

# ENTERTAINMENT & LIFE

## Outdoor art fair celebrates 60 years

Milestone marked with online show, including senior artists exhibition

**SUE CARTER**  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Every July, Nathan Phillips Square gets a boost of colour as the Toronto Outdoor Art Fair transforms the city hall space into a sprawling gallery. The annual weekend-long event, which turns 60 this year, has become a must-do on the city's cultural calendar and a great place to discover hundreds of new talents.

The fair even precedes Nathan Phillips Square. For four years before it moved to the newly built city hall in 1965, the art fair was held in the parking lot and courtyard of the Four Seasons Motor Hotel at 415 Jarvis St.

Late philanthropist Murray Koffler, who co-owned the groovy mid-century hotel, was inspired by an art fair he and his wife Marvella visited on a trip to New York. Koffler called on a few friends — including artist Jack Pollock and Alan Jarvis, the former director of the National Gallery of Canada — for help starting an event where up-and-coming artists could sell their works directly to the public.

Although the show won't go on as usual this year at city hall, there is plenty of content online to get your fix, including a new exhibition, "60 Over Sixty." On view at [torontooutdoor.art](http://torontooutdoor.art), with sales till July 11, the show features senior artists who helped shape the country's art scene, many of whom have memories of the fair. Curated by Flavio Belli, the exhibition includes pieces by the likes of Michael Snow, Suzy Lake, Robert Bateman, Jane Ash Poitras and Barbara Astman.

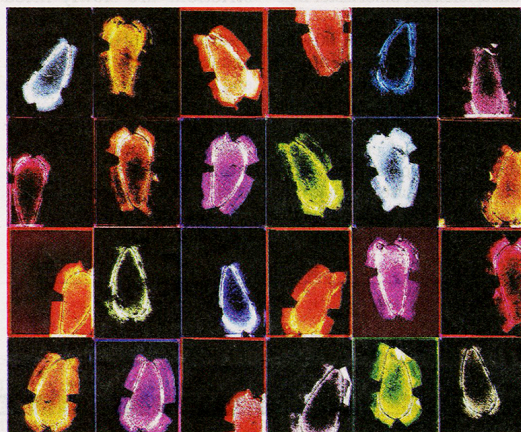
Astman is perhaps best known for her groundbreaking experimental work with Polaroid images, particularly one series in which her self-portraits are layered with lines of text. (That is a coolly posed Astman and her art on the cover of Loverboy's 1980 debut album.)

After graduating from the Ontario College of Art in 1973, Astman recalls joining a group of artists for her first Toronto Outdoor Art Fair. It was a low-key event back then. Instead of the



ANDREW CHEDDIE SOOKRAH

Andrew Cheddie Sookrah's painting "Hydrating Witness, Cumberland Yorkville Transformation" is an homage to the time he spent at offices at Bloor and Yonge, observing the neighbourhood's dramatic transition. It's part of the Toronto Outdoor Art Fair's "60 Over Sixty" exhibition.



BARBARA ASTMAN

Barbara Astman created negatives using lint saved from her dryer for her work "Domestic Warrior 4A."

professional stands that many of the artists use now to display their works, she lugged milk crates filled with her work, which she hung on fences.

"I think we did more trade than we did sales, but we also really felt like we were part of a

community," says Astman, who returned to the art fair years later as an award juror. "I think that's partially what the fair does. It makes you feel like you're part of a bigger picture, especially when you spend so much time working alone."

Astman, who just retired from teaching at OCAD University, continues to produce exciting photo-based works, manipulating objects until they're unrecognizable. Her "60 Over Sixty" piece, "Domestic Warrior 4A," is a black grid covered with jewel-toned teardrops that almost look like they're taken from a scientific test. And in a way they are: Astman saved lint from her dryer for a year. She took some beautifully shaped pieces of the lint into the darkroom and used them to make direct negatives without a camera. She experimented with the enlarger and scanning the images to create the piece's gorgeous colours and patterns.

"I realized it was the DNA of my family because of what's in the dryer, all the little fluff from their pockets or whatever," she says. "I kept thinking there's probably all sorts of important information packed away in this lint."

The title "Domestic Warrior" comes from that familiar feeling of doing laundry every day.

"It was like holding up my shield and doing my laundry, but then all of a sudden seeing the creativity in it too," says Astman. "I like seeing creativity in everyday objects and everyday activities."

When painter Andrew Cheddie Sookrah was approached to be part of "60 Over Sixty," he had been working on a painting off and on for a year, and used the opportunity to push the work past the finish line. "Hydrating Witness, Cumberland Yorkville Transformation" is an homage to the time Sookrah spent working in offices at Bloor and Yonge, observing the neighbourhood's dramatic transition.

**"It makes you feel like you're part of a bigger picture, especially when you spend so much time working alone."**

**BARBARA ASTMAN**  
ARTIST

A man stands at a window, looking out at a scene of disrepair as construction vehicles move piles of rubble. One can almost hear the smash of concrete and taste the dust.

"Every single thing in that painting ended up having relevant layers of meaning to what I'm going through in life and what I've already experienced," Sookrah says.

Sookrah, who immigrated to Canada in 1974 from Guyana, first took part in the Toronto Outdoor Art Fair in 1981, where he won an honourable mention in the watercolour category. In fact, one of the jurors who selected him, Joanne Tod, is also part of "60 Over Sixty."

Remembering his early years as a struggling artist, Sookrah is now a sponsor of a Toronto Outdoor Art Fair student award.

"I jokingly tell people that every time I've shown, I've made it onto the awards podium," he says.

"But I know what it's like to be in school as an immigrant, to not have a lot of money in my pocket. I know that the recognition of the fair and the small amount that I was able to put toward an award would go a long way."