

Coulee landscape offers inspiration for Toronto artist's latest creation

Camille Turner wraps up shooting around the city of film 'Final Frontier'

By **SHERRI GALLANT**

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When she first came to Lethbridge a couple of years ago, Camille Turner was unprepared for how deeply the landscape would affect her.

The Toronto-based media and performance artist had been invited to speak at the University of Lethbridge and, having grown up in southern Ontario, she had never experienced coulees. The things she learned about local history while here inspired her to create her latest project, a film called "Final Frontier." This week she wrapped up filming in and around the city for the production, which will premiere in Toronto this fall.

"Nothing prepared me for the coulees," explained Turner, who returned to Toronto Friday. "I thought, 'oh my God, this is alien territory, but when I was here I felt like the alien. That's why I had to set up an intervention.'"

The intervention is the film, which marries history, fiction and art to pack a powerful wallop of a message about human nature. She's teamed up with Halifax filmmaker Sobaz Benjamin (who produced "Race is a Four Letter Word" for the National Film Board) to co-produce the project.

The story follows the journey of four Dogon people who have returned to Earth to save it, after watching its environmental and spiritual decline for centuries from their vantage point on a star called Sirius B. The Dogons were ancient people who lived in the fertile crook of Africa before the Sahara became a desert. Legend has it they scattered to start great civilizations after the



HERALD PHOTO BY NORM LEBUS

Have laptop, will travel: Toronto-based performance artist Camille Turner has been in Lethbridge for two weeks shooting a video installment for her latest project, "Final Frontier."

desert came.

The Dogon had knowledge of a star that was invisible to Earth observers until it was first photographed by a powerful telescope in 1971. How they had that knowledge remains a mystery,

but legend has it that it was extra-terrestrially imparted.

In "Final Frontier," some Dogon people who left Earth to live on Sirius B return to save the planet. They walk through familiar locations (the

film is shot in Toronto and in Lethbridge and near Pincher Creek) never uttering a word out loud yet speaking volumes with their actions. Some of the unscripted reactions from city residents made for some unforgettable moments. In front of the Farmers' Market one Saturday, children with their parents cautiously approached the actors, who were in costume, holding lentils in their cupped, outstretched hands.

While no words were spoken by the actors, the children seemed to naturally accept what they saw and took some lentils from their hands, turning to share them in the same way with others who were approaching.

The story is both complex and unvarnished, but Turner's goal was to find a way to reconcile the storied land with the city, which she sensed had become disconnected over time.

"The coulees were everything to Lethbridge, which was built because of what the coulees had to offer," she said. "And when the resources weren't there anymore, the city and the land became separated."

"Final Frontier" speaks to the destination of Earth, but Lethbridge, too, is a place of frontiers, Turner said.

"This is a very potent place."

Turner is Artist in Residence at the Women's Art Resource Centre in Toronto. Her work — funded by Canada Council for the Arts — explores the social dimensions of technology and she is one of the founding members of Year Zero One, a collective working as a network to disseminate digital culture. The group's projects include a number of mobile and site-specific exhibitions, including one in a taxicab and another that shows artists' works on video billboards in Toronto.