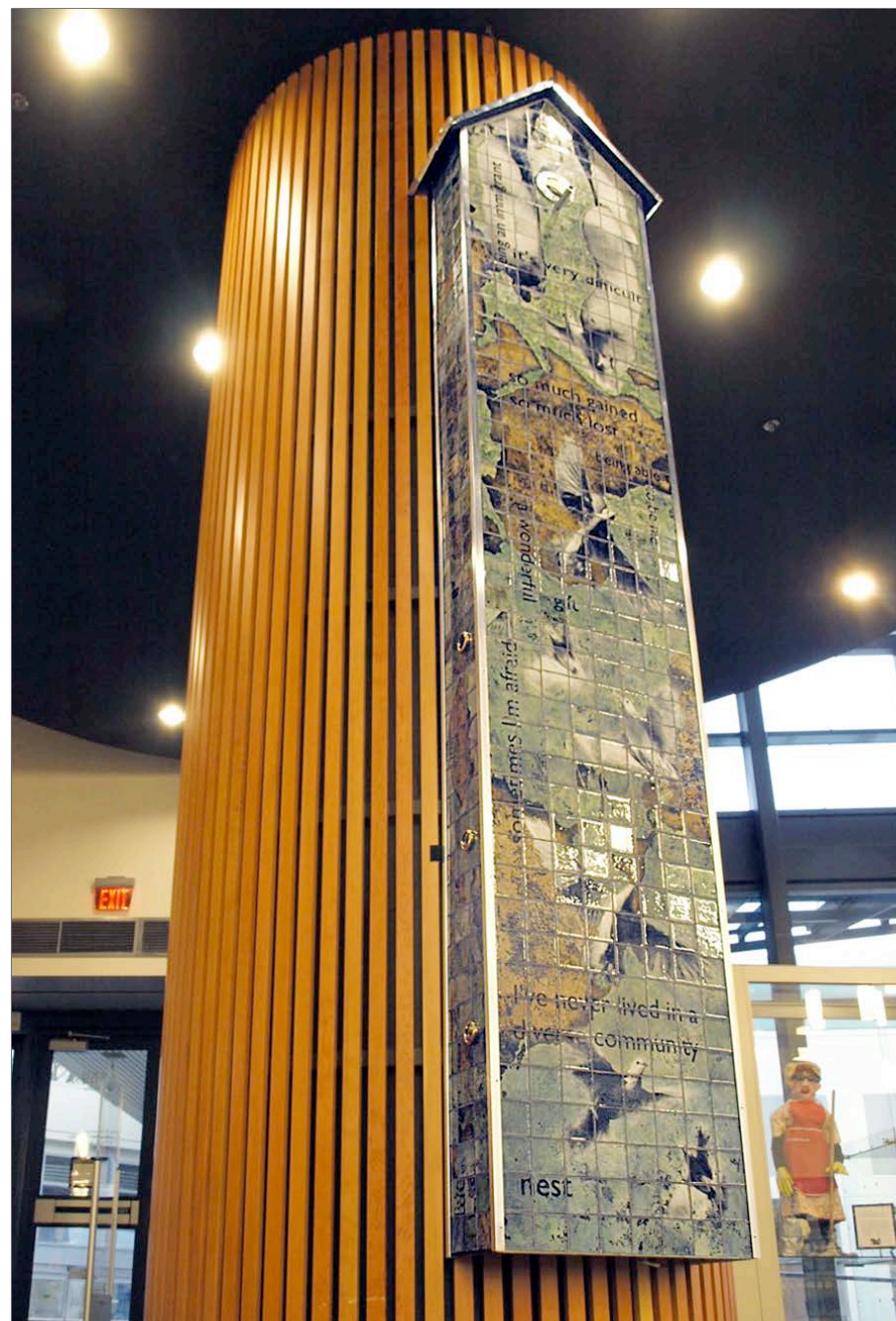
workshop participant





*"We come here to Coquitlam to
build our homes and make a life
for our families."*

workshop participant



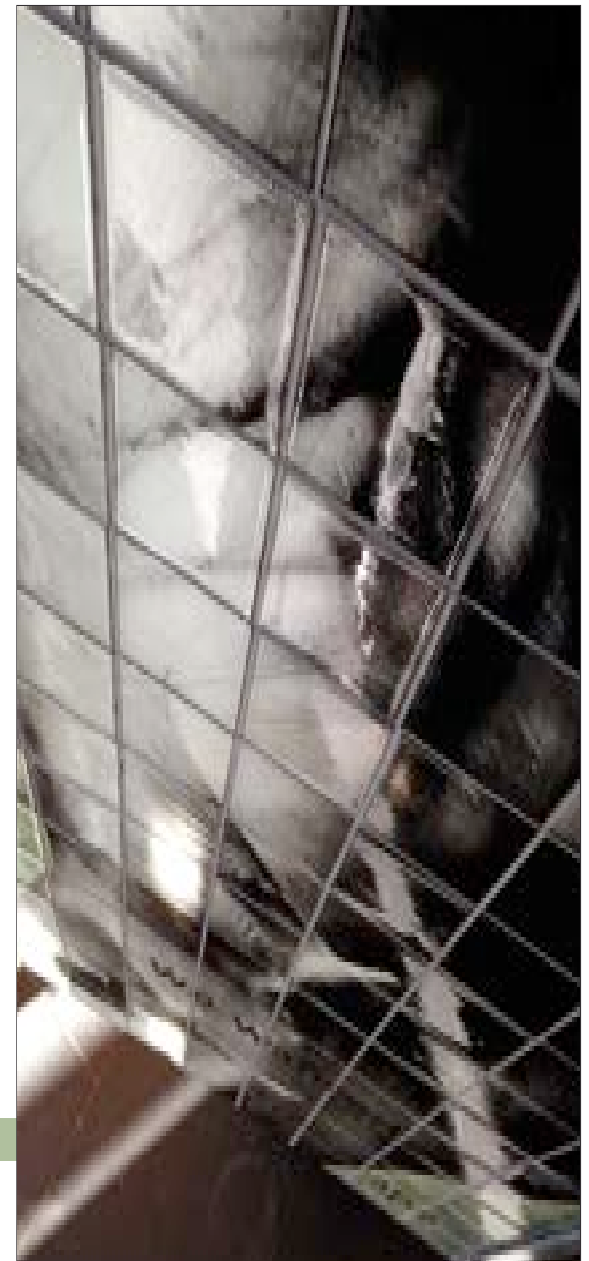
About the Artist

Blake Williams is a Vancouver based artist working primarily in public art. He has a background in photography and film with digital studies at Emily Carr University and specialized photographic training at Langara College.

Recent public works include: “All Things intertwined” in Richmond, BC; “RISE” in Red Deer, AB; “ Illuminations” in Port Moody, BC; and “Body, Mind, Spirit” in Calgary, AB.

In addition, he has also directed a documentary film for CBC Television’s series “ The Lens” entitled “Lottery on Ice”; has completed primary filming for “Secret Fire”; a documentary examining spiritual pilgrimage; a music video for Alpha YaYa Diallo; and a number of short personal video projects reflecting on family, neighbourhood and community.

Blake Williams
www.blakewilliams.ca



Message from the Library

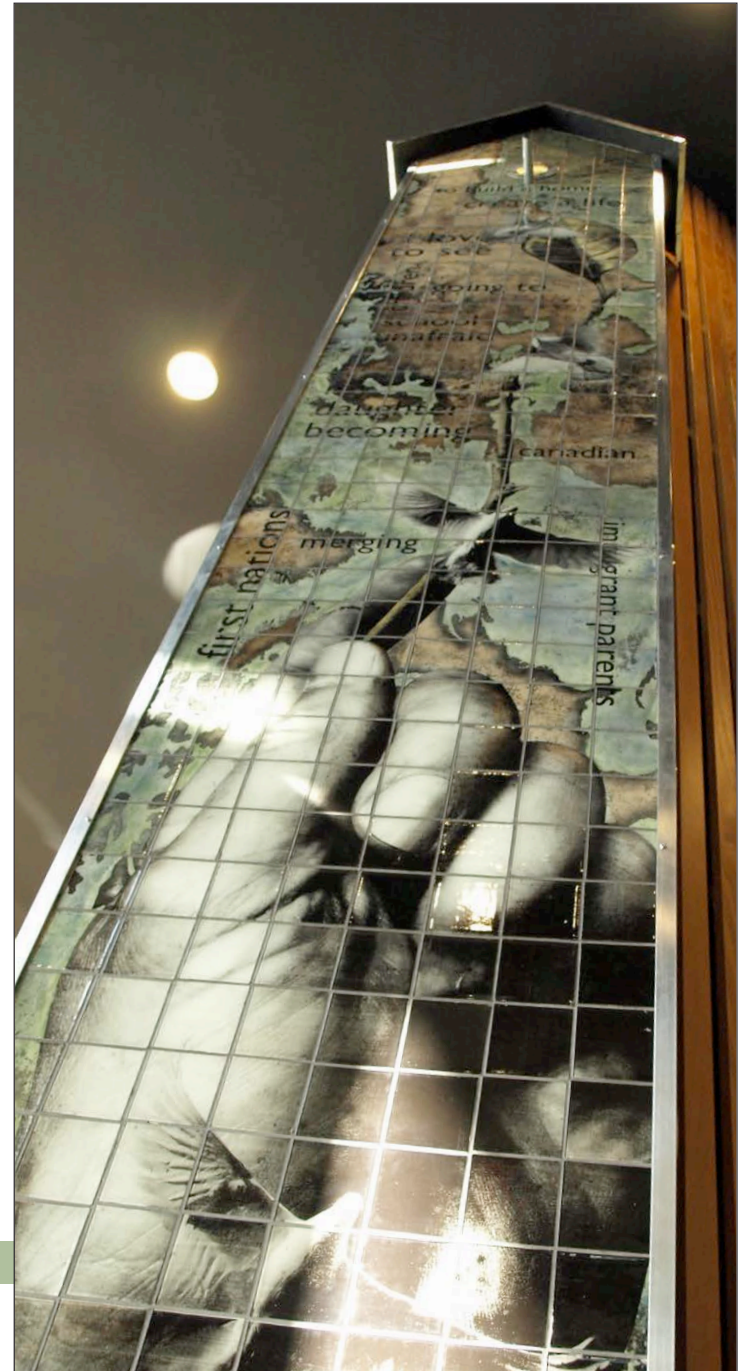
We at the Coquitlam Public Library are thrilled to have such a wonderful work of art at our new City Centre Library. The concept, welcoming all people while recognizing issues that have brought many of our citizens to our community - is beautifully manifested in this art piece. The imagery of birds migrating to a new home that represents the aspirations of all people – reaching higher and the achieving of one's full potential - is both hopeful and thought-provoking.

We are so pleased that “Migration” will delight all ages as one looks inside to discover wondrous things. It inspires thought and discussion – asking questions – and that is what a library is all about.

We were delighted to display all the birdhouses that were the created; these helped inspire “Migration”. We will continue to display them through the large photograph of all the participants and their individual works of art. Again, the creativity of the artist and his volunteers is a delight and inspiration.

Thank you to Blake, the volunteers, the staff at the City of Coquitlam and the Province of British Columbia for making this beautiful artwork available to our community for its people.

Many thanks from the Coquitlam Public Library.



"It was amazing that we, as members of the committee, were able to achieve consensus every step of the way. To me, it shows how superior Blake's concept for the project is in terms of understanding exactly what we were trying to achieve and the message we would like to convey to the community through a piece of public art."

My learning is that residents are very interested in community activities and are prepared to engage in them given the proper opportunities and prompting. I think Blake's idea of engaging people to build bird houses in order to draw out people's culture, emotion and hopes for the future is just brilliant."

Ron Lee, jury member



The Embrace BC Grant

The City of Coquitlam allocated \$10,000 for public art in the new Coquitlam City Centre Library, which officially opened in November 2012. In April 2012, City and Library staff applied to the Province of BC for a grant of \$35,000 under the Embrace BC program. The objective of this program was to use the arts to build inclusive communities. The joint City of Coquitlam/Coquitlam Public Library application proposed engaging a professional community artist to use art as a tool to examine issues of racism, diversity, integration and inclusion, and explore how the Coquitlam community could become more welcoming and inclusive. As a result, the City's initial \$10,000 commitment for public art was leveraged into a \$45,000 public art project, named "The Welcome Project"

Project Partners

A Community Project Committee was appointed to guide "The Welcome Project". This group was instrumental in selecting the project artist and in ensuring a community engagement strategy was built into the creative process. The members included two representatives from the Library Board, two members of the City's Multiculturalism Advisory Committee and two members from the Arts and Cultural Advisory Committee.

In addition, the City partnered with community organizations to host the art workshops and assist with publicity, including:

- SUCCESS
- SHARE Family Services Society
- Glen Pine 50+Society
- Douglas College
- Burquest Jewish Community Centre
- Place Maillardville
- School District 43
- ISS of BC



Lessons Learned

The lessons learned through this process were many. The project started as the title suggested finding out if Coquitlam is a welcoming place to live. People told us that Coquitlam was very welcoming, as were the people. Some people who had arrived ten or twenty years ago felt like they “stood out” back then because they were members of an ethnic minority; today they felt like they belonged. Many told us that Coquitlam was a very good place to raise children, and many more told us they have lived in many places, but they love Coquitlam and plan to make Coquitlam their home. Several felt very safe in Coquitlam, and contrasted this with their experience in their country of origin, where they did not feel safe.

People generally felt that diversity was beneficial. They found it interesting to have many different cultures and traditions represented. Having access to many different types of food was seen as a great benefit; although some people confessed that they still preferred foods from their country of origin.

The number one challenge cited was the language barrier. People found it hard to get to know neighbours who did not speak English well and praised the City for having events to bring people together. Other concerns included the clash of Canadian values with values that are brought from the home country. Those who raised this issue felt strongly that people who arrive in Canada should adapt to the Canadian value system. Some mentioned the challenges of finding work in Canada, and the frustration of not having their credentials accepted. Language was also a barrier to finding employment.

People who commented on their sense of belonging felt accepted by the Coquitlam community. They feel like they can “be themselves,” and continue to follow customs, traditions and practices from their home country.

The most common response to a query about how we could make people feel more at home was to have more events like the Bird House Workshops to bring people together. Other workshops were suggested as well as musical events. Many were looking forward to participating in the Canada Day festivities.

What our workshop participants learned:

- 87% said they learned something about other cultures
- 30% said they would be more open and tolerant of people from other cultures
- 18% said they would do something differently in the future
- 58% said they might do something differently in the future

The majority of people said, “They would not change their attitude and behaviour because they already consider themselves tolerant, welcoming and inclusive.”

Workshop Participants

Adams Family, Fraser Alexander, Larry Anderson, Wendy Anderson, Olesya Bilous, Yoon Kyung Bin, Kurtis Campbell, Nadia Carvalho, Rosa Chang, Cindy Chen, Niko Cheng Serrine Cheng, Wong Ki Cheung, Carol Chichinskas, Jerome Cho, Anne Choe, Sunah Choh, Laura Couch, Lillian Cumberbirch, Jiin Chun, Sun Hwa Chun, Starr Crawshaw, Tom Crawshaw, Yossi Dajan, William Dean, Helen Deng, Sam Di, Kris Draper, Alina Dou, Quin Fletcher, Mariana Fro, Asmona Fu, Graham Gurniak, Nancy Gurniak, Johnathan & Natalie Harder, Beatrice Ho, Gayle Hunter, Lee Hyunju, Ah Rin Jung, Hanna Jung, Young Og Jung, Tammy Hubbard, Farah Kabir, Ginny Kenacan, Ji Young Kim, Michele Lee Kim, Rachel Kim, Tara King, Mitra Khoubyar, William Kwangjoo, Rita Knight, Diana Davies-Koo, Grace Kuo, Elaine Kwok, Masa Kwok, Alan Lai, Keanna Lai, Chaemin Lee, Elizabeth Lee, Jeemin Lee, Sang Eun Lee, Eva Li, Amy Liu, Renee Liu, Fraser MacKrous, Margaret Matthews, Teena McCoy, Ian Yaewon Min, Wendy Moore, Carol Morris, Hee Jeong Myung, Veronica Nel, Amina Niazi, Elaine Nie, Ying Nie, Nicole Palnikof, Joon Park, Diane Pearen, Klara Pennal, Krista Pennal, Ron Peters, Tammy Pilon, Banafsheh Razzaghi, Angela Reeves, Hanna Reeves, Eran Roubini, Alisa Sato, Dariush Sato, Izumi Sato, Mirzaei Sato, Bella Best-Sanberg, James Shi, Gloria Shin, Melissa Silver, Harvey Soon, Linda Soon, Julie Tang, Angela Wang, Joyce Watts, Anne Wong, Ki Cheung Wong, Jinyu Xue (Helen), Annie Ye, Fei Ye, H Yeo, Juh Hye Yeon, Annie Zhang and Yan Zhang



Jury Members

Community Committee: Erin Adams, Angela Crocker, Astrid Heyerdahl, Ron Lee, J.J. McCullough, Christopher Moreno, Bertha Rojas, and Eran Roubini.

Staff Liason: Silvana Harwood, Library; Lynda Baker and Robyn Newton, City of Coquitlam

Photographs by artist, Jay Shaw Photography and Zana Williams