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ARTS

## Gary Taxali's coin operative

That acclaimed Canadian pop artist unveiled his new line of coins for the Royal Canadian Mint last night at The Spoke, as part of an initiative to make our currency feel, well, more current.

BY: CARLY MAGA

Propelling the continuous cycle of pop culture—old becoming new, indie becoming mainstream, nerdy becoming hip—an unlikely pair have joined forces: renowned Toronto illustrator/toymaker/children's book author Gary Taxali and the Royal Canadian Mint.

In a new series of holiday-themed quarters, Taxali's signature 1930s-style cartoons are etched into tiny pieces of artwork accessible to more of his fans. (To actually buy an original Taxali piece, you'd need about 40,000 of those quarters.) In packaging that features the ethereal photography of Matt Barnes, the gift sets—celebrating birthdays, births, weddings, Canada Day, lost teeth and the winter holidays—are taking the hobby of coin collecting and, dare we say it, making it cool.

"I don't know what's cool or not cool," Taxali said humbly at last night's launch event at The Spoke Club. "But it does seem like it's moving with the times and reflecting contemporary Canadian art."



The Mint has worked with notable Canadian artists in the past, like Alex Colville, Robert Bateman and Bill Reid. But as Alex Reeves, Senior Manager of Communications at the Mint, announced last night, this marks the first time the Mint is celebrating Canada's pop-art scene. At the launch, the tattooed, coiffed and plaid-covered patrons crowded the bar, while models in dresses dotted with prints of the coins (also available for purchase) refrained from eating the complimentary cupcakes. It could have been any night at the Drake, albeit one that's filled with a new generation of potential coin collectors.

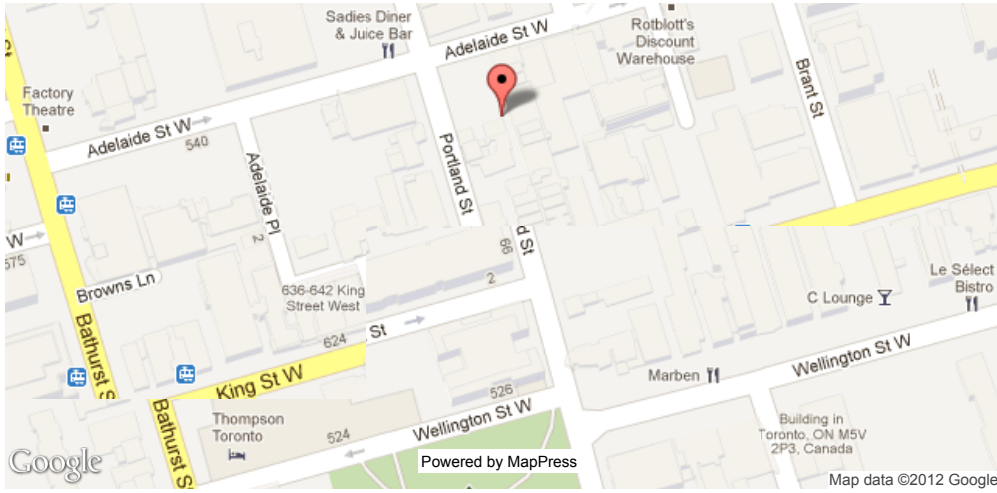
When the Mint went about looking for artists, the ad agency Young and Rubicam suggested Taxali, whose work employees of the Mint instantly recognized—a good sign that he would be popular enough to bolster the Mint's profits, which depends on commercial revenue rather than government funding. Though Taxali considers it "an honour to represent Canadian currency," the project wouldn't have progressed if he didn't have full creative freedom.

"At first, I was really concerned they wanted me to be a little more conservative, but that wasn't the case," said Taxali, whose last name actually means "Maker or Steward of The Mint" in Hindi.

What results are holiday coins that resemble nothing like their predecessors: A birthday cupcake cheerily clings to a bunch of balloons; a gaggle of smiling maple leaves commemorate our nation's birthday; and, in Taxali's favourite, two intertwined wedding rings honour a marriage between anyone regardless of gender. With his initials and original font "Chumply" also appearing on the coins, there's no question about who's their creator, and that could lead to a new era in the pursuit of coin collecting.


"If you only think of super-realistic people and animals, then you have preconceived notions about what the Mint is about," said Reeves. "We want people to think of us as avant-garde and creative. We never want to get old."





TAGS Gary Taxali, Money, Royal Canadian Mint, Spoke Club, Visual Art

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**Robert Cortez**

I must say... these designs make quarters so much more valuable. An awesome choice with Taxali!  
Coin reliefs are not just not (and should not) be limited to serious subject matter ... everyday celebrations should also be commemorated!

Way to go Royal Canadian Mint!

- Robert Cortez | <http://www.arcandco.ca>

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