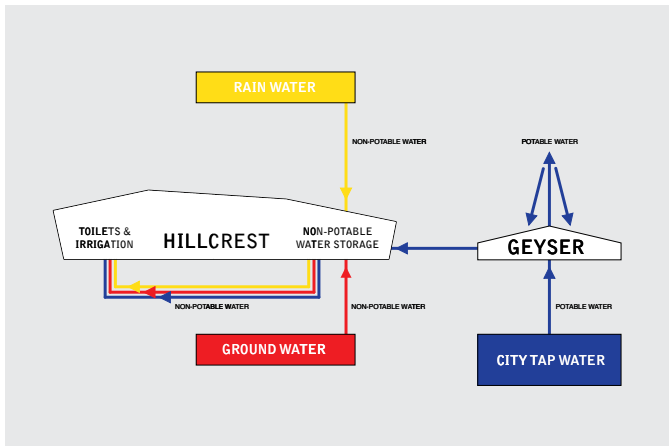


VANESSA KWAN ERICA STOCKING

Geyser for Hillcrest Park



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About the Work

In the community surrounding Hillcrest Park, urban lore tells of underground streams that may still flow unseen beneath the neighborhood, forced deep below the city’s surface decades ago by urban development. The park was home to the Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic curling rink, and now includes a hockey rink, swimming pool and outdoor aquatic area. The facility uses water to fulfill both its recreational and its rigorous environmental mandate.

For artists Vanessa Kwan and Erica Stocking, water (past and present, visible and invisible) is a defining characteristic of the site. Their public monument for Hillcrest Park harnesses water in the form of a geyser that sends an impressive plume of spray 12–18 feet in the air. It is an artwork that weaves together all these elements in the park—oral and geological histories, civic function and environmental concerns—in the form of a “man-made” “natural wonder.” A geyser is a rare and remarkable phenomenon, characterized by the eruption of pressurized water through a vent in the earth’s surface. Like those found in the natural world, the Hillcrest Geyser operates in accordance with unseen forces underground and, for the duration of its spray, renders them visible.

Above The workings of *Geyser for Hillcrest Park*, 2012. Illustration: Christian Kliegel

The Geyser’s spray is entirely safe for public play. Located on a mound at the northeast side of the park, the Geyser’s workings are directly connected to the demand for fresh water to replenish the non-potable water cistern in the Hillcrest facility. This cistern is fed by rainwater and groundwater (together known as grey water) and used for all the building’s non-potable water needs, including park irrigation and restroom functions. When there is insufficient grey water to keep the cistern functioning, the city’s potable water is pumped in. This is what activates the Geyser, intercepting the draw and sending a column of clean water, powered by the building’s water pressure, high into the air. The exhausted geyser water is then fed back into the cistern and the cycle continues. As the Geyser only erupts at the point when the city water is triggered—venting intermittently throughout the drier months and remaining dormant through the wet Vancouver winters—it calls attention in a unique way to the water usage in the complex. By functioning as a fountain without wasting water or employing an expensive water recycling system, the artwork is attentive to the green initiatives of the facility, which qualifies for the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) gold certification.

Because its eruptions are unpredictable and seemingly random, Kwan and Stocking envisage that the geyser will cultivate a sense of communal wonderment and play, gradually attaining a reputation less like that of a civic monument and more like a mysterious element of the natural world. Even when the geyser itself is inactive—its sloping concrete catch basin marking the spot—the site will maintain a fabled existence, not unlike its natural counterparts. Like the stories of the underground streams that abound in the area, the artists hope that over time, neighborhood lore will develop about the geyser, as it assumes a beloved presence in the park, a civic “natural wonder” in the heart of the city.

— Kimberly Phillips

Kimberly Phillips is a writer and curator based in Vancouver. She holds a doctorate in art history from the University of British Columbia and works at the Vancouver Art Gallery where she writes interpretation for exhibitions.

Opposite Installation view of *Geyser for Hillcrest Park*, 2012. Photo: Klodyne Rodney



About the Artists

Vanessa Kwan and Erica Stocking are Vancouver-based artists with a number of experiences making artwork for the public realm. Kwan was the recipient of a previous City of Vancouver public art commission in 2010 and works as an interdisciplinary arts programmer at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Stocking, whose site-specific installations frequently involve the use of found materials, completed a public work for UniverCity in 2009, a model sustainable community on Burnaby Mountain. Their related approaches to art-making have led them each to produce work that is materially diverse, conceptually oriented, and concerned with the communities and histories that inform a site or situation. Both graduated from Emily Carr University of Art + Design in 2004 and they have also collaborated with others in the performance art collective Norma, which received a Mayor's Art Award for Public Art in 2011.

Above Erica Stocking and Vanessa Kwan. Photo: Elaine Miller

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.



Hillcrest Geyser, 2012, was commissioned by the City of Vancouver through the Public Art Program.

Cover image *Geyser for Hillcrest Park*, 2012, Vancouver, British Columbia. Photo: Blaine Campbell

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