

CULTURE PUBLIC ART

September 15, 2026 by Julian Mirabelli

Striking New Public Artwork Joins Lassonde Art Trail in Biidaasige Park

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Recent visitors to Biidaasige Park in Toronto's Port Lands district may have noticed a striking new public art piece pop up over the past week. The large, iridescent purple sculpture is hard to miss, placed prominently at the main entrance to the new western extension of the park at the corner of Cherry and Commissioners streets. The sculpture, titled *First Sun*, is designed by Kuwaiti artist Monira Al Qadiri, and represents her first major public art installation in Canada.



'First Sun' by Monira Al Qadiri, image by Vid Ingelevics and Ryan Walker.

First Sun was co-commissioned by the Lassonde Art Trail, which oversees all the public artwork within Biidaasige Park, and the Public Art Fund in New York City. Al Qadiri's work was first installed last year in New York's Central Park, before being transported north to its current location on Ookwemin Minising. The artwork was designed with both locations in mind.

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Monira Al Qadiri presenting 'First Sun' at the unveiling ceremony, image by Julian Mirabelli.

As a Kuwaiti artist, Al Qadiri's work mainly centers around oil and fossil fuels, to which she "has an existential relationship with the substance". She is also drawn to ancient cultures, and in particular Ancient Egypt, for the differences in their ecological thinking compared to how our society relates to the natural environment today. She notes that the scarab, which is actually a dung beetle, was one of the first gods in Ancient Egypt. Al Qadiri explained, "I found it very interesting that there was a time in human history where we revered nature so much that even an insect could become a god. And I thought that was so far removed from our ideas about ecology in the modern world. When I came to this site, and I heard about the bioengineering that went into this park and the reintroduction of nature and the thought process of fixing our mistakes, the mistakes of industrialization, I thought this concept would fit perfectly here."



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The sculpture features the silhouette of a scarab – finished with an iridescent surface that changes colour depending on the angle from which it is viewed, and the specific light conditions – placed over the face of a human bust with long hair. It represents a contemporary take on the anthropomorphization of nature that was common in ancient cultures, and in particular how the beetle god in Ancient Egyptian times was frequently depicted with a human body. The iridescent colour of the scarab is reminiscent of the natural iridescence of the insect itself, but also of the colour of oil.

First Sun is a temporary installation and will be displayed in Biidaasige Park for one year, enough time to see it shimmering in all four seasons (Al Qadiri beamed with excitement when winter was mentioned; "It looks great in the snow!").



"First Sun" by Monira Al Qadiri, image by Julian Mirabelli.

The majority of artwork along the Lassonde Art Trail is in fact temporary, with timelines ranging from one to three years on display. The trail is intended to be an outdoor art gallery, with rotating installations that bring fresh new perspectives as the park grows and matures in the coming decades, so be sure to visit and take in all of them before they move on to their next locale. There are only three permanent works along the trail, one of which is already installed – *Trajet* by Caroline Monnet and Dean Baldwin Lew, located at the eastern end of the park below the Commissioners Street bridge – while the second will be unveiled in a couple weeks, a sculpture by Canadian artist Kent Monkman, representing his first ever public art installation – and coming in 2027, following an international design competition, will be a third.



We will keep you updated when the next major artwork is unveiled at Biidaasige Park, but in the meantime, you can join in on the conversation by checking out the associated Forum thread, linked below, or by leaving a comment in the space below on this page.

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