

STARGATE Pushes the (Galactic) Boundaries of Public Art

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For all its advantages, "playful" and "uninhibited" aren't the adjectives that come to mind when describing Toronto's Yonge and Eglinton neighbourhood. Instead, the livable, dense, and transit-friendly area sometimes feels like a smaller—but arguably more grown-up—sibling to Downtown. At 150 and 155 Redpath, however, what's described as a "crew of intergalactic 3D characters" is set to invade the public realm in a youthfully zealous—and somewhat psychedelic—act of placemaking.



STARGATE at 150 Redpath, image courtesy of Freed, Capital, Blue Republic

Called STARGATE, the playful installation is the brainchild of Anna Passakas and Radoslaw Kudlinski of Blue Republic. Fronted by 12-ft and 15-ft tall sculptures on either side of Redpath Avenue, the two figures emerge from the chaotically energized glass murals behind them, standing guard—or facing off—to create a 'gate' just south of Roehampton. Flanked by an inter-dimensional cast of supporting characters, the central figures are surrounded by beings emerging from the portals, frozen in the act of becoming.



STARGATE at 150 Redpath, image courtesy of Freed, Capital, Blue Republic

For developers Freed and Capital, the installation evokes "exactly the personality we want to bring to 150 and 155 Redpath," says Capital Founder Todd Cowan. "We see this as a real opportunity to add intrinsic value to our city. The dynamic installation will knit together the fabric of the neighbourhood, connecting the towers through—what we believe—will become landmark urban artwork."

Chosen from six entries in a national public art competition, STARGATE will be Blue Republic's first permanent installation in the city. In conceptualizing the installation, the Toronto-based art collective drew influences from diverse sources, ranging from low budget sci-fi to various ancient mythologies. The work carries a protean complexity that demands attention, albeit in an unpretentious and fun way.



A context view of the installation at 150 Redpath, image courtesy of Freed, Capital, Blue Republic

"We are both huge science fiction fans, and study diverse cultures in general," Passakas explains. "We were inspired by the idea of why and how we're in constant pursuit of connection, no matter how strange or different. The characters tell a narrative of the world today. STARGATE attempts to inspire connection between different worlds."

"The way that STARGATE is staged, there is an electric energy in anticipation of that moment when anything can happen and everything is possible," Kudlinski adds.



A context view of STARGATE at 155 Redpath, image courtesy of Freed, Capital, Blue Republic

For Peter Freed, meanwhile, "it's not about decorating a building." Going against the grain of much of Toronto's public art—which all too often serves as mere beautification—Freed argues that the work's power is in its ability to define its surroundings. "There is no greater contributor to placemaking than art, especially when it's paired with a narrative and vision as rich as STARGATE."



The 155 Redpath site in mid-May, looking northeast from Redpath Avenue, image by Jack Landau

In contrast to the conservative afterthoughts tacked onto to many of Toronto's condos as public art contributions, STARGATE screams for attention. Does that lend the work insight into the human condition? Does it make it a powerful expression of the imagination? Does it make it 'good'? It's hard to predict. But in an urban landscape that sometimes seems a monotonous sea of condos, it promises to make the intersection of Redpath and Roehampton anything but anonymous. In its inter-galactic hustle, it promises somewhere.