

Mark Vazquez-Mackay Full Biography

Mark Vazquez-Mackay's work has been exhibited and collected across the continent. As one of this province's most prominent observational painters/drawers, Mark is known mostly for his work with the human figure and portraiture, and his work is found in important collections such as that of the Canadian Armed Forces headquarters in Ottawa. His work is characterized by relentless experimentation, from his explorations of renaissance optics, to modern digital technologies, and massively ambitious projects such as his 100 portraits project and his recently begun project featuring 32 life-size figures arrayed along a single line.

Mark Vazquez-Mackay received his BFA from Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary, Canada and his MFA from the Instituto Allende in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Mark Vazquez Mackay taught for a year at the Instituto Allende and has been teaching drawing and painting at ACAD since 2004. In addition to his post-secondary teaching work, Vazquez Mackay is the current Artist in Residence at Willow Park Middle School.

While he is primarily known and respected as a painter and a teacher, Vazquez-Mackay's impact on his local community as a muralist, a mentor and a volunteer is hard to overstate since a central part of his practice is to create and nourish artistic communities and to create links between those communities and the citizens of Calgary.

His work as a public muralist exemplifies his commitment to the public. He has created works for

- The Calgary Immigration Society: apart from creating a mural for their child care center, he taught art (and tobogganing!) to Syrian refugee children.
- Queensland Community Centre: after consulting residents from Queensland, and working with First Nations representatives, Mark mentored students from ACAD who helped him paint this 107" by 9" mural.
- Calgary Drop-In Centre: Mark led a team of Artists from the Drop in centre to paint a mural on the east side of the building, a project that involved over 100 participants from multiple organizations and communities in the area.
- cSpace Arts Hub: Mark created a mural on the former King Edward school shortly before its transformation into cSpace to draw attention to the new construction.
- China Town mural project: funded by a Calgary Foundation grant via the Chinatown Community Association, this project involved nearly 200 participants, many of them elderly citizens.

As important as his work as a muralist is, Mark's community involvement extends beyond public installations: he has taught art to people in homeless shelters, to people with mental illness at Studio C, and to at-risk youth with the Y Calgary Program. He worked with recent war vets in Prospect's program called 'Forces at Work,' helping war vets with PTSD to visualize their transition from military to civilian work life, and he has just recently wrapped up a two-year commitment working alongside an art therapist at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre to help patients going through treatments. Mark will be offering for the second year his monthly public figure-drawing sessions at Arts Commons, and his seven semi-annual "Draw Til you Drop" marathon drawing and painting sessions were

legendary, playing an essential role in creating the vibrant figurative community we now enjoy in Calgary.

In front of Mark's Bridgeland home are two features that perfectly represent Mark. The first is his 'Tinier Gallery,' an aquarium-sized gallery perched atop his fence that Mark invites emerging local artists to both curate and to show work in. Through this tiny public gallery, Mark demonstrates his commitment to mentoring new talent, and to making art essential and available to communities. The second is an immense pair of eyes painted along the entire length of that same fence. Mark painted these eyes for a purpose: to remind drivers to slow down and watch for children in the neighbourhood. But this painting is also a kind of declaration of how Mark sees his role as an artist: these eyes gaze over the neighbourhood that Mark has made himself so central to, both influencing it and drawing influence from it, and in doing so asserting the artist's commitment to, reliance upon, and love of the people of this city.