

# SEANKELLY

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## Cardboard Beach is the latest hot spot for Luminato



The Cardboard Beach is the work of the Havana-based art collective Los Carpinteros (the Carpenters) and will be made up of a cabana, umbrellas, lounge chairs and a lifeguard tower made of cardboard. (Della Rollins for the Globe and Mail)

Dagoberto Rodriguez Sanchez says that he and his partner, Marco Antonio Castillo Valdes, are going to be "very happy" if there's an outbreak of mass nudity in Toronto's David Pecaut Square, the public hub of Luminato 2014.

He and Valdes, in fact, have been working to make that happen. Founders and co-creators of the Havana-based art collective Los Carpinteros (the carpenters), they're responsible for the design of Cardboard Beach, an assembly of familiar waterfront paraphernalia – lounge chairs, umbrellas, breakwaters, a lifeguard station, a cabana – installed around the outdoor stages in Pecaut Square. And, yes, they're all made of cardboard, manufactured in the Greater Toronto Area by several suppliers contracted by Our Paper Life, purveyors of 100-per-cent recyclable furniture since 2011.

"The idea of the whole project," said Sanchez with a smile the other day, while touring Pecaut Square, "is to pull people together ... to have some fun." And what better way to have fun in the sun than "to get naked." Potentially helping to realize that ambition is the fact that Cardboard Beach is "a fully licensed food and beverage centrepiece" during Luminato's run through June 15.

Ironies abound, of course. Cuba has long been a popular, relatively cheap winter destination for Canadians. Indeed, the sole experience of the island nation for many Torontonians likely has been of the prone variety atop a deck chair on the beach at Varadero, mojito wedged into the fine white sand. By contrast, Pecaut Square is a dry, profoundly urban space in the unforgiving concrete heart of Canada's largest metropolis. Life there, in other words, is no beach – the last place you'd expect to see, in the words of Luminato's artistic director, Jorn Weisbrodt, "sweaty lifeguards, cleavage-parading beach bums."

And yet its location is less than a kilometre from Lake Ontario, one of the largest bodies of fresh water on the planet. “We wanted to give something back,” said Sanchez. “Toronto doesn’t have a decent beachy culture.”

You could also see all that cardboard as an homage of sorts to Frank Gehry, the world-famous Toronto-born architect who in the early 1970s turned heads by designing chairs, ottomans and lamps made of cardboard. Sanchez, 45, acknowledges Gehry as a Los Carpinteros inspiration – “but, you know, a whole industry has developed around cardboard. ... It’s a material we always go back to and use a lot.” In 2008, for instance, Sanchez and Valdes, who is 43, erected a shantytown of “little cardboard houses” in Austria.

Humour clearly is a part of Los Carpinteros’s practice. But since its founding in 1991 the collective has worked seriously and steadily all over the world, using a variety of media, including Lego blocks, to explore the intersection of architecture and sculpture, society and art, practicality and uselessness, the phony and the real. Now represented by Manhattan ubergallerist Sean Kelly (Marina Abramovic, Rebecca Horn, Joseph Kosuth), the duo’s work is in the permanent collections of many institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Museo de Bellas Artes in Havana.

Late last week Sanchez said the pair were “crossing our fingers for the weather to be dry.” Their cardboard creations are solid and sturdy – their deck chair can support a 100-kilogram bulk and more without buckling, and repel the contents of a spilled cerveza. But “there’s finally no such thing as waterproof cardboard,” according to Jordan Whelan, part owner of Our Paper Life. “What they have is a waterproof coating on them ... which we ourselves have done tons of testing on. What we’ve seen is that you can basically pour a glass of water on them, leave that for a couple of days, then wipe it off and not really see any difference to the structure of the cardboard.”

So, un vaso de agua, si! A torrential downpour, no?

Whelan chuckles. “I don’t welcome a torrential downpour. There might be a little bit of a struggle if there’s something like that.” At the same time, he says he would “sort of welcome [some] rain” as a way to demonstrate “how well coated they are. ... For the most part, I think the pieces are well equipped to withstand several days of rain.”