



PLAYING IN PUBLIC

Donor Impact Report

PROJECT GOALS RECAP

Playing In Public sought to explore play's role in urban recovery and posed the following questions:

- What are the rules of play, and, how can we re-write them?
- How has the nature of play changed in a mid/post-COVID world?
- How can a neighbourhood work together to create a community-wide “play precinct”?
- Can play be a strategy for urban recovery?



REFLECTIONS & HIGHLIGHTS

Originally planned for the summer of 2020, the rapid onset of COVID-19, forced us to reschedule our multi-artist exhibition, *Playing in Public* to summer 2021. While not without its challenges, an extended timeline allowed us to reimagine our original vision and realize it in the expanded, neighbourhood-wide exhibition consisting of eight new local, national, and international public art commissions, plus a series of uplifting roaming constellation projects. Following a turbulent year, we explored play as a tool to understand current cultural, social, and political contexts and to identify and overcome challenges presented by the pandemic and by longstanding inequities.

We launched *Playing in Public* amid a myriad of uncertainties, primarily would audiences be ready to come out and play? We are overjoyed to report that the answer is an enthusiastic yes!

We welcomed over 100,000 people throughout the run of the exhibit with a response that further highlighted the importance of public space as a site for play and well-being.

PLAYING IN PUBLIC INITIATIVE TRACKS

Creative Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8 artist-led installations• 2 roaming and/or pop-up projects
Interactive Games & Talks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6 interactive Tiny Games• 3 episodes of Playcast podcast• 2 virtual talks
Engagement & Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 15 neighbourhood partners on a 2.6km connective Play Path• 23M impressions from earned media• 212K impressions on owned social media• 74 media articles and broadcast stories
Artist Residency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 artist in residence
Community Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 Audience engagement & feedback survey featuring<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 63 counting & observation sheets• 60 in-person short surveys• 25 in-person long-form interviews• 4 emotional wheel sessions

IMPACT & REACH

With your support, we were able to invite French artists and designers into this important conversation, bringing them in dialogue with Canadian counterparts.

Highlights include:

- 100,000+ attendees
- 23M earned media impressions & 74 media articles and broadcast stories, including articles in the CBC and Toronto Life
- Over 200,000 impressions on owned social media
- Enthusiastic response from local and out-of-town visitors

See Appendix A for featured press listings and social results.

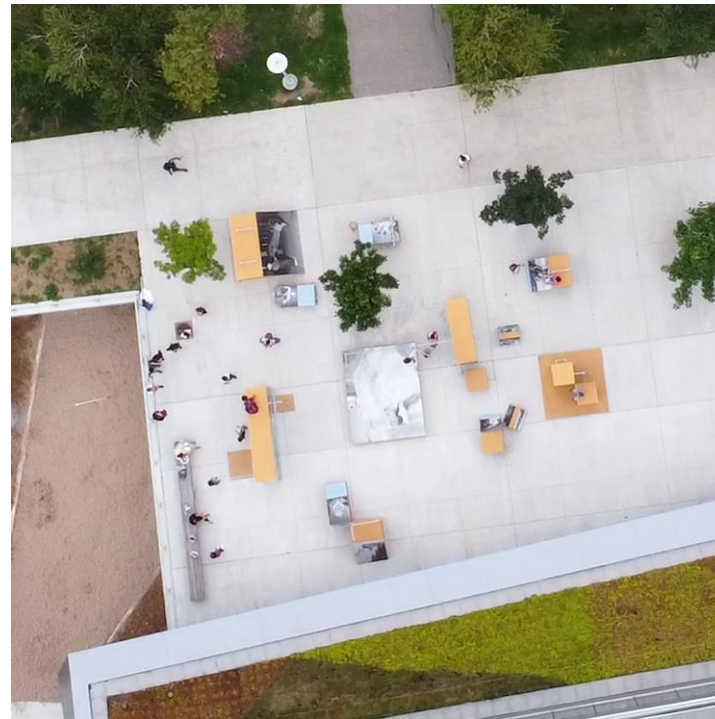


CREATIVE PROJECTS



Play Public (France)

French artist Thomas Mailaender and designer Erik Kessels drew from the Canadian National Exhibition photo archives to adorn their parkour-inspired piece that invited playful trips back in time at Canoe Landing Campus. A popular site, children and adults alike showed off their gymnastics-like moves on this piece. Co-commissioned with Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival.



For more photo/video: <https://play.thebentway.ca/experience/play-public/>

CREATIVE PROJECTS

For more photo/video: <https://play.thebentway.ca/experience/dream-street/>

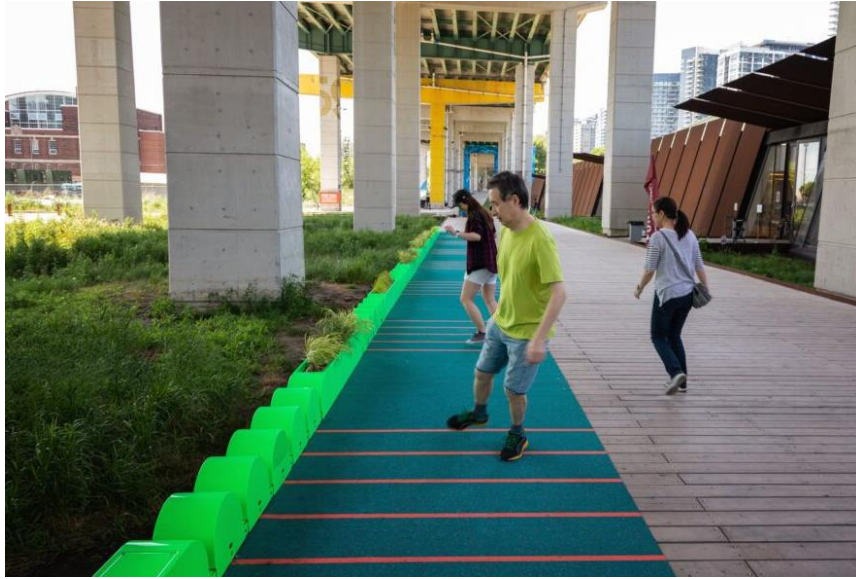


Dream Street (France)

On the façade of a formerly-industrial building slated for eventual redevelopment, Paris-based urban agency, The Street Society, produced Dream Street, a vertical playground inviting visitors to experience the ever-changing city from a child's perspective – a "make-believe mural". We were heartened by the appreciative response to this work, particularly from local residents. Due to COVID-19, The Street Society was not able to travel from France, but together we solicited illustration submissions from Paris and Toronto youth (which were integrated into the mural design).

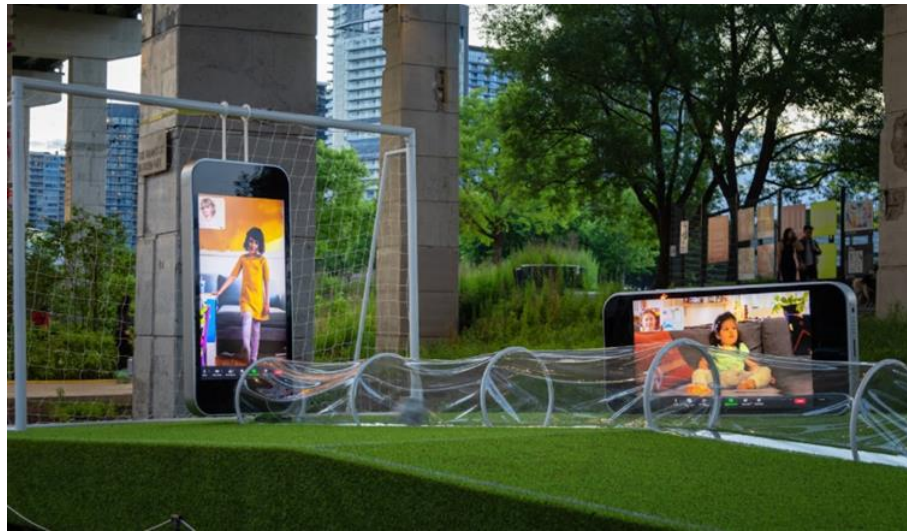


CREATIVE PROJECTS



Walk Walk Dance

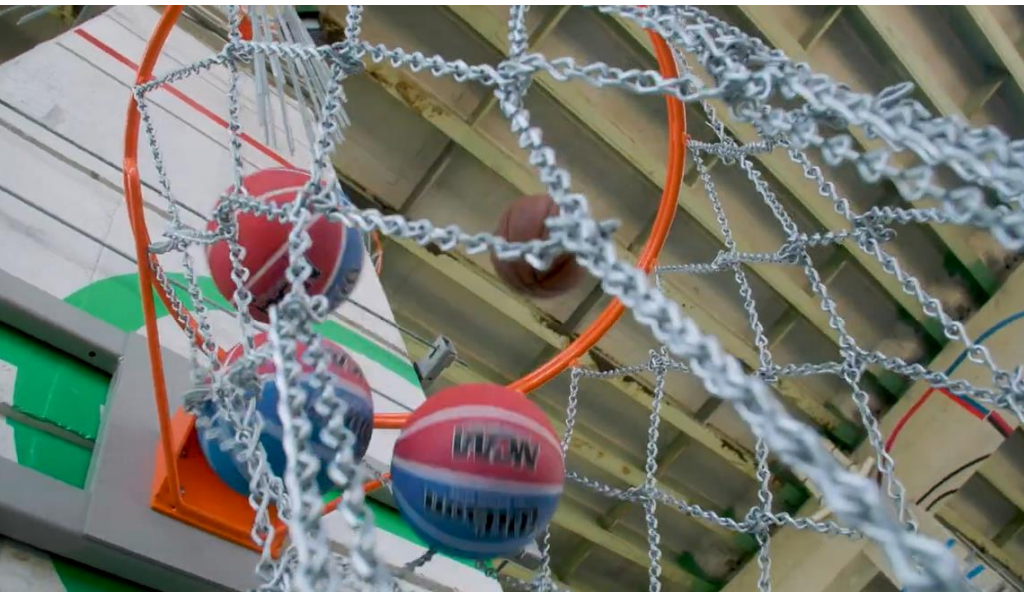
Montreal-based studio Daily tous les jours' latest collaborative public space experiences was, Walk Walk Dance – a series of music-making lines in front of Fort York Visitor Centre that explored new opportunities for play even amidst physical distancing rules. Perfect strangers could safely and accessibly make music together by moving their feet, inviting new forms of dance. Further, Walk Walk Dance was conceived as a roving project (The Bentway was the first stop on its multi-city tour) — one designed for struggling cities that may need to quickly revive their public spaces through easily deployed experiences supportive of social recovery.



Nil: Nil

Nil:Nil, by Toronto-based Studio F Minus' shows three children playing soccer "together" from the comfort of their own homes, each framed on a larger-than-life cell phone through a Zoom-like interface. In Nil:Nil, technology allows the game to go on, overcoming lockdowns and closures, while also ensuring that no progress is made.

CREATIVE PROJECTS



Double Dribble

Esmaa Mohamoud's expansive installation transformed the Bentway site into a surreal basketball court with 28 hoops of wildly varying diameters and court lines running dysfunctionally throughout the space. Without rules, Mohamoud posited, play is democratized, offering entry points for all people to participate. We were delighted to see players of all ages interacting with and enjoying this impressive piece.



CREATIVE PROJECTS

Big Red

UK-based artist collective Assemble brought to life one of architect Lina Bo Bardi's play sculptures in the audience-favourite, Big Red. The structures weren't shown with any architectural accuracy, rather as they would be in the imagination of a child: imprecise, colourful, and curiously scaled. Visitors enjoyed playing and relaxing on this installation throughout the run of the exhibition.



Jax

An offsite installation (co-presented with Concord Adex) by Toronto-based public space artist Pierre Poussin, Jax reimagined one of the world's oldest and most widespread games (jacks) by amplifying its scale and colour, thereby inviting visitors to see the game anew.

CREATIVE PROJECTS

Midsummer Mix Vol. 1

Toronto-based pixel artist Nelson Wu and collaborating composer, biosphere, offered visitors absolute escapism along the city's Waterfront. Inspired by classic 8-bit videogame graphics, Wu created playfully pixelated approximations of the area's icons, from the CN Tower to the Toronto Island Ferry Terminal, presenting them as unique levels of a hyper-local video game.



Happy Clouds

This joyful, floating and environmentally-friendly installation by Stuart Semple featured smiley-faced bubble sculptures that were released with helium to drift in public spaces and bring viewers a brief moment of cheer. Semple's Happy Clouds has exhibited outside the Tate Modern in London, as well as in Dublin, Moscow, Australia and Milan, and here showed at Canoe Landing and along the Waterfront.

PLAY PATH

Charting a neighbourhood route between installations, a connective Play Path (designed with Cossette) injected micro-moments of play into daily strolls around the block.

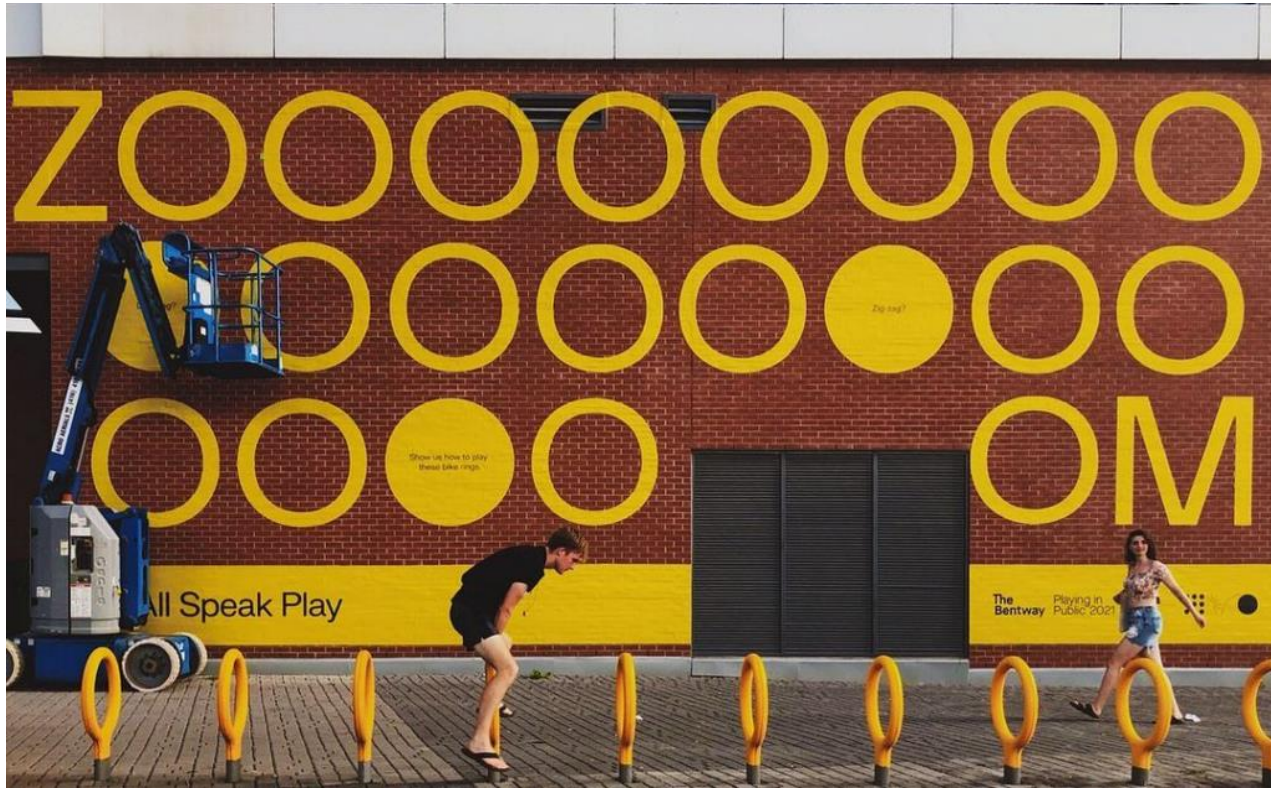
In-between spaces – walkways, bridges, trails, building faces, even hydro poles – became playable canvasses.

Along the Play Path, visitors and residents alike were invited to zoom, zig-zag, make-believe, race, and rediscover the city through the lens of play.

The Play path stretched over 2.6km through the Wellington, Fort York, CityPlace, and Waterfront neighbourhoods and was walked by tens of thousands of players.



PLAY PATH



The Play Path was brought to life through an ambitious network of new neighbourhood partners all working together for the first time:

Community

- Condo board of 20 Bruyeres Mews
- Condo board of 50 Bruyeres Mews
- Condo board of 167 Fort York Blvd
- Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre
- Canoe Landing Community Recreation Centre
- Waterfront BIA
- CityPlace/Fort York BIA

Municipal / Civic

- Fort York National Historic Site
- City of Toronto (Parks, Forestry & Recreation)
- City of Toronto (Economic Development & Culture)
- City of Toronto (Transportation Services)
- Toronto Hydro



CONSTELLATION PROGRAMMING

Tiny Games

A series of Tiny Games was created by 6 designers, ranging from contemplative interactive challenges to role-playing, rituals and more. Tiny Games was inspired by the 2011 project of the same name by Hide&Seek & co-created and presented with The Hand Eye Society.

Playcasts

From candid conversations and personal stories to spoken word, this mini-series provided audiences with yet another medium to engage with Play. The audio series is available to stream for free from our website, or for download so it can be enjoyed from anywhere. [Find here!](#)

- Youth Perspectives on Play, hosted by Ryan Lo of Urban Minds
- Never Stop Playing, hosted by Award-winning spoken word poet Britta B.
- Parkour and Play in the City, hosted by Stunt man and founder of The Monkey Vault Parkour gym, Dan Iaboni



CONSTELLATION PROGRAMMING

Virtual Talks

A two-part panel discussion, co-presented with [World Urban Parks](#) & [8 80 Cities](#), featured speakers for whom play is a core component of their work. Through lively discussion we explored the benefits of recreation as a tool for recovery and asked what play can teach us about building more resilient cities, public spaces, and communities. Streamed on YouTube, these talks were free to attend and accessible to all. [Find the recordings here!](#)

Featured speakers included:

Part 1: Jen DeMelo (KABOOM!), Luis Serrano (FUNdamentals of Play), Melissa Mongiat (Daily tous les jours), and Janie Romoff (Parks, Forestry and Recreation, the City of Toronto), as well as Amanda O'Rourke (World Urban Parks & 8 80 Cities) as moderators

Part 2: Tim Gill (Writer, Scholar & Childhood play advocate), Alexandra Lange (Writer and Architecture & Design Critic), Adil Dhalla (Camp Reset), Mitchell Chan (Studio F Minus) and Alex Bozikovic (The Globe & Mail) as moderator



ARTIST RESIDENCY: BEKAH BROWN

This year's Bentway Artist In Residence was a multi-disciplinary artist of Anishinaabe and mixed European descent, Bekah Brown.

During her time with us, Bekah's work explored stories of the land that Toronto and The Bentway occupy; what it looked like prior to contact and how it has changed throughout colonization. Connecting to our Play season, Bekah's research focused on traditional forms of play and recreation in Indigenous cultures found in these histories.

Bekah's impressive list of accomplishments from her residency period included:

- Outreach to local residents & urban Indigenous communities across Toronto
- Mentorship from Indigenous Elders
- Research on Indigenous cultural/recreational practices
- Creation of new artworks presented during 3 free public showcases



COMMUNITY RESPONSE

From mid-August through September, Daily tous les jour ran a visitor engagement and feedback study at multiple Play sites. Our staff “Play Referees” engaged users in conversation with either a short survey or long-form interviews. Highlights from Initial findings showed that:

- The majority of visitors (75%) felt the Play experience was fully accessible
- For 78% of visitors their experience had a positive effect on their mood

A fun (and revealing!) part of this study featured an “emotional wheel” – offered over 4 sessions and staffed by Bentway team members – on which visitors could place a sticker against the adjective that best described the feeling Play inspired in them. The most commonly selected words were:

- Happy
- Excited
- Belonging
- Joyful
- Delighted
- Thankful
- Grateful
- Optimistic



Playing in Public

A stylized map of a city street grid in shades of yellow and white. A dotted grey path winds through the streets. Along this path, there are several star-shaped markers: a pink star at the top, followed by three purple stars, then a cluster of four pink stars, and finally two more pink stars at the bottom right. The text 'Playing in Public' is overlaid at the top in a large, bold, black font.

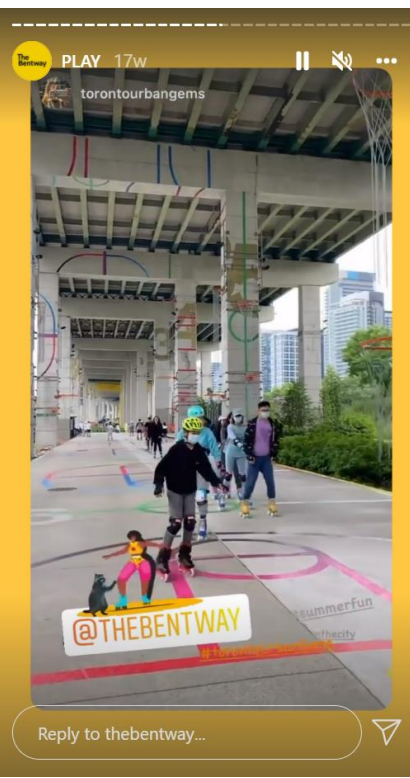
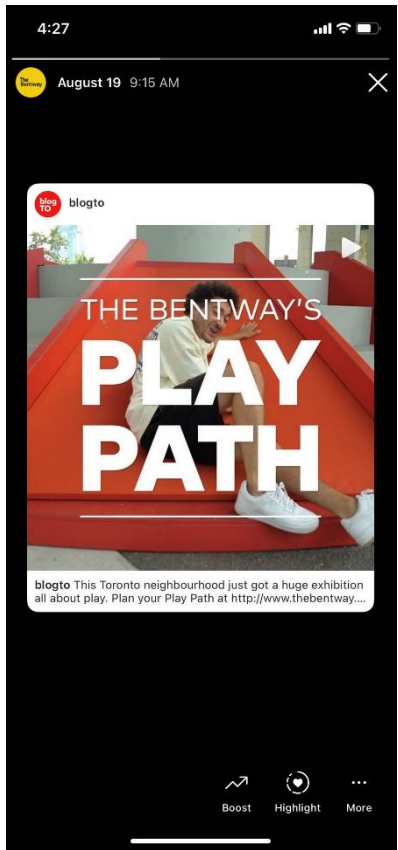
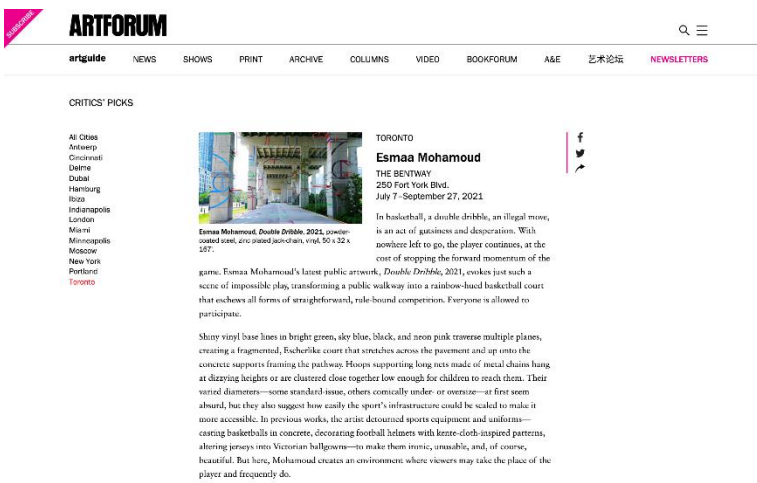
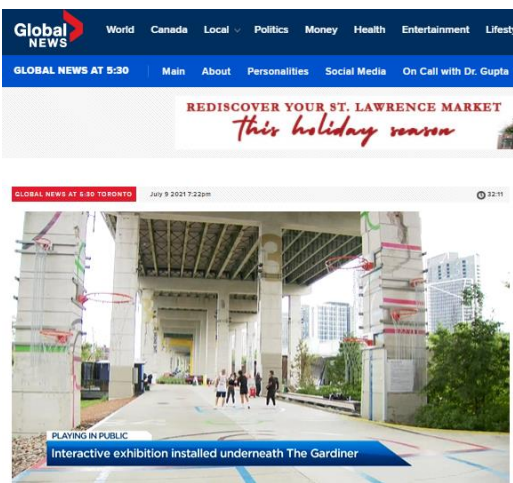
Visit thebentway.ca/play to learn more about this project, including an interactive map, photo and video documentation, supporter crediting, and more!

APPENDIX A

Playing in Public Media Results



SAMPLE COVERAGE



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

- Toronto Life: <https://torontolife.com/culture/here-are-the-eight-coolest-exhibits-at-this-years-contact-photography-festival/>
- CBC Arts: <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/there-s-a-supersized-basketball-court-under-the-gardiner-expressway-1.6109391>
- NOW Magazine: <https://nowtoronto.com/culture/toronto-artist-esmaa-mohamoud-challenges-stereotypes-about-black-men>
- Blog TO: <https://www.blogto.com/arts/2021/07/happy-clouds-toronto/>
- Artforum: <https://www.artforum.com/picks/esmaa-mohamoud-86345>
- Artforum (Critics' Pick): <https://www.artforum.com/artguide/the-bentway-21204/double-dribble-196334>
- She Does the City: <https://www.shedoesthecity.com/artist-bekah-brown-explores-the-history-of-the-bentway-in-multimedia-installation-with-one-beat/>



THANK YOU!

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