

# *ACER CONCORDIAE* (2011), Kamila Wozniakowska

This is the sixth stop of the Public Art, Nature and the City tour.

In the busy corridor between the Guy–Concordia metro station, and the J.W. McConnell (LB) Building, *Acer Concordiae* might not leap out at first. Composed of 52 laser-engraved steel panels, this work depicts the life cycle of a fictional maple tree species, *Acer Concordiae*. The imaginary species is based on *Acer saccharum*, or sugar maple, the most common maple species in Quebec. At each end of the tunnel, a pair of engravings shows both the first and last stage of the tree's life cycle — from seed to full maturity — followed by its intervening stages. As you progress through the tunnel in either direction, you witness growth and degrowth unfold across a timeline.

Kamila Wozniakowska, the artist behind this work, was born in 1956 in Warsaw. Wozniakowska studied in France before emigrating to Quebec in the early 1980s, where she finished her education at Université du Québec à Montréal in 1986. The artist has lived and worked in Montreal ever since. Wozniakowska has had many exhibitions throughout Canada and in Poland, including a retrospective at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, and one at the Art Gallery of Ontario. In 2007, the artist was inducted into the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts. Often working in large-scale paintings, Wozniakowska's work is characterized by bawdy and satirical humour, and immense technical skill. She often divides a canvas into a grid and uses each panel to represent a stage of interactions between subjects. By placing the subjects against the backdrop of a landscape, Wozniakowska creates a narrative with much the same method as a comic strip. Her work is often formally inspired by the veduta tradition, a highly detailed illustration of a landscape, most frequently one with architectural features. First appearing in the sixteenth century in Holland, and later made popular by Venetian artists, vedute were first produced as meticulously rendered, large-scale paintings, notable for their impressive lifelike quality. These paintings were frequently translated into etchings, which could then be reproduced and circulated widely.

In the case of *Acer Concordiae*, we might consider that Wozniakowska also works within the formal framework of the capriccio. Capriccio is a form of veduta that, while still characterized by the precision and accuracy of other vedute, combines landscape elements in fantastical or absurd ways. In the 52 panels of *Acer Concordiae*, the tree specimen is the central figure, growing from seed to sprout, to sapling, to full maturity. Mount Royal remains an unchanging backdrop for this growth, taking us along for the journey.

If you move through this tunnel frequently, as many do on their daily commutes, you might at first think that the panels' progression represents the city's growth. If you can, look more closely, or imagine its view. What else is revealed? Take a moment to look carefully at the panels nearest to you. What do you notice or imagine? The series of buildings and geographical

features in the tree's background are inconsistent. Rather, they collage buildings (and some public artworks) from Concordia's two campuses, from different periods of the university's history. Do you recognize any Concordia landmarks? Against this changing backdrop, the *Acer Concordiae* tree takes on a more metaphorical significance, a surrogate for the Concordia community and its collective growth.

If you move enough, these engravings might blur together appearing like an animation. However, given the opportunity to stop and have a closer look, the work reveals many layers to be discovered. While some public artworks rely on impressive scale to command the public imagination, this work asks the viewer to have a closer look — and then another.

To continue this tour, click on *Untitled* by Jean McEwen.