The Grid, July 4, 2012

Our home and native land

BY: KATIE UNDERWOOD

In January, when part of Allan Gardens was boarded up for a three-year-long water-main repair, the encasement resembled the dreary, light-wood exterior typical of most local infrastructure projects. Now, thanks to the work of a 21-person crew, a colourful mural documenting native history has replaced it. The eight-foot-high, 700-foot-long polyptych, "All My Relations," depicts local and national indigenous history: One wall honours the traditional role of women as both givers of life and first teachers, and serves as a sombre memorial to more than 600 native women across the country who've gone missing or been murdered since 1990. Another charts the history of native people in Canada, from the earth's creation to their first contact with European settlers and on. When the mural's walls

are dismantled in 2015, the decorated panels will be donated to local aboriginal organizations.

While another group of painters broke for lunch last Thursday, across the park, 26-year-old Lindsey Lickers brushed a wave of electric sky-blue on the wall facing Gerrard Street. She was chosen by a council of elders to spearhead the water wall, after receiving her spirit name, Mushkeke Niibi Kwe—"medicine water"—at a recent ceremony. "Ever since this [project] started, I've gotten so much more knowledge about water and what that means to me, and my responsibilities according to my name," said Lickers, a project coordinator at youth arts program 7th Generation Image Makers. "That's started to fuel how I am in life, how I carry myself, and how I treat others."

Denise Booth, a coordinator at the Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto, explained the mural's significance. "The beauty of Toronto's multiculturalism makes me love it, but indigenous people quite often get lost in the sea of multiculturalism," she said. "To have artwork up, created by our community, is really a giant honour…. It's important for everyone to know where they come from —where home is."