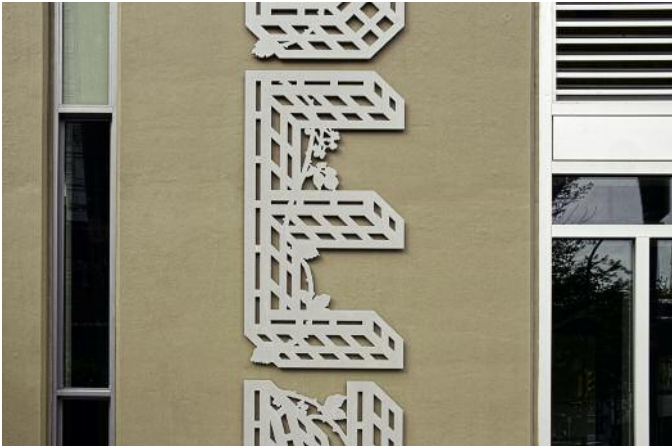


**RHONDA WEPPLER
TREVOR MAHOVSKY**
Idea for a Trellis



**PUBLIC
ART**
vancouver



About the Work

Idea for a Trellis, an artwork installed on the north façade of the condominium tower at 1308 Hornby Street, is a rendering of the famous phrase from Voltaire’s literary work, *Candide*. “WE MUST CULTIVATE OUR GARDEN” spans the full height of the 31-storey building as a column of aluminum letters. Designed by the artists, the typeface resembles a modest latticework trellis, an architectural structure used to support climbing plants. The letters forming the word “GARDEN” are embellished with silhouettes of prickled stems interspersed with leaves and clusters of berries that clamber upward through the trellis’ intersecting bars.

Echoing the European traditions of ornamenting building façades with simulated garden trellises and incorporating perspectival illusion into elaborate trelliswork featured in formal gardens, *Idea for a Trellis* evokes a partial illusion subject to several disruptions. A trompe l’œil effect is suggested but deliberately unachieved because the optical perspective shifts from word to word, implying changes to the viewer’s relative position to the artwork and making the phrase itself a material composite of assembled views. As we read from top to bottom, the spacing between the words decreases by set mathematical increments. The shortest sequence of letters is followed by the longest exposure of the building’s

concrete wall, a pause that reinforces the physicality of the architecture and artwork.

The sheer scale of the work and its location in Vancouver’s downtown core make it legible from numerous locations, where people are involved in a range of activities and private pursuits. Just as there is no optimal vantage point for viewing the work, the public declaration “WE MUST CULTIVATE OUR GARDEN” has no single interpretation. The collective obligation implied by the phrase may or may not register or align with the outlook of actual viewers in the day-to-day course of living their lives. The pronoun “WE”, isolated at the top of the tower yet visible to the widest audience, may imply either inclusivity or division. Whether any obligation is recognized and upon what it may be based are also open questions.

The call to “cultivate our garden” is equally ambiguous. The leaves and climbing nature of the stems interlaced through the word “GARDEN” evoke a Himalayan blackberry, an invasive plant from Armenia introduced via Europe and now ubiquitous throughout the Lower Mainland. The imperative to cultivate suggests the need to encourage or nurture, but also the requirement of striving to impose order on a designated environment: we must select, organize, reject, foster certain relationships at the expense of others, maintain vigilance and cope with the consequences of unforeseen elements to which all open, living systems are susceptible. In Voltaire’s *Candide*, written in France in 1759, the elements to be rejected were superstition and optimism in the contemporaneous proposition of a coherent and perfectly designed world. What *Idea for a Trellis* proposes is a framework for considering the countless incongruities conjoined in Vancouver, how collectively and individually we have contributed to what they are, and how we continue to consciously shape and understand certain aspects of our environment while remaining inattentive to others.

— Robyn Laba

Robyn Laba is a Vancouver-based artist and writer.

Images Installation views of *Idea for a Trellis*, 2014. Photos: James Nizam

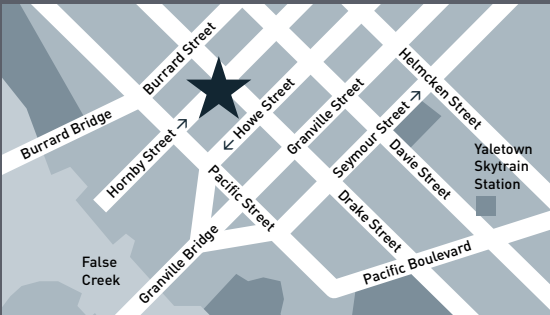


About the Artists

Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky met in 1996 while pursuing MFA degrees at the University of British Columbia. Their formal collaboration began in 2004 and continues since relocating to different cities (Wepler to San Francisco; Mahovsky to Toronto). Their work in sculpture, photography and installation is characterized by an exploration of our complex relationships to the world of things, from the commonplace items of consumer culture to the vestiges of obsolete objects and processes that still surround us. They are widely recognized for their innovative approaches to working with a diversity of materials and their work has been featured in exhibitions across Canada, the United States and Europe. Wepler and Mahovsky are the 2014 winners of the prestigious Glenfiddich Artists-in-Residence Prize and their work is represented in public collections, including the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and the National Gallery of Canada. Public art projects in Vancouver include *A False Creek* (2012), located under the Cambie Bridge, and *Watch Seller*, to be installed at the Main Street-Science World SkyTrain station in 2015.

Above Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky, 2014. Photo: Richard Winchell

The City of Vancouver Public Art Program commissions contemporary art for public spaces. The program supports excellence in art making by emerging and established artists, in new and traditional media and from stand-alone commissions to artist collaborations. Projects at civic buildings, greenways, parks and other public spaces are funded through annual civic capital budgets. Private sector projects are funded by developments in the rezoning process. Learn more about this and other public artworks in the Public Art Registry at www.vancouver.ca/publicart; subscribe to the Public Art Listserv to be notified of upcoming artist opportunities.



Idea for a Trellis, 2014, was commissioned by Concert Properties Ltd. as part of their participation in the City of Vancouver's Public Art Program for Private Development.

Cover image *Idea for a Trellis*, 2014, 1308 Hornby Street (at Drake Street), Vancouver, British Columbia. Photo: James Nizam



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