

## Sculpture spreading happiness on shores of Lake Massawippi

**N**ORTH HATLEY (RM) — Towns interested in slowing traffic on their streets should pass by Lake Road in North Hatley. There, drivers are slowing down to a crawl — not out of deference to speed bumps but to get a better look at a curious site on the shore of Lake Massawippi. There, poised on a vacant green lot, is an eight-foot tall black bronze sculpture of a sensuous nude nymph, blowing stars out to the world.

The sculpture is the work of local artist Nicole Taillon and has recently returned from an eight-month stay in the lobby of Le Grand Théâtre in Quebec City and, before that was part of Taillon's solo show at Le Château Frontenac. For the last several weeks, its home has been the lakeshore across the road from Taillon's home.

"I put it there because there's no place for it under my bed," joked Taillon.

### Broken base

The open-air exposition also offers Taillon a chance to see what effect the elements will have on the bronze sculpture's patina. The only flaw in the 1800-pound piece now is the granite base, which cracked on its rollers before it even made it to Quebec City. Taillon is reluctant to repair the base be-

cause one potential buyer has mentioned mounting the nude on a concrete base in the middle of a lake; replacing the base now would be premature.

### Symbol of happiness

The sculpture is titled "Cassiopeia," and, like the constellation it is named after, it is full of stars. Besides blowing golden stars out of her hand, she has stars coming out of her ears, in her hair, even between her toes. She even appears to be emerging from a sea of stars, a source, says Taillon, that is "like happiness — without end."

"I believe in the spirit of the earth, the trees, and I imagine a spirit coming from the stars blowing happiness on the earth," says Taillon.

Taillon has used stars before as a symbol of happiness.

"When I travelled the metros in Paris, I carried in my purse small shining stars that I would pour on the floor. I imagined all the old ladies and men, sitting on the metro after a hard day, seeing those stars on the floor and feeling happy for a moment," she says.

The creation of the statue itself — a year-long process — was not always a happy event. Taillon, who works with her sister Céline in the casting process, had great difficulty getting the carefully balanced

work to come together. It wasn't until she put all her technical data aside and went on instinct — a process she describes as like being at sea without instruments — that the piece finally jelled.

Only after it was finished did an acupuncturist friend tell her that the way Cassiopeia's hand pointed skyward was conducive to channelling of energy through the body.

"When I work, it's like praying. Sometimes I don't know what I'm doing," she says.

### Slow stares

While "Cassiopeia" waits to find a permanent home, it is attracting a good deal of attention from passersby on Lake Road. Even a bus-load of tourists stopped to take a look. After cyclists used the sculpture to prop up their bikes, Taillon's son staked out a small rope fence around the piece. Her neighbors seem to like it and she has received only one complaint about the fact that Cassiopeia is nude and seemingly delighted to be so.

"I don't want to shock," says Taillon. "There's too much love in this work for that."

Since she placed it on the unguarded lakeshore, it has been mercifully untouched by vandals — no doubt thanks to the happiness it's spreading.



Nicole Taillon explains the long thought process she went through to bring "Cassiopeia" to life. Photo: Ross Murray