

AUGUST 23, 2024

UP AGAINST THE WALL STREET ART IN CANADA

Works that are central to the identity of Canadian cities.



El Mac (Miles MacGregor) and Gene Pendon, *Tower of Songs, Hommage à Leonard Cohen*, 2017, 1420 Crescent Street, Montreal, photograph by Olivier Bousquet.

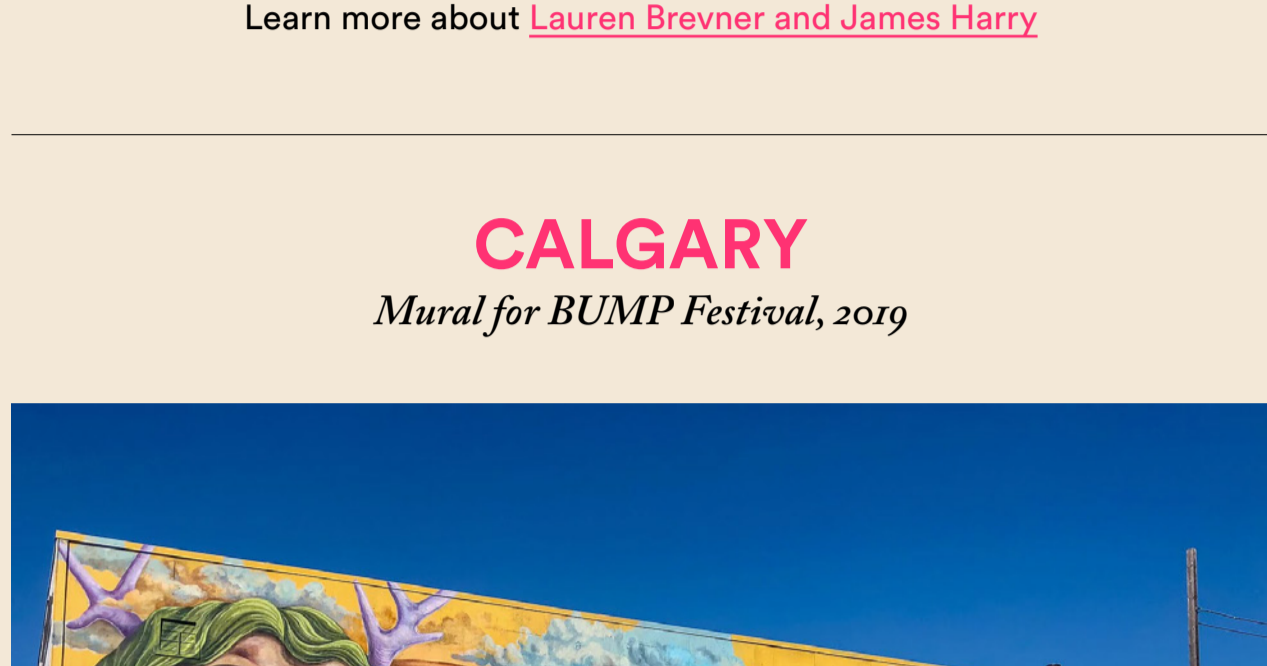


Street art that takes over exterior walls—and sometimes entire buildings—has the potential to reach larger and more diverse audiences than art shown indoors. Sometimes, as is the case with *Tower of Songs, Hommage à Leonard Cohen*, 2017, by El Mac (Miles MacGregor) and Gene Pendon (above), it can become central to the identity of a particular address or the visual landscape of a city. Each summer, urban centres across Canada host street-art festivals, taking advantage of the warm weather to get people outside and excited about the visual beauty that is all around them. Here are ten of our favourite examples of murals past and present by Canadian artists, from Vancouver to Charlottetown.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

VANCOUVER

DreamWeaver, 2020



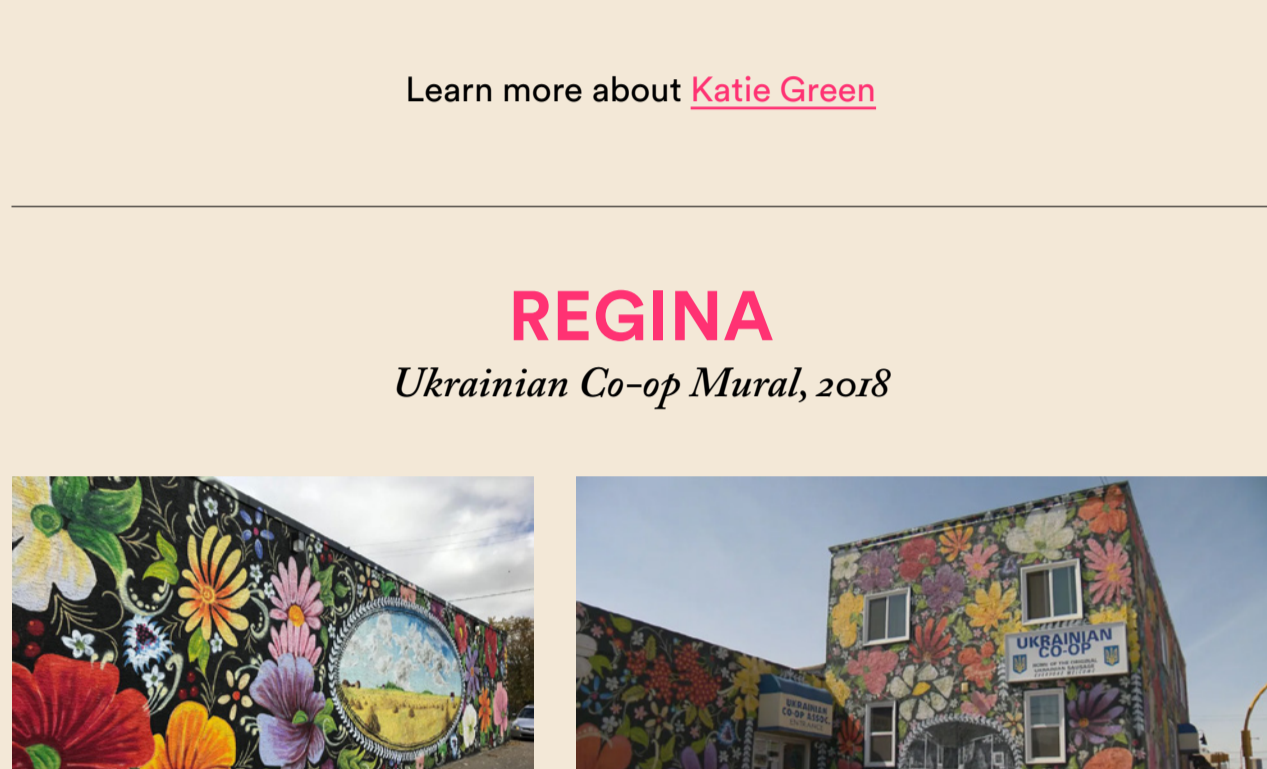
Lauren Brevner and James Harry, *DreamWeaver*, 2020, Bentall Centre, 505 Burrard Street, Vancouver, courtesy of Bentall Centre.

In downtown Vancouver, on the façade of the Bentall Centre on Thurlow Street, you can find the striking *DreamWeaver*, 2020. The mural was created by partners from Vancouver—Squamish artist James Harry and Lauren Brevner, an artist of Japanese and Trinidadian ancestry—who sought to make space for a message of racial justice and solidarity in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. Commissioned in partnership with the [Vancouver Mural Festival](#), the work depicts two part-human, part-animal figures posed back to back, each gazing purposefully ahead against a Salish design in eye-catching black and red.

Learn more about [Lauren Brevner and James Harry](#)

CALGARY

Mural for BUMP Festival, 2019



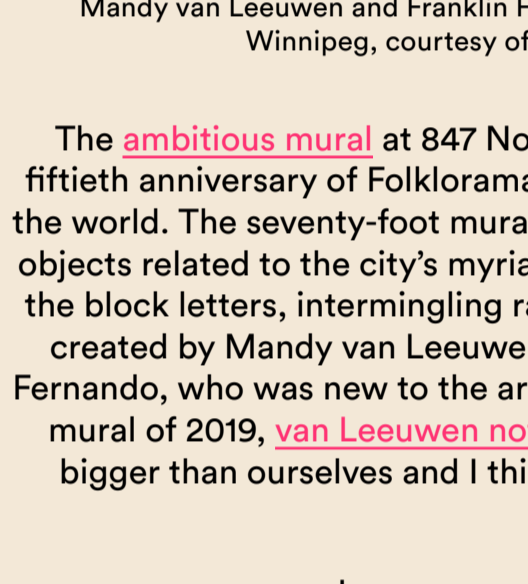
Mural by Katie Green, 2019, 10th Avenue and 12th Street S.W., Calgary, courtesy of the artist.

Local artist and University of Calgary alumna Katie Green, who is best known for her watercolour portraits, created this [2019 mural](#) on a warehouse at 10th Avenue and 12th Street S.W. as part of the Beltline Urban Mural Project (BUMP). The composition brings flora, fauna, rocks, and fungi into an ambitious frieze as animal, mineral, and vegetable fuse with one another. Green's practice spans from the intimacy of a small watercolour to murals like this one which, [as she notes](#), is a work that combines "abstract feelings and forms into immersive scenes where fantastical beings morph and melt together within imagined worlds."

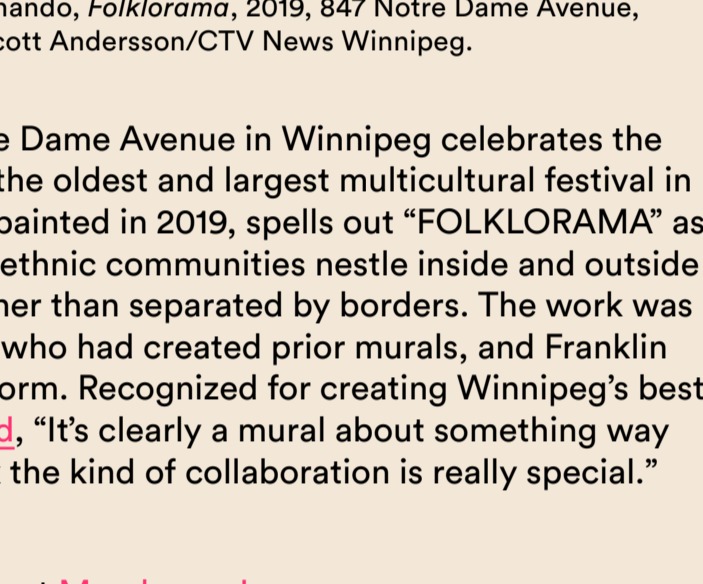
Learn more about [Katie Green](#)

REGINA

Ukrainian Co-op Mural, 2018



Detail of mural by Jez Brenwold, 2018, 1805 Winnipeg Street, Ukrainian Co-op, Regina, courtesy of Madeline Kotzer/CBC News.



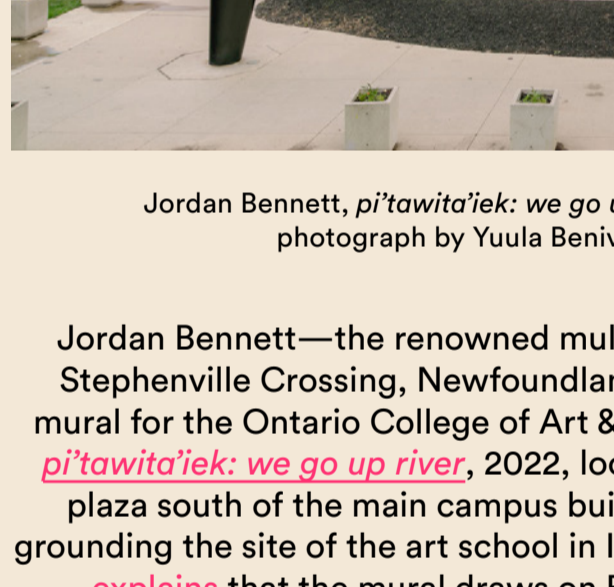
Mural by Jez Brenwold, 2018, 1805 Winnipeg Street, Ukrainian Co-op, Regina, courtesy of Global News.

Between 2018 and 2019, Regina artist Jez Brenwold painted this dazzling floral mural that wraps around the exterior of the Ukrainian Co-op at 1805 Winnipeg Street. Though the store is best known for its sausages, meats, and imported delicacies, Brenwold was inspired by the intricate designs of the Ukrainian Easter eggs for sale inside. He executed the entire mural by himself, using up one thousand cans of spray paint and meeting the store's customers throughout the process. As [he recalls](#), one patron told him, "My baba would love this!" prompting Brenwold to think to himself, "If I can make the grandparents like it and appreciate aerosol art, I think I'm doing pretty well."

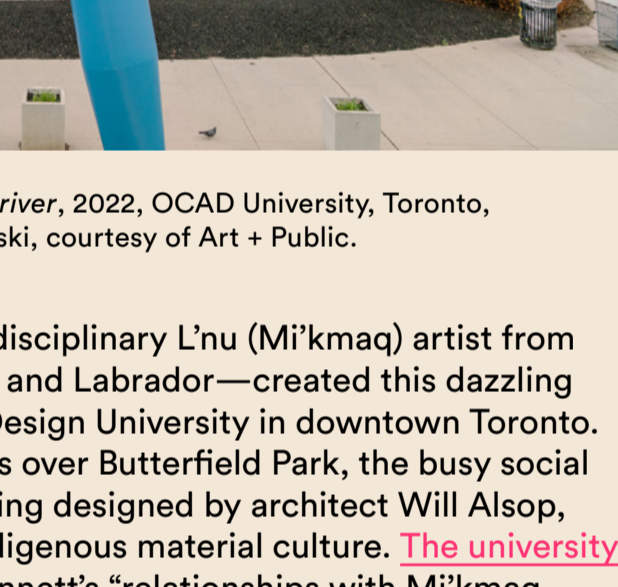
Learn more about [Jez Brenwold](#)

WINNIPEG

Folklorama, 2019



Mandy van Leeuwen and Franklin Fernando, *Folklorama*, 2019, 847 Notre Dame Avenue, Winnipeg, courtesy of Scott Andersson/CTV News Winnipeg.



The [ambitious mural](#) at 847 Notre Dame Avenue in Winnipeg celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of Folklorama, the oldest and largest multicultural festival in the world. The seventy-foot mural, painted in 2019, spells out "FOLKLORAMA" as objects related to the city's myriad ethnic communities nestle inside and outside the block letters, intermingling rather than separated by borders. The work was created by Mandy van Leeuwen, who had created prior murals, and Franklin Fernando, who was new to the art form. Recognized for creating Winnipeg's best mural of 2019, [van Leeuwen noted](#), "It's clearly a mural about something way bigger than ourselves and I think the kind of collaboration is really special."

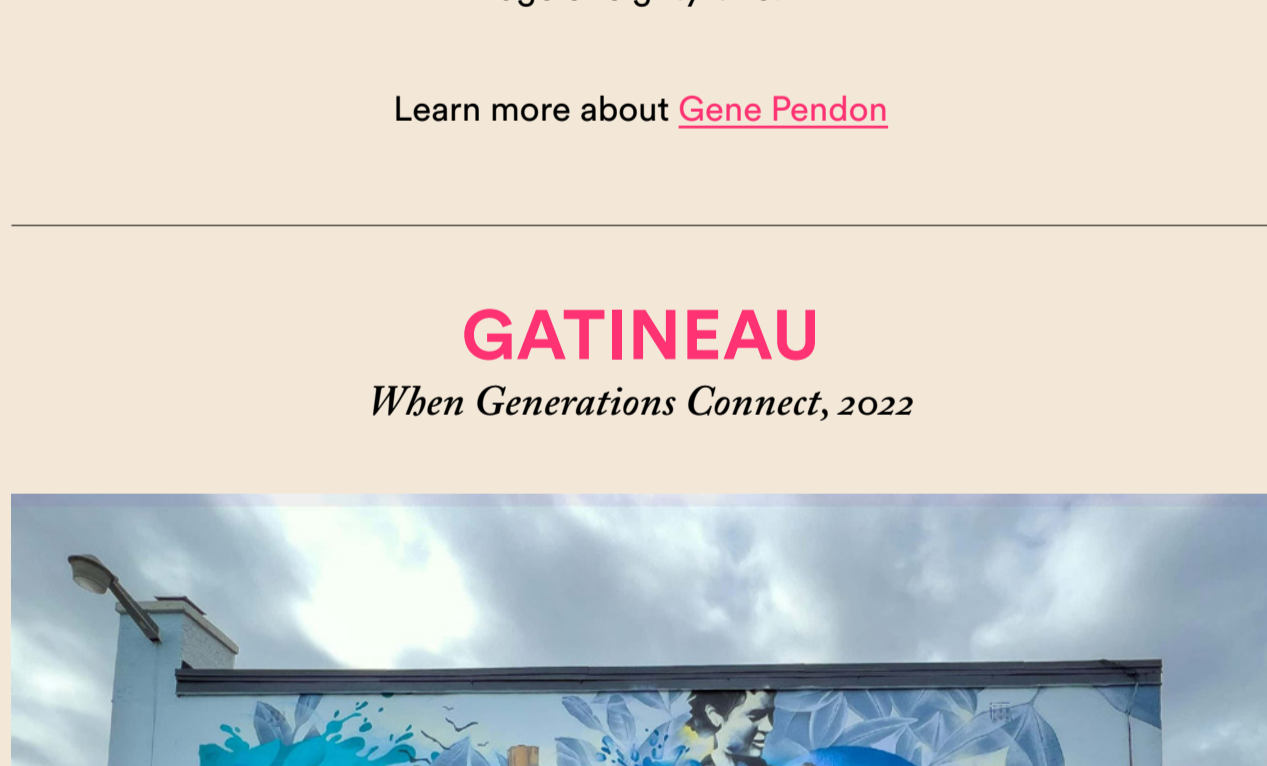
Learn more about [Mandy van Leeuwen](#)

Learn more about [Franklin Fernando](#)

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TORONTO

pi'tawit'iek: we go up river, 2022



Jordan Bennett, *pi'tawit'iek: we go up river*, 2022, OCAD University, Toronto, photograph by Yuula Benivolski, courtesy of Art + Public.

Jordan Bennett—the renowned multidisciplinary L'nu (Mi'kmaq) artist from Stephenville Crossing, Newfoundland and Labrador—created this dazzling mural for the Ontario College of Art & Design University in downtown Toronto. [pi'tawit'iek: we go up river](#), 2022, looks over Butterfield Park, the busy social plaza south of the main campus building designed by architect Will Alsop, grounding the site of the art school in Indigenous material culture. [The university explains](#) that the mural draws on Bennett's "relationships with Mi'kmaq porcupine quillwork. He brings forward and reimagines their graphic patterns, bright colours, and inspiring stories."

Learn more about [Jordan Bennett](#)

MONTREAL

Tower of Songs, Hommage à Leonard Cohen, 2017



El Mac (Miles MacGregor) and Gene Pendon, *Tower of Songs, Hommage à Leonard Cohen*, 2017, 1420 Crescent Street, Montreal, photograph by Olivier Bousquet.

Wherever you go in downtown Montreal, it feels like the legendary singer-songwriter and poet Leonard Cohen is watching benevolently over you from his perch at 1420 Crescent Street. More than a local boy made good, Cohen embodies the spirit of Montreal, in particular its rich literary and Jewish histories, and its dynamic music scene. A collaboration between the Los Angeles-born street portraitist El Mac and Montreal-based Concordia University alumnus Gene Pendon, *Tower of Songs, Hommage à Leonard Cohen*, 2017—a sepia-toned painting of Cohen in his trademark trilby hat—is twenty-one storeys tall and a major tourist attraction. It was commissioned by the local non-profit mural organization MU following the icon's death in 2016 at the age of eighty-two.

Learn more about [Gene Pendon](#)

GATINEAU

When Generations Connect, 2022



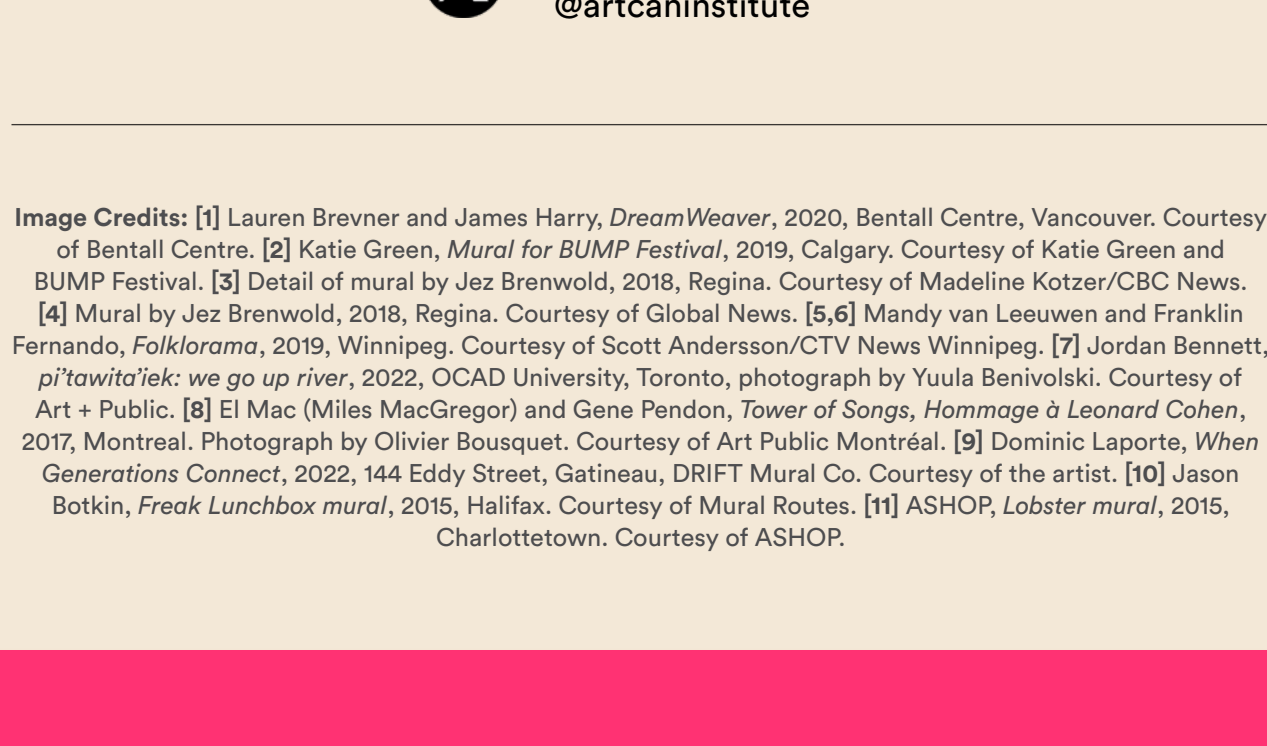
Dominic Laporte, *When Generations Connect*, 2022, 144 Eddy Street, Gatineau, DRIFT Mural Co., courtesy of the artist.

Located at 144 Eddy Street in Gatineau, *When Generations Connect*, 2022, by Dominic Laporte, is a tribute to the historical neighbourhood of Old Hull. The Ottawa-based artist-illustrator—a recent finalist for the Ottawa Arts Council's 2024 Peter Honeywell Mid-Career Artist Award—depicts his great-grandmother Yvon Charbonneau, who lived and worked in the neighbourhood her entire life. As [Laporte notes](#), "the mural design was meant to pay homage to the impact women had in the local industrial weaving industry."

Learn more about [Dominic Laporte](#)

HALIFAX

Freak Lunchbox mural, 2015



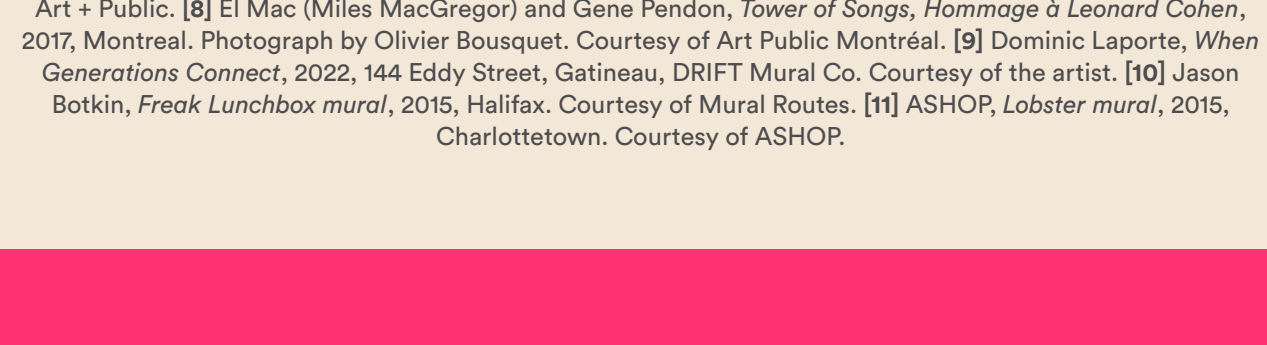
Jason Botkin, *Freak Lunchbox mural*, 2015, formerly installed at Freak Lunchbox, 1729 Barrington Street, Halifax, courtesy of Mural Routes.

An octopus and a blue heron are entwined in intense combat over a hapless fish in [this mural](#) painted in 2015. Rendered in rich colours and with a frenetic energy by the prolific Montreal-based muralist Jason Botkin, the work was [widely recognized](#), making a top twenty list of best murals in the world by the website All City Canvas. This strikingly example of wall art, which depicts environmental concerns with the ocean in a "playful, fantastic, surreal way" [says Botkin](#), once graced the Freak Lunchbox candy store at 1729 Barrington Street in Halifax. In 2021 it was concealed by a new building development. Interestingly, Botkin's own mural had covered up an earlier one by Zeqirja Rexhepi.

Learn more about [Jason Botkin](#)

CHARLOTTETOWN

Lobster mural, 2015



ASHOP, *Lobster mural*, 2015, Timothy's World Coffee, 154 Great George Street, Charlottetown, courtesy of ASHOP.

In Prince Edward Island's capital, this [ambitious mural](#) by the Montreal-based ASHOP Crew covers an eight-foot, two-storey-high exterior wall of the Timothy's World Coffee building at 154 Great George Street. Dating back to the first edition of the [Charlottetown Mural Festival](#) in 2015, it features a photorealistic lobster—a P.E.I. symbol—emerging out of a ship's helm against a blue-tinted backdrop of nautical scenes. ASHOP began when a group of graffiti artists decided to collaborate as a crew in 2009, and they have since created murals all over the world.

Learn more about [ASHOP](#)

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