



FEATURES

'Art is the breath of a city'

My City's Still Breathing is a four-day symposium that will explore "art, artists and the city"

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TREVOR MARCZYLO PHOTOGRAPHY ENLARGE IMAGE

John K. Samson

My city's still breathing (but barely it's true) through buildings gone missing like teeth.

It's no wonder that lyric, from The Weakerthans' *Left and Leaving*, would end up inspiring the title of a symposium "exploring the arts, artists and the city." After all, if there's anyone in tune with Winnipeg's breath — and knows just how much influence a city can have on art (and art on its city) — it's John K. Samson.

My City's Still Breathing — which runs Nov. 4 through 7 at various venues around town and is a major component of the Winnipeg Cultural Capital of Canada 2010 Arts for All campaign — will bring together international, national and local artists, city planners, policy-makers and experts to discuss and debate that critical idea: the relationship between art and city-making.

"Art is the breath of a city," says Alix Sobler, marketing and communications co-ordinator for Winnipeg Cultural Capital of Canada 2010 (she's also an accomplished playwright and Fringe Fest favourite). "It gives us life. The idea of my city's still breathing says, 'Yes, it's on. It's happening.' But we know it's precarious. If we don't nurture it, we could lose it."

My City's Still Breathing will feature a diverse set of engaging keynote speakers, from influential cult filmmaker John Waters, whose art is deeply influenced by his hometown of Baltimore, to Australian author Jon Hawkes, who is an expert on sustainability, to Vancouver's Larry Beasley, who is one of the world's top urban planners.

A slew of acclaimed Winnipeg artists from a host of disciplines — including Samson, singer/songwriter Christine Fellows, Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers artistic director Brent Lott, curator/writer Milena Placentile, dancer/choreographer Natasha Torres-Garner and author Michael Neelak Van Rooy, among others — will also be leading and participating in a wide range of related panels. "It's amazing how many people are relevant to such a specific topic," Sobler says.

In addition to being an excellent educational opportunity and sounding board for artists and planners alike, My City's Still Breathing aims to engage the public by underlining just how vital it is to have artists making art in our concrete backyards. Some folks need real convincing on that point; a cursory glance at any arts funding story on any news website will reveal at least one comment bitching and moaning about how "those crazy weirdo artists shouldn't get any more money." But, as Sobler stresses, you can't have a great city without great art.

"Art is an important calling card for a city" she says. "Infrastructure, architecture — all those things are certainly important. But when you go to New York or Paris, what you remember is the Louvre, or the Empire State Building or Fashion Week. You remember the art that emerges from those cities."

And with so many of our musicians, choreographers, dancers, visual artists, playwrights, actors and

authors garnering international attention, Winnipeg is the perfect city to host My City's Still Breathing.

"Aside from being the centre of North America, I think Winnipeg typifies and represents the challenges of city living," Sobler says. "We're dealing with aging infrastructure, urban sprawl and economic challenges. Yet, at the same time, there's this vibrant arts scene here. Winnipeg is home to some of North America's biggest arts festivals. In a lot of ways, we're making it work — but at the same time, I think we have the potential to catch up to larger cities.

"It's great to have this opportunity to bring people in and teach them what we've been so successful at while, at the same time, learning from others' successes."

For more information about My City's Still Breathing, including the full symposium schedule, visit www.artsforall.ca.

MY CITY'S STILL BREATHING

Nov. 4 - 7, various venues

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