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Queen Street diversity celebrated in new Theatre Passe Muraille project

By Ari Altstedter
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Project to give audiences a chance to learn about the area's history and social issues affecting it

Art may soon meet life at Theatre Passe Muraille [<http://passemuraille.on.ca>] near Queen Street West and Bathurst Street, where both actors and regular people will come together in an audio tour to dramatize the area's unique character.

The project is one part of an ambitious program of street theatre the venerable cultural institution plans to roll out, thanks to a grant from Toronto's Metcalf Foundation [<http://www.metcalffoundation.com>].

The grant is one of four issued by the foundation after putting out a call for projects to make Toronto a more cultural, sustainable and just place to live.

The other winners include an eco-food hub, an alliance between rural and urban people for sustainable food systems, and a year-long project by artists, activists and randomly selected Torontonians to create a vision for a better Toronto.

"On one level I think they're going to be very interesting standalone projects," said Sandy Houston, the president of the Metcalf Foundation. "But I'm hoping that they will also stimulate a broader conversation about ways in which we can imagine the future of the city."

For Andy McKim, Passe Muraille's artistic director, the future of the city involves art reaching beyond the walls of his theatre.

"What we're interested in doing is going out beyond our walls into the community and finding ways to bring culture to parts of the city where people can have access to it without having to go into an institution," he said.

The prime example of this convergence is the audio tour scheme which Mr. McKim hopes will display the breadth of Queen Street's diversity: from homeless people and condo-dwellers, to recent immigrants and long-time residents. He says the project will provide a unique chance for audience members to learn about the area's history and the social issues currently affecting it.

"They'll be listening to music and commentary and watching both the general public and performers, and maybe not knowing the difference between the two," he said. "And hopefully we will be able to give people a sense of this social

justice issue through that piece of work.

Because of the Metcalf Foundation's unique combination of social justice and cultural advocacy Mr. McKim describe them as "visionary."

"I'm really so gratified, excited, pleased, to be living in a city with such a foundation, and now to be supported by such a foundation," he said.

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