

Utility Box Stories Project: artworks by Wil Yee & seth cardinal dodginghorse

Utility box artwork is coming to Chinatown!

The Utility Box Stories project – artwork wrapped onto three utility boxes – explores the story through original artwork and historical photos. The artwork envisioned will beautify and re-vitalise the Chinatown neighbourhood by helping to create a sense of historic place as well as discourage graffiti. The traffic signal boxes are located at Centre Street S. & 2nd Avenue, and 3rd Avenue.

In 2020, Fung Ling Feimo was awarded a Community-Initiated Public Art Microprojects grant for Utility Box Stories. The project addresses the erasure of local histories and seeks to explore the social intersections and cultural intersectionalities that make up Calgary. The project seeks to replace existing images on the Canton Block utility box to reflect rather than erase the BIPOC who were/are here.

As an arts enthusiast, Ms. Feimo is passionate about arts and culture. She states:

“To know where we’re going, we need to know where we’re coming from and the journey that brought us here. We need to acknowledge those who were here before us. We need to preserve and protect the historical integrity of the community. If we are indeed “all Treaty People”, then we have to start acting like it and acknowledge our history. We have to accept that we have erased people’s history and that we continue to do so. Every global city acknowledges their history. We need to acknowledge ours. And we need to restore what has been erased.”

“Heritage Buildings could Talk” is the name of a Chinatown Heritage Project, which she completed in 2019, that included the Context Paper that can inform the City’s Cultural Plan for Chinatown. In addition to projects within the Chinese-Canadian community, Fung Ling has also been involved with Indigenous projects that include the launching of *Making Treaty 7*, in 2012. She now draws on her rich community experience to contribute to Tomorrow’s Chinatown Advisory Group.

Two artists have been commissioned to create art for the utility boxes:
Wil Yee, Calgary; and seth cardinal dodginghorse, Tsuut’ina Nation

Wil Yee is a multi-disciplinary artist and graduate of the Alberta University of the Arts. He spent countless summers with his grandparents in the heart of Chinatown before becoming a permanent resident of Calgary. Known for his murals and public artwork in Crescent Heights and on Memorial Drive, he is also a custom tattoo artist. The “Time and Tigers”, created for utility boxes in Chinatown, is inspired by the colours of theatrical make-up and designs in Cantonese opera.

seth cardinal dodginghorse is a multidisciplinary artist, experimental musician and graduate of the Alberta University of the Arts. He grew up eating dirt and exploring the forest on his family’s ancestral land on the Tsuut’ina nation. His work explores his own experiences of displacement and family history.

With the future addition of proposed murals, shutter and window art, the project adds vibrancy to Chinatown and transforms the streets into an art walk generating excitement and discussion.

The project acknowledges the support of the City of Calgary Community-Initiated Public Art Microprojects grant, and the Calgary Chinatown Development Foundation. The Utility Box Stories project offers sincere gratitude to supporters from the community and Tomorrow's Chinatown Advisory Group.

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Fung Ling Feimo, Utility Box Stories