

# Winners: Governor General's Awards in visual arts

**PETER SIMPSON** March 24, 2015



Micah Lexier, *This Sign* (2011, illuminated commercial sign, 96.52 x 109.22 x 30.48 cm.) Photo: Toni Hafkenscheld, courtesy of Birch Contemporary, Toronto

This year's winners of the Governor General's Awards for Visual and Media Arts include artists from across Canada, or, at least, from Central Canada to the west coast.

The recipients of the \$25,000 awards, which recognize "outstanding career achievement," include Toronto artists Robert Houle Micah Lexier and Paul McClure, Montreal artists Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Rober Racine and curator Louise Déry, Winnipeg's Reva Stone, and Victoria's Sandra Meigs. The list for the 15th annual awards was released Tuesday by the Canada Council for the Arts.

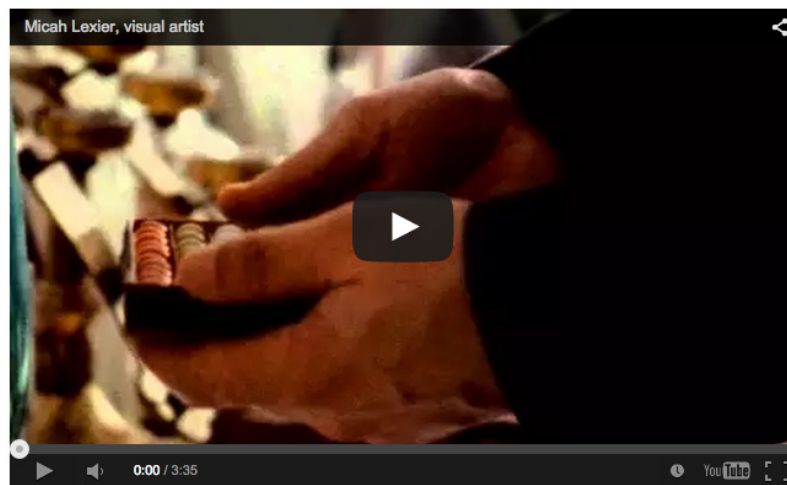
"This year's winners are profoundly shaping Canada's cultural identity," said council director Simon Brault, who added that each artist "invites us to question the state of our world and our own personal destinies in ways that we never would have imagined."

The laureates will receive their awards during a ceremony at Rideau Hall on April 8. An exhibition of the artists' work will be at the National Gallery of Canada from April 9 to Aug. 30.

The aboriginal artist Robert Houle's work "draws on Western art conventions to tackle lingering aspects of European colonization of First Nations people," according to his bio at the National Gallery. He was curator of "contemporary Indian art" at the Museum of Civilization in Gatineau from 1977 to 1980. Houle's 1992 painting *Kanata*, in the collection of the National Gallery, appropriates Benjamin West's iconic painting *The Death of General Wolfe*, and reverses centuries of European appropriation of aboriginal culture.



Micah Lexier’s conceptual sculptures are eloquent reflections on the fleetingness of human life. One work, at the Art Gallery of Ontario, is a “portrait” made of 906 coins, which represent the “the number of months of the statistical life expectancy of a child born January 6, 1995.” Each month, one coin is moved from one box to another box, to mark the passage of time. Lexier has “a deep interest in measurement, increment, games, puzzles, found imagery, and the kinds of casual marks we make in our day-to-day lives,” he says on his Facebook page.



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s work has been seen by many in Ottawa recently (<http://ottawacitizen.com/entertainment/local-arts/your-eyes-will-explode-in-canada-councils-new-gallery-space-on-elgin>) in the lobby of the Morguard building at 150 Elgin. People walking by are projected onto a

large video screen, and if people stop and look at the screen they'll see smoke burst from their own eyes. It's a typically startling example of Lozano-Hemmer's interactive work.



Sandra Meigs' paintings are "vivid, immersive, and enigmatic," her website says. They are also brightly colourful and often comic. *Purgatorio, A Drinkingbout*, is a watercolour and pencil work in the collection of the National Gallery, and it shows a row of silhouetted people drinking in a smoke-filled bar. It succeeds in Meigs' goal of making the viewer "feel richly engaged, jubilant, and most of all, transported to an imaginary universe."



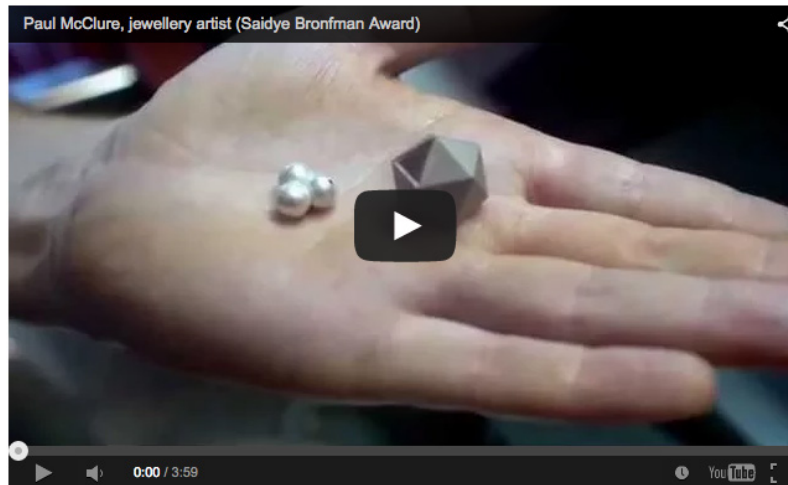
Rober Racine is a multi-media artist, composer and novelist. His oeuvre ranges from text-based works — such as *Mirror-Pages/Exhibition*, in the National Gallery’s collection — to collaborations with choreographers Marie Chouinard and Edouard Lock.



Reva Stone is a digital artist who uses “various interactive and electronic technologies to investigate what it means to be human,” wrote Robert Enright in *Border Crossings* magazine. One work, titled *sentientBody*, used sensors, images of sand and water, the sound of a woman breathing and a stainless-steel container filled with water to “both realize and dematerialize the existence of the body,” Enright wrote.



Paul McClure, a jeweller and winner of the Saidye Bronfman award for craft, says on his web page that his works “interpret the body at the cellular level to reflect our humanity in an era of medical and biological advancement.” McClure teaches at George Brown College in Toronto.



Louise Déry is curator at the gallery of the University of Quebec in Montreal.

