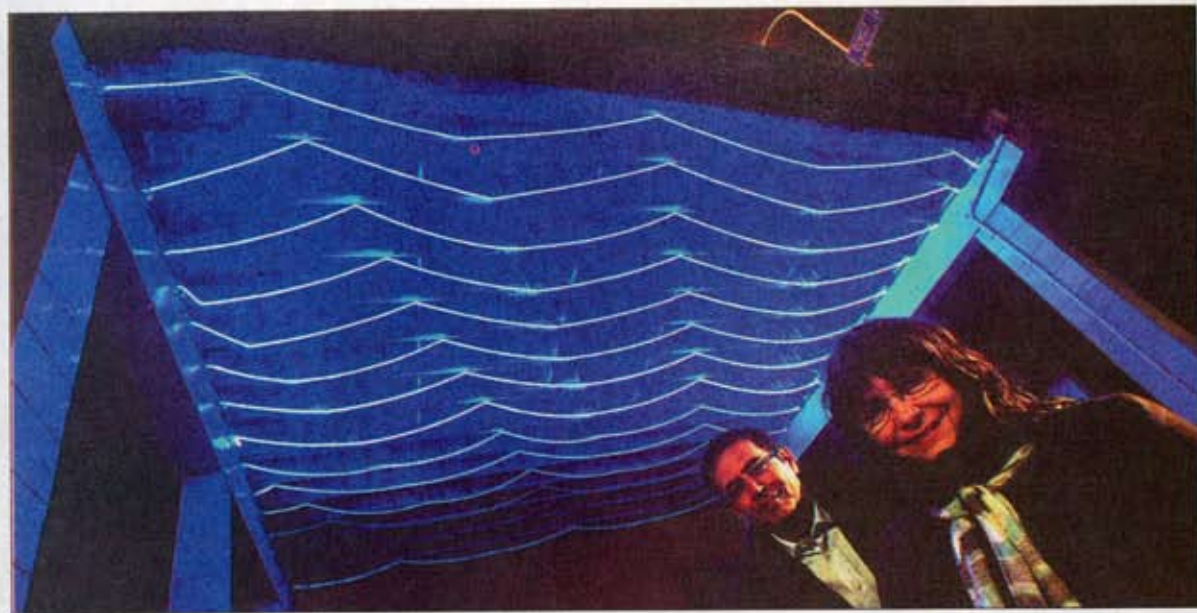


GREATER TORONTO



VINCE TALOTTA/TORONTO STAR

Water Table by Kim Tomczak and Lisa Steele, hangs beneath the Gardiner, imitating waves at nearby Lake Ontario.

A watershed for Toronto artworks

Whether it's a case of making a silk purse out of a sow's ear or gilding the Gardiner is hard to say. Either way, the city's first permanent multimedia public artwork tries — and succeeds — in making the best of a bad situation.

Created by the veteran Toronto art duo of Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak, the piece, titled *Water Table*, hangs beneath the Gardiner Expressway just south of Fort York, west of Bathurst St. Consisting of multiple strips of LED lighting strung across the rusty underbelly of the raised highway, its blue hued patterns are programmed to resemble the motion of waves as they hit the shores of nearby Lake Ontario. The sound of these waves has also been incorporated into the work, an aural clue, should one be necessary.

And as the title implies, the site was chosen because it marks the location of the shoreline before hundreds of metres of landfill were added, starting in the 19th century.

More than this, the piece is a unique presence in the city, an intrusion of civilization into a dark and forgotten section of the urban landscape. Until now, the wasteland has been little more than the



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price we must pay for the convenience of a downtown highway.

But with the growing interest in the public realm, perhaps it was only a matter of time before the city got around to addressing this swath of neglect that runs through the lower end of Toronto.

Whatever the reason, the city's decision to launch an international competition for an artwork on the Gardiner shows a new willingness to risk the disapproval of those who think the cash — \$115,000 — would have been better spent fixing the potholes above.

To hell with them. Or, as we say in Canada, to heck with them. Given that it seems the talk about dismantling the dinosaur highway will go nowhere, maybe it makes more sense to turn it into an artwork.

If that's the case, this piece marks an excellent start to a process that still has a long way to go. The Gar-

diner stretches the width of the city, from the Don River in the east to the Humber River in the west. All we need is a few hundred more *Water Tables*.

Still, an outpouring of gratitude is unlikely; more probably, the city will be criticized for wasting taxpayers' hard-earned money on a frill such as art. Tomczak and Steele, prize-winning artists and teachers recognized around the world, will fare better.

Regardless, standing in this newly colonized space watching and listening as the blue lines undulate back and forth is a magical experience, especially at night. Culture vultures, who descended on the site for the opening Wednesday evening, witnessed this firsthand.

The sheer spectacle of these moving lines of blue light in such an unexpected location can't be denied. The historical references add another layer of interest.

Above all, *Water Table* serves as a reminder of the power of human imagination to transform our surroundings. Imagination is what got us into this mess in the first place, and now, Steele and Tomczak want us to know, it can get us out.

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