Lingua Aqua

Melanie Cassidy, Michael Filimowicz, Brady Marks and Philippe Pasquier

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Bear Creek Park Garden,
Bear Creek Park entrance southwest of 140 St & 88 Ave

Lingua Aqua, alludes to the idea of "lingua franca," a hybrid language originally developed to enable people of different mother tongues to communicate. This play on words emphasizes the importance of engaging with language and asks us to contemplate both the diversity and the commonality of language across cultures and within our own communities. The work reminds us that our encounter with language begins long before birth.

We begin to hear before we are born, four and a half months after conception. From then on, we develop in a continuous and luxurious bath of sounds: the song of our mother's voice, the swash of her breathing, the trumpeting of her intestines, the timpani of her heart. –Walter Murch

Built in the form of a small pavilion or shelter, Lingua Aqua combines sculptural, architectural, graphic, audio and water elements to create an immersive sonic environment. This "bath of sounds" is the place in which language is first heard and sounds from the outside environment first experienced.

The structure is a self-enclosed fountain, with rain curtains and a reflective pool. A mirror on the underside of the roof reflects the pool and visitors, creating a visual texture and interaction with the structure.

The sound of flowing water evokes the fluid environment in which spoken language is first heard, and the rippling pool and rain curtains modulate the sounds emitted from the structure. Visitors are invited to make their own disturbances in the pool, altering the reflected imagery and providing a subtle interactive dimension.

Glass panels overhanging the roof are engraved with symbols drawn from a number of languages spoken in Surrey. Four support columns each house audio speakers that play a variety of sounds, each transmitted through holes in the columns. These perforated designs form Braille texts related to the role of language across various cultures. For example, one of the columns reads: "Language is an anonymous, collective and unconscious art; the result of the creativity of thousands of generations." (Edward Sapir); "Language is a city to the building of which every human being brought a stone." (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

Lingua Aqua is one of six site-specific public art legacy projects produced under Surrey's 2008 Cultural Capital of Canada initiative and supported by the Department of Canadian Heritage and the City of Surrey.

The City of Surrey commissioned this artwork as a tribute to mother languages and in recognition of International Mother Language Day, formally established by the United Nations to be celebrated annually on February 21.

Braille Quotes from the Four Pillars

1.
"You live a new life for every new language you speak. If we spoke a different language, we would perceive a somewhat different world. If you know only one language, you live only once."
—*Compilation of Czech proverbs (anonymous)*

2.
"Language is an anonymous, collective and unconscious art; the result of the creativity of thousands of generations."
—*Edward Sapir*

"Language is a city to the building of which every human being brought a stone."
—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

3.
"Our native language is like a second skin, so much a part of us we resist the idea that it is constantly changing, constantly being renewed."
—*Casey Miller*

"Everything becomes a little different as soon as it is spoken out loud."
—*Hermann Hesse*

4.
"Language is for the empty mouth what dreams are for closed eyes."
—*Pascal Quignard (translated from French by Philippe Pasquier)*

"He who loses his language loses his world."
—*Gaelic proverb*

"A country without a language is a country without a soul."
—*Gaelic – Irish proverb*

About the Artists

Lingua Agua is the work of a multi-talented team of new media, visual and audio artists, including Melanie Cassidy, Michael Filimowicz, Brady Marks and Philippe Pasquier. All have a connection with Simon Fraser University's School of Interactive Arts and Technology (SIAT SFU), and their approach to their ambitious public art work is both collaborative and interdisciplinary.

Michael Filimowicz is a new media artist who works in the areas of sound, experimental video and digital photography. He is also a writer of poetry, fiction and philosophy, a sound designer for cable-tv documentaries, an audio engineer, and an international consultant in the hybrid field of audio architecture. Based in Surrey, he teaches at SIAT SFU.

Melanie Cassidy is a visual artist whose practice explores issues of perception, memory, transition, loss and renewal. Her background as an art director and sculptor in film and television has provided her with a broad knowledge of materials, fabrication techniques and collaborative work. She attended the Ontario College of Art and Design and earned an MFA at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Brady Marks is a collaborative artist who manipulates light and sound using computer software and electronics. Her objects and installations, she says, "work to reverse established lines of flow, pointing at what is present but not seen." A teacher, mentor, consultant and a founding member of Intermission Artists Society (1998 - 2003), she holds an MSc from SIAT SFU.

Philippe Pasquier is a sonic artist with an interest in exploring the relationships and synergies between art, science and technology. Pasquier has a PhD in the field of artificial intelligence from Laval University, is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Melbourne and an assistant professor in SIAT SFU.