

THE ARTS

# From the Cold War to the Far North to the world stage

Art installation that explores sovereignty in the North will debut at festival in Germany thanks to funding from Yukon government

BY JOSH WINGROVE

When the DEW Line was built, Charles Stankieveh hadn't been born. He was only a teenager when the Cold War ended, and until three years ago didn't even live in the North.

But this month, the 32-year-old will represent Yukon artists on the world stage when his installation project – an homage to the outmoded yet iconic Distant Early Warning (DEW) system and supported with funding from the territory's government – makes its international debut.

The DEW Project, an art installation that explores environment and sovereignty in the North, will be displayed at an international art festival in Dortmund, Germany, next week. It's a hallmark showing for the territory of a scant 34,000 people. Two years ago, the Yukon government created a Touring Artist Fund to support the efforts of its many artists, including Mr. Stankieveh, to show their work to a broader

audience internationally.

"We wanted to do something where artists get the opportunity to show their stuff outside of the Yukon," said Laurel Parry, arts manager with the Yukon Department of Tourism and Culture, which contributed just over \$5,775 to Mr. Stankieveh's German display. "We just feel that people spend so much time here creating and producing a work of art, that we'd hate to see it just be shown to such a small local audience."

Mr. Stankieveh's project was inspired by what was once a 5,000-kilometre series of 63 radar stations dotting the Canadian and American Arctic Ocean coasts along the 70th parallel. The DEW Line was a joint project of Canada and the United States meant to detect a Soviet bomber attack over the North Pole. Developments in intercontinental missiles soon rendered most of the stations obsolete. Much of the DEW Line is now considered toxic and sites are being dismantled in an ambitious environmental resto-

ration effort at a cost of about \$600-million, due to be complete in 2018.

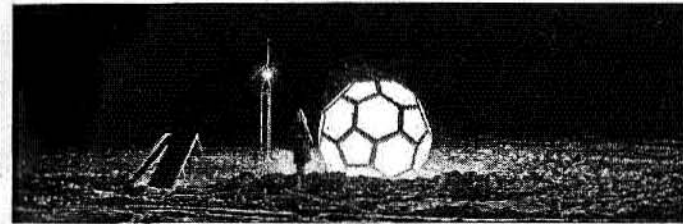
Many of the stations still exist, and they caught the eye of Mr. Stankieveh, who in 2007 left Montreal for tiny Dawson City, where he co-founded the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture School of Visual Art. For an artist on the hunt for a symbol of the role of communications in the fight for Arctic sovereignty, they fit the bill.

"Immediately, I was drawn to the Cold War defence structure of the DEW Line," he said from Germany, where he is preparing his multifaceted display. "It's somewhat of a replica."

He developed a single 10-foot geodesic dome (what he calls a "formal nod" to the actual DEW Line stations), which sat last year for one month at the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike rivers and recorded the sounds of ice and flowing Arctic water. The sound was broadcast live over radio and the Internet.

With the help of a Parks Canada researcher, that concept was

## DEW LINE HISTORY



The DEW project is an art installation spanning the northern outposts of the old Distant Early Warning system. CHARLES STANKIEVECH

**1952** – Study group at Massachusetts Institute of Technology warns of possibility of a northern attack.

**1953** – Two stations built to test feasibility of a northern radar line.

**1955** – Canadian government approves plans for the DEW Line, meant as a heads-up for Canadian and American defence systems in the event of a Soviet air invasion.

A total of 42 Canadian DEW Line radar dome sites would be built in the 1950s, in addition to others in Alaska and Greenland.

**1957** – DEW Line declared fully operational.

**1963** – Twenty-one radar sites abandoned amid improved missile technology. They've each since undergone two cleanup efforts.

**1993** – Last Canadian DEW Line stations shuttered. Cost of cleanup pegged at about \$250-million.

**2008** – Cost of cleanup of remaining 21 DEW Line sites estimated to be \$583-million, with 10 years of work remaining.

» Source: Parks Canada, archives

developed into an installation that includes the dome, satellites, an audio soundscape featuring some of the river sound, and video. "Essentially, I recreate the radio station inside the museum," he said.

The DEW Project, having already been shown in Toronto and Montreal, is being displayed at the International Symposium on Electronic Art in Dortmund, beginning Aug. 19. Mr. Stankieveh is one of two Canadians among 30 international artists. Last year, 35 artists received a total of \$141,000 in funding from the Yukon fund.

"The fact that it [The DEW Project] is being appreciated by an audience beyond Canada is, to me, fantastic," Ms. Parry said.

"Sometimes our artists here don't have the opportunity to rub shoulders with the people that are going to disseminate their work to an audience. And so we wanted to remove at least the struggle of funding," she said. "At least living in the Yukon isn't going to be a disadvantage."