

Walkers, iPhone, art collide; Artist creates mystery using GPS technology

Elissa Barnard Arts Reporter

A whale's eyeball and an iPhone seem worlds apart.

But artist Leola Le Blanc connects them in a story about Dartmouth for the Maritimes' first locative media project, using mobile GPS technology.

Inspired by artifacts she found in the Dartmouth Heritage Museum, including the whale's eye preserved in a jar, Le Blanc has created a mystery that people experience using an iPhone.

"As you walk with the iPhone, it will vibrate as you approach a designated marker I've left and you open up the audio file," says Le Blanc, sitting in the fog on the boardwalk at the foot of Ochterloney Street, site of one of the markers.

"There are 10 stops around the harbour front and to the Geary Cemetery, the Leighton Dillman Park, the Quaker House and the Peace Pavilion.

"What inspired this is I'm a walker. I walk everywhere and my background is in archeology," says Le Blanc, who has a masters degree in anthropology-archeology from Trent University, as well as a masters degree in fine art from NSCAD University.

As Le Blanc walks around she collects objects. "After digging, anything I find is a treasure. To some people it's junk. To me it is anything I can put in my hand and my pocket."

As an artist, she loves to work with recycled found objects, and as a Dartmouth homeowner, she loves the city's history and culture.

"We live on George Street near the bridge. I like to walk over the bridge and take the ferry. I love the Dartmouth Common.

"I like what's happening downtown. There's a great coffee shop, Two If By Sea. I go to the market and the coffee shop. It's become for me an interesting community."

For this project, she went to the Dartmouth Heritage Museum and, with director Lisa O'Neill, picked out 12 objects that piqued her interest, including a pince-nez, a child's toy, a gun and the whale's eyeball.

She then wrote a story, recorded at the Centre for Art Tapes by 10 different volunteers, that is inspired by Dartmouth's 1800s whaling history, 1900s rum-running and the present, as well as historical characters like Emily Scarfe, who lived near Sullivans Pond and was married to artist Henry Rosenberg.

The fiction starts at the foot of Ochterloney Street where you hear that Blinky, the one-eyed whale, will be coming in past Georges Island for Dartmouth's annual **DAMMSel day**, a civic holiday that celebrates five Quaker women, since mysteriously disappeared, who ended local whaling. (The letters DAMMS are taken from American history and the first initials of the names of real Quaker women who were tortured for their beliefs.)

"The other story in **DAMMSel Day** is an illegal shipment of liquor coming in," says Le Blanc. "All these artifacts created this bizarre story. I am reinvigorating discarded material culture."

She likes the term "narrative archeology," coined by Jeremy Hight, another artist making public art with technology. The iPhone becomes "a kind of virtual trowel" for people, she says.

"They're digging through layers of time discovering stories.

"I intended it to be a discovery of space and time. I wanted people to get immersed in the various historical periods of Dartmouth. It's about highlighting the place we live in so people can participate in their direct environment. The environment we live in and walk through every **day** makes us what we are."

The entire walk takes about 50 minutes. "It's non-linear. You could start at the Quaker House or the Peace Pavilion. It's a puzzle you put together."

Figure:

Dartmouth artist Leola Le Blanc has created **DAMMSel Day**, a walking and audio adventure into a fictional story inspired by Dartmouth's history. 7scenes, a free application that runs on iPhone and some Nokia smartphones, reads location from GPS and triggers the recordings when people approach pre-determined markers along the waterfront route. (Eric Wynne / Staff)