



As I walked down my street one day, I noticed two people huddled in front of a pole-mounted wooden box.

Upon closer inspection, I realized the box was filled with milkweed seed fluff. The words “I thought you were solid but you’re just fluff” were printed on the three inner panels.

A few weeks later, I saw a similar box, this one attached to the side of an apartment building. And instead of milkweed seed fluff, there was an abstract painting of what seemed to be a lake within a valley.

These boxes, a project of Open Field Collective called Street Project, take a private space (such as a house’s front lawn) and use it as a public one. By doing so, they encourage passersby to engage more thoroughly with the space around them. We are not just walking down the street, we are interacting and experiencing the space, thanks to these curated gallery boxes.

“Our goal is to bring engaging, current, and high-quality visual art programming to neighbourhoods right on the streets of Toronto,” says Open Field Collective member Erika James. Founded by three members in September 2014 with the aim of creating collaborative work, Open Field

Collective now consists of only James and Scott McDermid. The idea of placing mini-galleries in people’s front yards had been a recurring dream for McDermid. Once the collective was formed, the idea became reality.

The very first gallery box was installed in December 2014 outside a collective member’s home. “We immediately began receiving positive feedback from the community,” says James, “and people began to ask us if we could install a gallery in their front yard as well.”

After installing several more boxes in different neighbourhoods, Street Projects was born. Gallery boxes are currently in eight locations, and will remain in place for two years before being relocated. In addition, Street Projects has produced a set of pop-up boxes that move around more frequently.

The exhibitions displayed in each gallery box change every six weeks, and showcase a range of media, including small-scale installation art, photography, printmaking, fibre arts, painting, and

PUBLIC ART

MINI GALLERIES

Open Field Collective’s art boxes are coming soon to a front yard near you

electronic media. “We choose to exhibit a broad spectrum of programming so that our audience has an opportunity to see many different styles and approaches to art making,” says James. To see these different styles on a residential street is exciting not only for passersby, but also for the exhibiting artists, who are given a chance to show their work in an entirely new setting.

So far, Street Projects has been funded by Open Field Collective, supported by material donations to build the boxes, and hosted by enthusiastic residents who keep the galleries on their own yards. James and McDermid plan to find partners and sponsors to remunerate participating artists while still maintaining free art for the public.

“The response has been overwhelmingly positive so far” says James. “The neighbourhoods that the boxes are in seem to have become very attached to the galleries.” It’s common for Open Field Collective to receive emails from people thanking them for bringing the box to their neighbourhood, or describing the pleasant surprise of seeing a gallery where they least expect it. ↑

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photos courtesy Open Field