

Installation highlights obstacles facing intellectually disabled

It's an art installation. It's a lesson in human rights. It's called The Encampment and it will be comprised of 70 white, seven-foot-high tents in Major's Hill Park behind the Château Laurier.

Each of the tents will contain an art installation that tells the story of one or more people who have experienced discrimination or lack of opportunities because of intellectual disabilities.

The collaborative installations were created by people from across Canada, including artists, volunteers and people with disabilities.

The Encampment is a project of the Canadian Association for Community Living, an agency working with the disabled, to celebrate its 50th anniversary. Artists Thom Sokoloski and Jenny McCowan, who have supervised the creation of similar massive installations in Toronto and New York, are once again in charge.

The Encampment is reminiscent of the giant art projects of Bulgarian-American artist Christo, who is most famous for turning New York's Central Park into a giant canvas to create a temporary art installation.

The Ottawa installation will be open to the public tomorrow, Friday and Saturday this week from 7 p.m. to midnight. There is no admission charge.

The project is designed to make people more aware of the situations faced by people with intellectual disabilities by allowing these people to tell their life stories through art.

Rachel Schmidt, a Vancouver artist and documentary filmmaker, supervised the creation of one of the tent's interiors. Schmidt's project was to tell the story of Grace Chen, a Vancouver woman who faced obstacles thrown up by society

against her desire to have a relationship with a man who also had intellectual disabilities.

In Schmidt's installation, she has employed elements that reference Chen's own life and that of the central character in a book Chen wrote called *Cinderella-Grace, Vancouver Princess*.

Thus, Schmidt has employed a Cinderella-like party dress, illustrations from the *Cinderella-Grace* book, elements reflecting Chen's Asian heritage and ropes that are symbolic barriers to the struggles the woman faces.



CHRIS MIKULA, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Artists Thom Sokoloski, left, and Jenny McCowan will be setting up The Encampment in Major's Hill Park.