

## **Launch of the Humanitas Festival May 26, 2006**

I want to thank Mayor David Miller and the Executive Director of Toronto Culture, Rita Davies, both of whom have spearheaded and sustained the notion of creative cities for our metropolis. Their foresight in cultural policy has helped to ensure a robust legacy of artistic life for Toronto.

As curator of Humanitas, I'm hugely excited about the Olympian signature that Humanitas will be for Toronto culture, because Humanitas extends culture past the notion of the arts and includes citizens as artists and Toronto as the canvas on which our character will be seen by global cities.

Humanitas articulates the archeology of our love, as Torontonians; it maps a geography of who we are as diversity; it provides a forum in which other cities can come and learn from the architecture of civility that is Toronto. For that is our gift to the global dialogue; how a city can be enthusiastic, sustainable and certain of its soul. And soul is the final distillation of this project that will see its completion on Toronto's waterfront by 2015.

There will be many festivals between now and then, there will be international conferences and artistic showcases and archival displays. Humanitas will take the pulse of Toronto year after year, and offer itself as a mirror for the ever-evolving prism of Toronto city building. It's the purpose of Humanitas to focus and broadcast internationally the project of the urban that Toronto does so well. Global soul is the definition that comes out of the workshop of Humanitas thinking; what is it that we as global citizens have in common, with citizens in Shanghai, Bangkok, New York, Paris and what is the genius of Toronto habitat; these are the questions? Does genius sound like a big claim for a town with a history of modesty and civic self-effacement?

That was the old Toronto – the new Toronto is electric with young innovators, spontaneously natural with new Canadians, hugely restless and unsatisfied with the edicts of corporate unthinkingness, intent on forging a model of co-habitation that will be an example to the perturbed cities of the contemporary. When someone asks what Humanitas is, in the array of functions and services that it places at the feet of its citizens; let us just say it is a mirror. For who we are, who we have been and what we will become.

This festival is a gift of delight to the city, a foretaste of celebrations to come, a chance to parade the skills of our imagination, a fun-loving debut of the creativity we have become. Toronto museums, filmmakers, Toronto thinkers, Toronto musicians, dancers, artists of all kinds, mix media mavericks – the choreography of festival creativity is dazzling. It is a coming out party for the project of Toronto lovingly identifying itself. It is a chance to tell ourselves who we are before we articulate to the world our signature spirit.

Finally, it is marvelous that our sister project “Doors Open Toronto”, begins simultaneously. Doors Open Toronto is precisely what happens before we open our doors to the world; we welcome each other, into our own home, exploring our buildings and the architecture of love and creativity. We will become familiar with each other as lovers of Toronto, before styling ourselves as citizens of the world.

Per Giorgio Di Cicco  
Poet Laureate of the City of Toronto  
Curator of Humanitas