

Applied Arts Mag - Editorial - Blog - Art Takes on STEM in New Museum Installation



Art takes on science history in a new 100 foot wide by 17 foot high interactive mural installation at the [Canada Science and Technology Museum](#) in Ottawa.

The museum re-opened last month after a three-year overhaul. The closure allowed not only for building repairs, but also for the museum to begin rolling out a new mandate that follows the STEAM approach, incorporating art into the traditional STEM (science, tech, engineering and math) model.

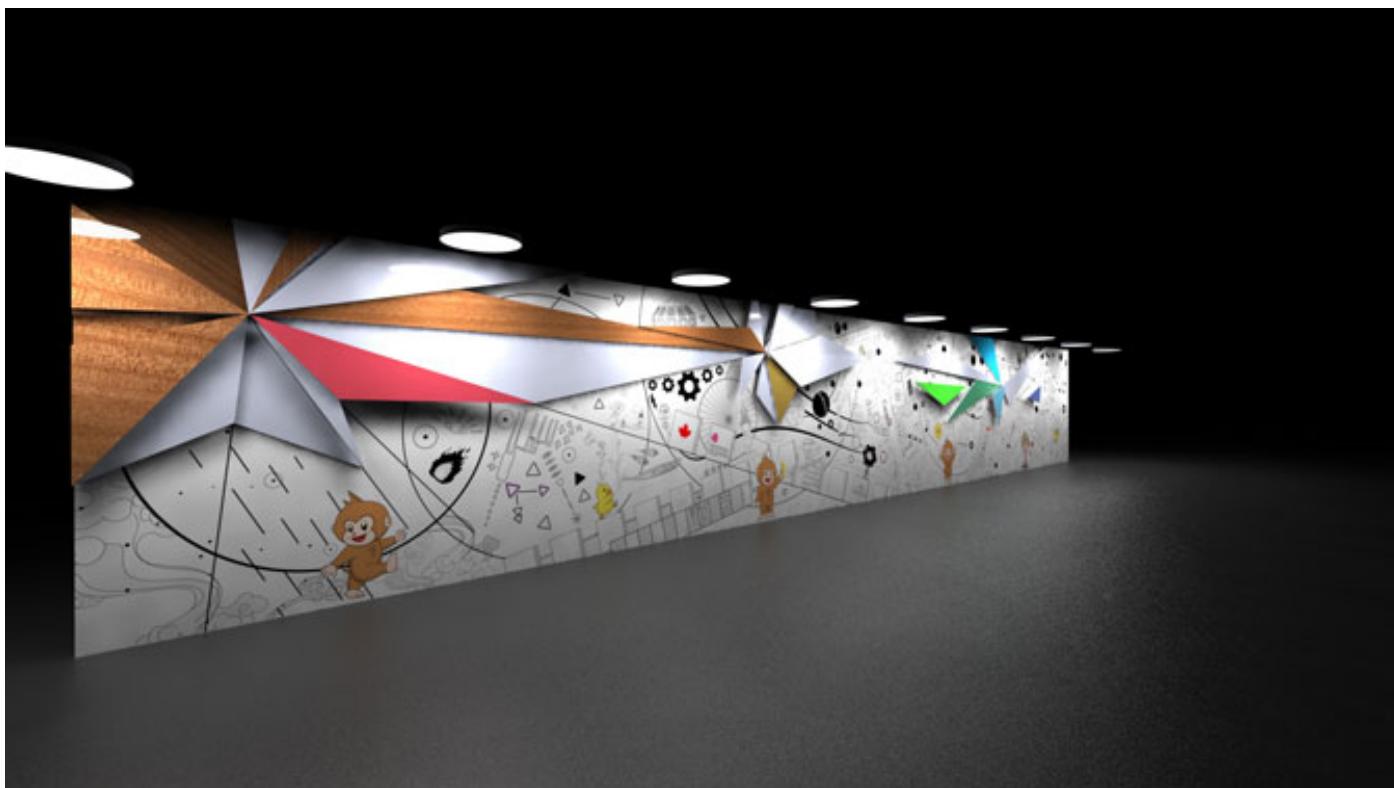
“We wanted to set the stage and let people know that art and creativity lead to cross-disciplinary work,” says Christina Tessier, director general of the Canada Science and Technology Museum (CSTM).

The installation, spanning a long, previously blank wall that greets visitors when they enter the museum, represents CSTM’s new narrative—that art has

a key place in the world of science and technology. “We wanted to use this space not to just show an exhibition, but our vision on tech and innovation,” says Tessier. “It’s now a lobby befitting a national museum.”

CSTM commissioned Ottawa-based digital artist Eric Chan, also known as [eepmon](#), to produce the piece, called “Yours to Discover,” alongside Tanya Woods, chief impact officer of social media start-up [Kind Village](#). Chan, who is known for his vivid digital illustrations, approached the mural with same goal he had for his fashion collaborations with Canada Goose and New York streetwear company RIME—to connect analogue elements with technology. He used digital vector artwork to fabricate physical materials for the wall, covering major aspects of natural and human innovation, from the Big Bang to the invention of the Canadarm to how humans may one day live in space.





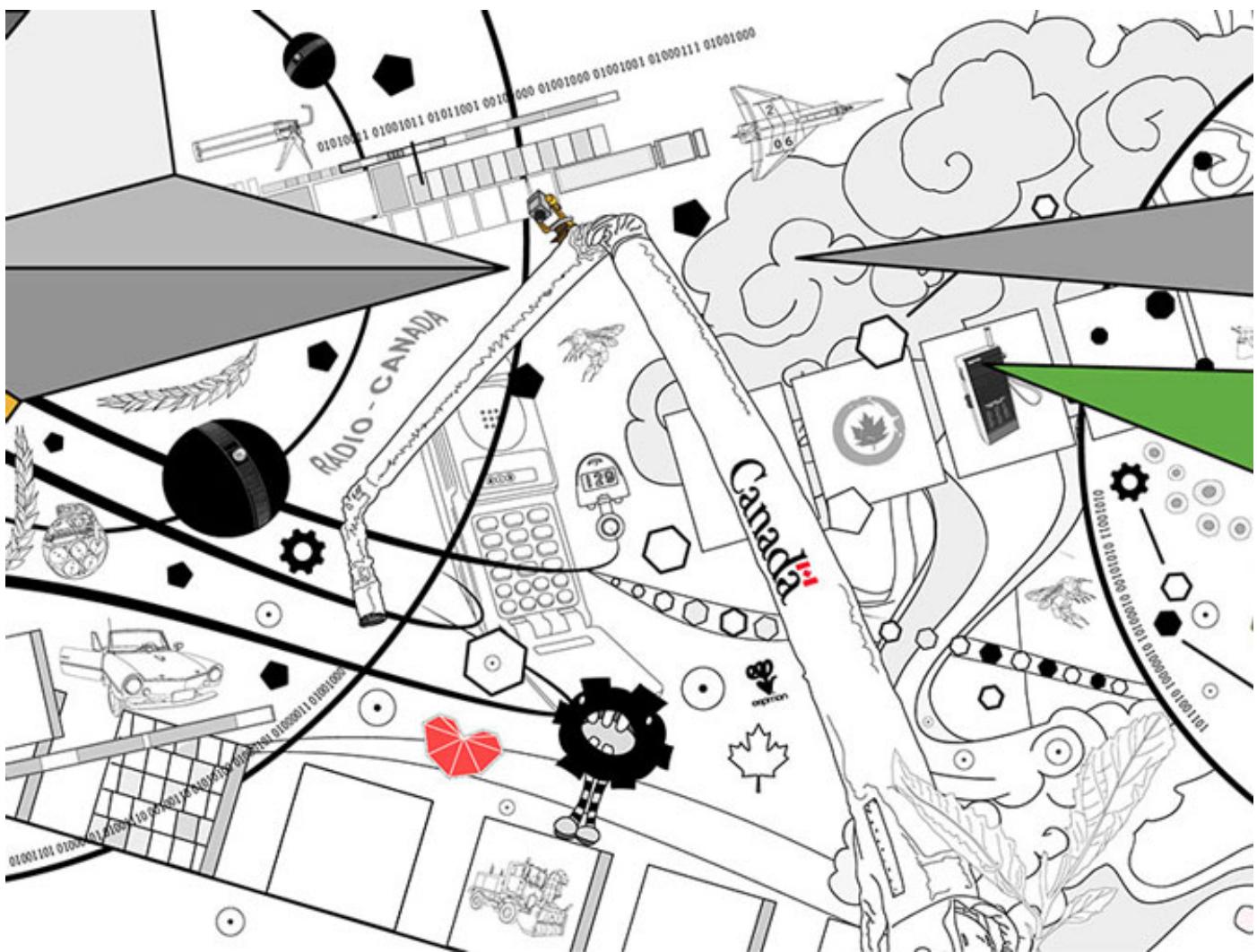
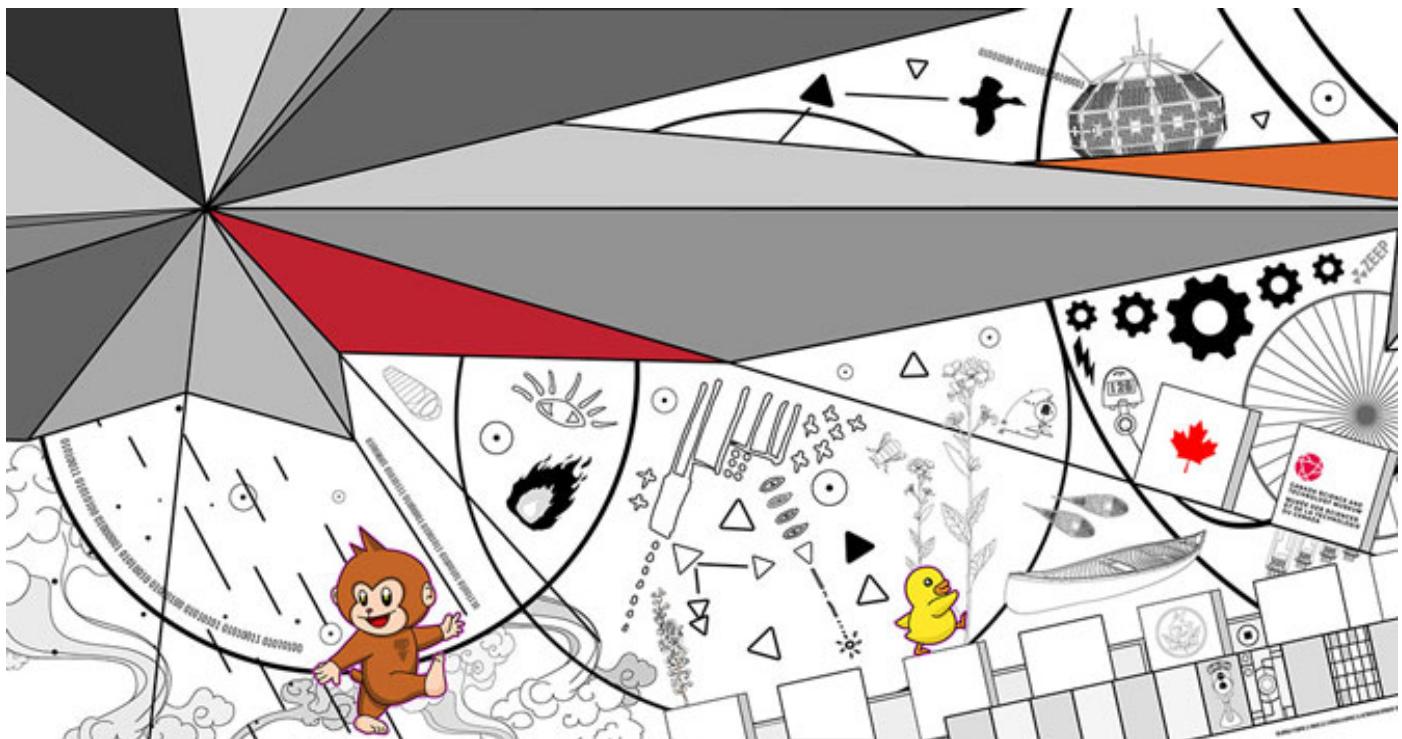
Chan and Woods—who helped develop the [online portion](#) of the installation where people can learn more about each part of the mural and exchange their

stories about social innovation and issues—sketched out the mural by interviewing curators, the museum’s youth advisory council, and members of the public, collecting the important moments in Canadian history everyone would want to see on the wall. From there, Chan and Woods turned to the museum archives, combing through artifacts to whittle down those most significant, starting with the Big Bang.

“I wanted to hear people’s stories, and learn what pieces stood out more than others,” explains Chan. “My hope is that people will take away their own stories. My vision was to show an abstract timeline—artifacts and key items that people can relate to. We’re using technology, but have a nod to heritage in the craftsmanship and the workmanship.”

Chan was inspired by some wood triangles at the front of the building and used a similar shape to begin the mural, coating them in powdered aluminum to evoke astronomy. He drew the vector artwork on the computer, and later worked with a fabricator to etch the drawings onto acrylic and add pieces of vinyl, wood and aluminum. The mostly black-and-white installation features some of the cartoon characters he’s known for in his own work, which he thought would resonate with younger museum visitors.

“I didn’t want this to be too dense and colourful—I was very mindful to ensure this didn’t overpower the viewer,” he says. “I wanted the work to play with the existing architecture and space.”



Detail of the vector artwork

The challenges of working on a public-facing piece were new to Chan. “I had to take my art cap off and become the project coordinator in order to work with the fabricator,” he says. “As an artist, I don’t engage in that capacity every day, so I had to wrap my head around it. How would toddlers interact with the piece? How would adults or teenagers interact with it?” For safety reasons, aluminum elements needed to be at least eight feet off the ground so children couldn’t reach them, and edges of the acrylic wall needed to be sanded down.

The mural was unveiled when the museum opened on November 17 and kicks off more than 80,000 square feet of exhibition space featuring a number of other new art projects including an installation of 1,867 light bulbs from the museum archive, created to close out the Canada 150 year.



An exhibition called The Technology of our Lives features German artist HA Schult’s *Trash People*—humans form made up of consumer waste. Says Christina Tessier, director general of CSTM, “It shows how much more we are

consuming today and what that means for waste. We're not here to lecture that consumerism is bad, but we are here to start a dialogue—and we thought art was a good way to start that dialogue.”