

# Design TO Festival

Jan 23 - Feb 1, 2026

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Toronto's Stories Through Design: DesignTO Festival Returns in January

100+ free exhibitions and events transform Toronto

**Toronto, ON – December 5, 2025** – Kicking off on January 23 until February 1, 2026, the [DesignTO Festival](#) returns to Toronto for its 16th year, unveiling more than 100 free exhibitions, installations, talks, and workshops across the city. This year's Festival asks a simple but profound question: What does it mean to belong – to each other, to our cities, to our past, to the materials and spaces that surround us, and to the futures we hope to build?

Through work by hundreds of artists and designers, the Festival is set to examine the question of identity through many lenses, including queer domesticity, diasporic memory, ancestral craft, urban advocacy, ecological futures, and the raw creativity of making.

“Identity is not static; it is shaped by the threads we inherit, the stories we hold, the places we call home,” says Anna Bartula, DesignTO’s Executive Director. “This year’s Festival is a celebration of design that will be defined by the rich and beautiful expressions of belonging.”

She adds, “We encourage visitors to stretch their imagination far and wide as they explore how design can help us see each other, and our diverse city, with greater depth, empathy, and appreciation.”

The Festival positions Toronto as a living laboratory of ideas, where materials, memories, and communities converge and where their stories are told through design.

With neighbourhood activations planned in Kensington Market, Roncesvalles, Yonge + St. Clair, Trinity Bellwoods, Stackt Market, 401 Richmond, and along the Waterfront, the Festival situates global conversations within Toronto’s layered histories, diverse communities, and flourishing maker ecosystem.

“We’re so excited to deliver yet another Festival that transcends the traditional boundaries of design, reminding us that design is something we inhabit, create, and feel together,” says Deborah Wang, DesignTO’s Artistic Director and Curator.

She shares, “This year, artists and designers explore identity as an idea that is shaped across generations – expressed through craft, carried through diaspora, and embedded in

the architecture of daily life. Our approach is to encourage visitors to feel design deeply, to step into the stories it can tell, and to reimagine where and how we belong – physically and metaphorically.”

To date, DesignTO has welcomed over one million visitors, reached 2.6 billion people through media, showcased over 7,000 artists and designers, and generated \$159 million in tourism spending, making the Festival one of the most important design events of the year!

### **DesignTO Launch Party:**

The Festival opens with its highly-anticipated DesignTO Launch Party at the Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto (MOCA), a night celebrating art, architecture, design, and global diasporic culture.

Guests will experience three floors of *Jeff Wall Photographs 1984–2023*, with music curated by local·global, featuring DJs Isabel Okoro and Adeola Abegunde.

For more information on this ticketed event and fundraiser, [click here](#).

### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

With more than 100 exhibitions, installations, and events across the city, here are just a few of the many moments you won't want to miss. Registration may be required in advance – a full list can be found [here](#).

#### **Identity, Memory and Cultural Storytelling**

[TO ·BE·LONGING: Portraits of Queer Living](#): An immersive spatial experiment by Quan Thai challenging rigid norms of domesticity, reframing queer home as a site of fluidity, chosen family, and everyday resilience.

[Remnants for the Future](#): A poetic textile installation by Yana Rzayeva that reflects on diasporic hybridity, ancestral craft, and the traces that endure across generations.

[Knot: Holding On](#): An exhibition where artist Alanoud Emaish (noudiee) weaves Palestinian memory, inherited stories, and tactile nostalgia into personal archives of longing and cultural continuity.

[Traces](#): A group exhibition exploring migration, forced relocation, and the weight of preserving culture and identity. The multidisciplinary exhibition will include a broad range of works in sculpture, installation, cyanotypes, geographic maps, furniture, and textiles by Hangama Amiri, Sonny Assu, Meena Chowdhury, Nilojan Jegatheeswaran, Jenn Kitagawa, Dennis Lin, Rose Nordin, Anahita Norouzi, Waard Ward, and Abhishek Wagle.

## **Architecture and the Built Environment:**

[How Heavy is a Building?:](#) A film exploring the unseen material, cultural, and environmental weight of architecture. Developed by Ha/f Climate Design and Make Good Projects, the film traces the embodied carbon of three of Lisbon's most iconic cultural institutions.

[Ideas Forum: Advocating for a Better City](#): 5 fast-paced presentations (20 slides shown for 20 seconds each) exploring different approaches and case studies of advocacy in Toronto's built environment.

[Signs of Change: Pedaal](#): A project that invites the public to imagine how cycling and urban landscape might evolve in response to shifts in climate, technology, and public policy.

[Art and Architecture Trivia Night](#): Join the Toronto Society of Architects (TSA), solo or as a team, for a joyful evening of fun, laughter, and maybe even a little bit of learning.

## **Craft, Materials, and the Maker Culture:**

[All Light](#): Through unique interpretations of ceramics, glass, textile, wood, and metal, this multidisciplinary group show celebrates the creativity, materiality, and technical innovation of our local Canadian maker community.

[An Evening of Craft, Digitality, and Critical Reflection](#): Explores the role of technology in traditional craft processes through the community initiative Fábrica de Artes y Oficios.

[DesignTO Talks: Within the Weave](#): Through dialogue, they'll reflect on how material practice becomes a form of storytelling—revealing how the landscapes we inhabit might be translated by incorporating elements of repetition and irregularity, the familiar and the abstract.

[Kensington Unearthed and \(Re\)formed](#): An exhibition of ceramics crafted from wild clay discovered in the heart of Toronto's Kensington Market.

[Soft Grid](#): Shao-Chi Lin bridges traditional craft and contemporary technique to create a meditative pause in the heart of the city. Located in the Le Germain Hotel Toronto, the textile installation invites guests to slow down, take notice, and feel a sense of belonging.

## **Eye-catching Exhibitions:**

[Beneath One Sky](#): Through its openness and overlapping cloud-like forms, this artwork by Asli Alin celebrates multiplicity, exchange, and shared belonging – proposing that true pride lies in embracing diversity.

[Suspended Vessels](#): Bram Locknick's glowing installation transforms The Drake Hotel's window into a field of luminous, hand-blown glass and spectral light. Suspended from a canopy, clusters of free-blown uranium glass droplets emit an eerie green glow when illuminated by ultraviolet light, radiating across the glass façade and into the winter night.

[Flourish](#): A dynamic light fixture is programmed to respond to the local light conditions and mirror the natural rhythms of our surroundings. Embracing both heritage and innovation, the installation by 3K1D and Hot Pop Factory fuses technology and tradition to create a moment in the present, informed by the past.

[The Weather Holds](#): This exhibition displays Teston + Zhang's vision and experimentation addressing space-making with air and water, as well as imaginary yet grounded designs for the public. with six tangible design products: simulations, milli-fluidic prototypes, DIY drip cooling, thermal drape, and mock-up installations.

**– ENDS –**

#### **About DesignTO:**

As a charitable arts organization, DesignTO continues to expand its mission to advance the public's appreciation of design, create accessible cultural programming, and nurture community connections through design. DesignTO acknowledges funding support for the 2026 DesignTO Festival from the Government of Ontario, City of Toronto, the Ontario Arts Council, and many sponsors and partners.

Each year, the DesignTO Festival brings over 100 free events across Toronto, showcasing hundreds of artists and designers. As Canada's largest annual design festival, DesignTO has welcomed over 1 million attendees, reached 2.6 billion people through media, supported 7,000+ artists, and generated \$159 million in tourism impact.

"DesignTO isn't just a festival; it's an anti-loneliness machine," co-founder Christina Zeidler remarked, underscoring the organization's power to foster a sense of belonging and spark vital conversations about design's role in shaping a better world.