

# DAVID MACWILLIAM

## Kingsway Luminaires



PUBLIC  
**ART**  
vancouver



## About the Work

Kingsway is Vancouver's oldest thoroughfare. Before European contact, Kingsway was a Salish subsistence trail that stretched from what is now New Westminster to what was then a creek at 7th and Main. As the road widened, so too did its meanings. Kingsway has been many things over the years — a military endeavour, a commuter route, an automotive strip mall, a multicultural neighbourhood and, most undeservedly, a metaphor for what some find crass and unattractive about our modern gridded city.

David MacWilliam addresses time, space and locus in *Kingsway Luminaires*, a serial work that begins with six cast iron poles situated at the centre of two median strips — three poles on one side of Knight Street, three on the other. Atop each pole sits a lamp of the artist's design, an asymmetrical form placed at sixty-degree turns from one pole to the next. The effect of this curling form, and its circular placement, is evocative of an era when street lights were gas powered, their flame shape susceptible to the natural elements but also to the system by which its energy was delivered. It also brings to mind the soft ice-milk cones served at the Collingwood

Dairy Queen (or the ghouls in the *Ghostbusters* DVD available at the Kensington branch of the Vancouver Public Library).

During daylight hours, the lamps appear opaque. However, as the sun sets, colours emerge, turning these white acrylic forms into homes for a series of six randomly programmed shades that shift subtly over a two hour period, giving the appearance of lamp-to-lamp travel. But these are not the colours of commercial signage, nor could they be confused with the red, green and yellow of traffic control — these are tertiary colours, with their own agenda.

Just as street lights are there to show us where we are going, MacWilliam's lamps remind us of where we are. For the driver this means a break in the daily commute, where the forgettable (a familiar building, sign or tree) gives way to an ongoing chorus of illuminated variations. For residents of Kensington-Cedar Cottage, the lamps stand in contrast to the Victorian-style light standards installed in 2004 at the request of a business association eager to make the area more attractive — yet in doing so, inadvertently identified it with a long lost monoculture, a Dickensian world of red brick schoolhouses and British-picked street names that loom like sentries at the corners of this epic eight mile road.

The brilliance of *Kingsway Luminaires* shows us that identity (who we are in space and time) is not a static thing but something mutable, open to new configurations, new possibilities — be that the launch of a Vietnamese restaurant or the passage from stop to go. As Gertrude Stein once wrote, "Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that is a composition." In other words, it is not elements that change over time but their relationship to one another. *Kingsway Luminaires* marks the beginning of our recognition of these relationships.

— Michael Turner

**Michael Turner** is a Vancouver-based writer of fiction, criticism and song. His books include *Hard Core Logo* (1993), *Kingsway* (1995), and most recently, *8x10* (2009).

**Opposite** Installation view of *Kingsway Luminaires*, 2009. Photo: Scott Massey

**Above** *Kingsway Luminaires*, 2009. Photo: Scott Massey



## About the Artist

David MacWilliam has been active in the Vancouver art community for three decades as an artist, teacher and administrator. He is currently Dean of the Faculty of Visual Art and Material Practice at Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

Consistent in MacWilliam's art practice is his interest in colour, form and beauty. His finished works are the result of a highly refined process of consideration: he works and re-works how one form might sit in relation to another, how one colour offsets the next, how the speed of a curve can define the gestalt of a shape.

MacWilliam moves fluidly between the disciplines of painting, photography and sculpture. His current research focuses on observable, real-time coloured light events and environments in public settings.

*Kingsway Luminaires* is the most recent of his public projects that explore the illumination of simple forms with slowly shifting coloured LED lights. One-person exhibitions of his paintings include the Vancouver Art Gallery (1990), Galleria Panorama, Barcelona (1997), the Musée Régional de Rimouski, in Quebec (1998) and Winchester Galleries, Victoria (2006).

Above David MacWilliam. Photo: Barbara Cole

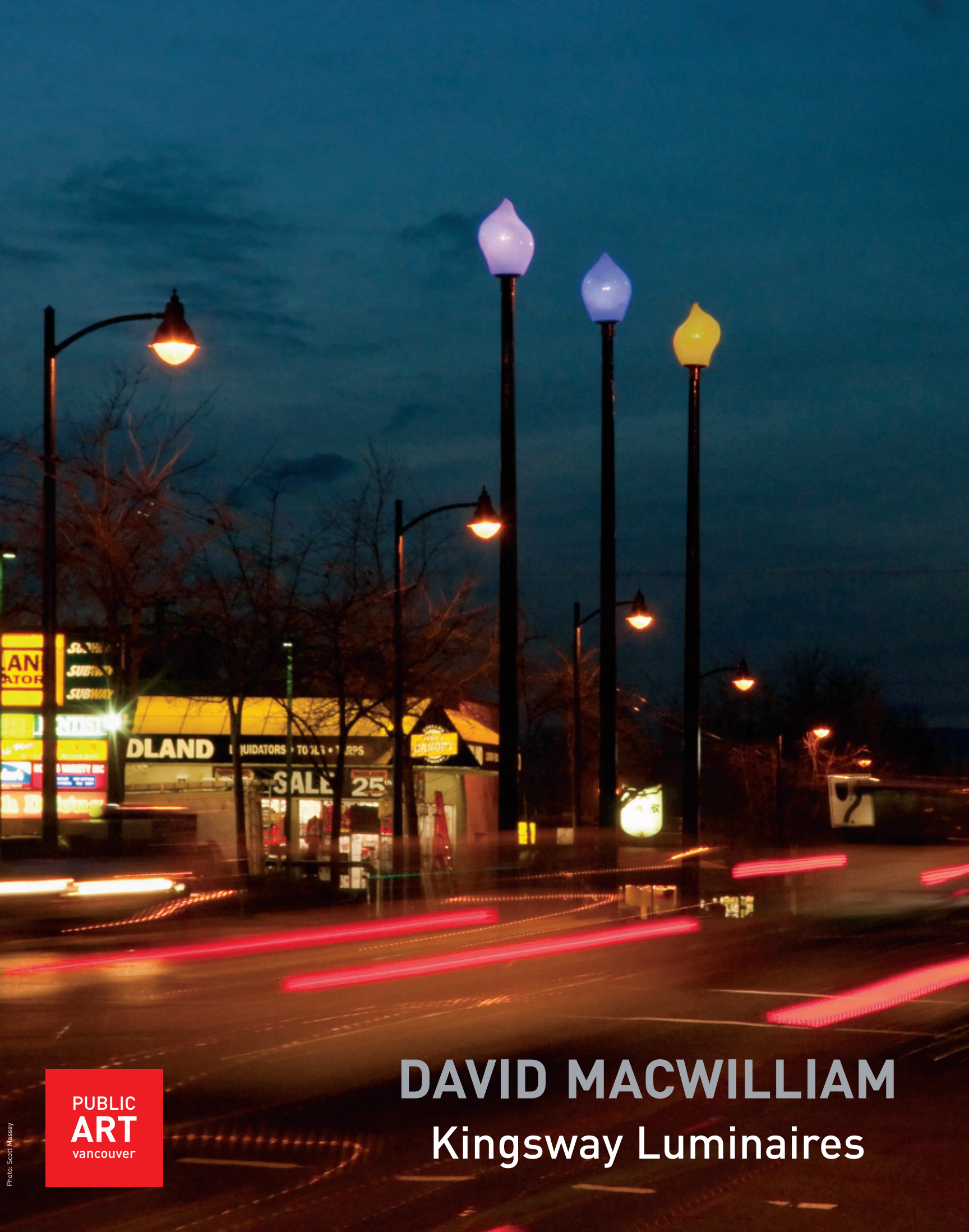
The City of Vancouver's Public Art Program incorporates contemporary art practices into city planning and development processes. The program supports excellence in art making of many kinds — by emerging and established artists, in new and traditional media, from stand-alone commissions to artist collaborations. The program is part of the Cultural Services Division and oversees the development of public art opportunities throughout the city. 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](http://www.vancouver.ca/publicart); subscribe to the Public Art Listserv at the same site to be notified of upcoming artist opportunities.



**Kingsway Luminaires** was commissioned by the City of Vancouver through its Olympic and Paralympic Public Art Program as part of Mapping and Marking: Artist Initiated Public Art Projects for Vancouver 2010.

**Coverpage** Installation view of *Kingsway Luminaires*, November 2009, Kingsway and Dumphries Street, Vancouver, British Columbia. Photo: Scott Massey





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