

KEN LUM

Monument for
East Vancouver



PUBLIC
ART
vancouver



About the Work

Monument for East Vancouver, commissioned in 2009 by the City of Vancouver as part of the Olympic and Paralympic Public Art Program, provided Ken Lum with an opportunity to pay tribute to the place where he was born and raised. His contribution transformed a decades-old symbol familiar throughout East Vancouver into a public artwork.

The artwork features a Latin cross formed by the intersection of two illuminated words: a vertical “EAST” and horizontal “VAN” with the two words sharing the letter “A.” The origins of this symbol are shrouded in mystery but possibly linked to the once-sizable Roman Catholic population living in East Vancouver. Over the years, the symbol has been appropriated in a number of ways: school children carved it onto desktops, graffiti artists sprayed versions of it on the sides of buildings, and gang members flaunted it on their jackets. The word “rules” would occasionally be included underneath the cross to read “East Van Rules.”

Lum’s transformation of this symbol entailed the construction of a seventeen-and-a-half-metre sign fabricated out of steel and light-emitting diodes that automatically turn on at dusk and off at dawn. Located above a fenced-in and

weed-filled demolished lot at the intersection of Clark Drive and East Sixth Avenue, the sign faces west toward the downtown peninsula to challenge the symbolic power associated with the downtown and west side of the city. Yet, the issue of audience is complex; it includes not just those residents living on the east and west sides of the city, but also SkyTrain commuters passing by daily on their way to and from the suburbs, and the many others who encounter the cross while stopped at the busy traffic intersection over which the sign towers.

Monument for East Vancouver is almost invisible during the day due to the silver colour of its frame against the sky. It is at night when its white glow is impossible to ignore. Visible from kilometres away, the sign hovers like a nocturnal talisman intended to protect those living on the east side of the city.

The cylindrical base anchoring Lum’s cross attracted graffiti following its installation. This illicit mark-making not only echoes the graffiti covering the concrete wall bordering the lot beneath the cross, but also evokes the earlier and more ephemeral manifestations of the East Van cross. Contrary to the early images of the cross, however, *Monument for East Vancouver* functions as a distinct physical marker that calls attention to the historical and ongoing division of the city along class lines. There is a growing belief that the traditional divide between the east and west of the city no longer exists due to rising real-estate prices across the entire city. Yet, it is still a reality that the current real-estate prices are generating even more of a crisis for the poor who, by and large, reside on the east side and are finding the cost of housing too expensive to afford.

The monumentalization of the East Van cross results in a provocative reminder of the social, economic and political divides that exist in Vancouver. *Monument for East Vancouver* not only pays tribute to a particular place and time in the city’s history, it prompts us to think about the lives of those who call East Vancouver home.

— Paloma Campbell

Paloma Campbell is an editor who lives in Vancouver.

Opposite *Monument for East Vancouver*, 2010. Photo: Robert Keziere

Above *Monument for East Vancouver*, 2010. Photo: Robert Keziere



About the Artist

Ken Lum was born in East Vancouver in 1956. He studied at Simon Fraser University (Burnaby) and New York University before earning a Master of Fine Art degree from the University of British Columbia (Vancouver) in 1985. Since then, he has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions around the world. These include Documenta (Kassel) and biennales in Gwangju, Istanbul, Johannesburg, São Paulo, Sydney and Venice. From 2000 to 2006, he was Head of the Graduate Program in Studio Art at UBC. He is also the Founding Editor of *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*. He has received numerous honours and awards: in 1999, he was made a Guggenheim Fellow; he was also the 1998 recipient of the Killam Award for Outstanding Research and won the 2007 Hnatyshyn Foundation Visual Arts Award. *Monument for East Vancouver* is his third public art commission in Vancouver. His other public art projects are located in various cities, including Vienna and Utrecht. A thirty-year retrospective of Lum's work opened at the Vancouver Art Gallery in February 2011.

Above Ken Lum. Photo: Bob Kronbauer

The City of Vancouver Public Art Program commissions contemporary art for public spaces. 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. 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 at the same site to be notified of upcoming artist opportunities.



Monument for East Vancouver was commissioned by the City of Vancouver through its Olympic and Paralympic Public Art Program, Mapping and Marking: Artist Initiated Public Art Projects, Vancouver 2010.

Coverpage *Monument for East Vancouver*, 2010, Clark Drive at East 6th Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia.



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