

BRIGHT LIGHTS OF THE PLATEAU



ALLEN MIGNIS/THE GAZETTE

INSTALLING ILLUMINATED WORD BUBBLES on Mont-Royal Ave. lampposts was the brainchild of Estelle Jugant and Yazid Belkhir. Their creations are lighting up the commercial strip this winter, after they worked on them for the past year. The pair's concept was picked in a contest among young artists, who were challenged to liven up the street. **Page A4**

Mont-Royal art project speaks for itself

DUO'S DESIGN livens up strip with illustrated, illuminated word bubbles

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Estelle Jugant and Yazid Belkhir had one goal in mind when trying to come up with a concept for an art installation project on Mont-Royal Ave.: to let the street speak for itself.

Fast forward a year and their winning design for seasonal winter lights on the Plateau commercial strip does just that — affixing illuminated word bubbles to lampposts with cartoon-like characters and icons.

"We wanted our project to be something out of the ordinary when it comes to winter and holiday decorations," Jugant said.

"We wanted to do something that is proper to Mont-Royal Ave."

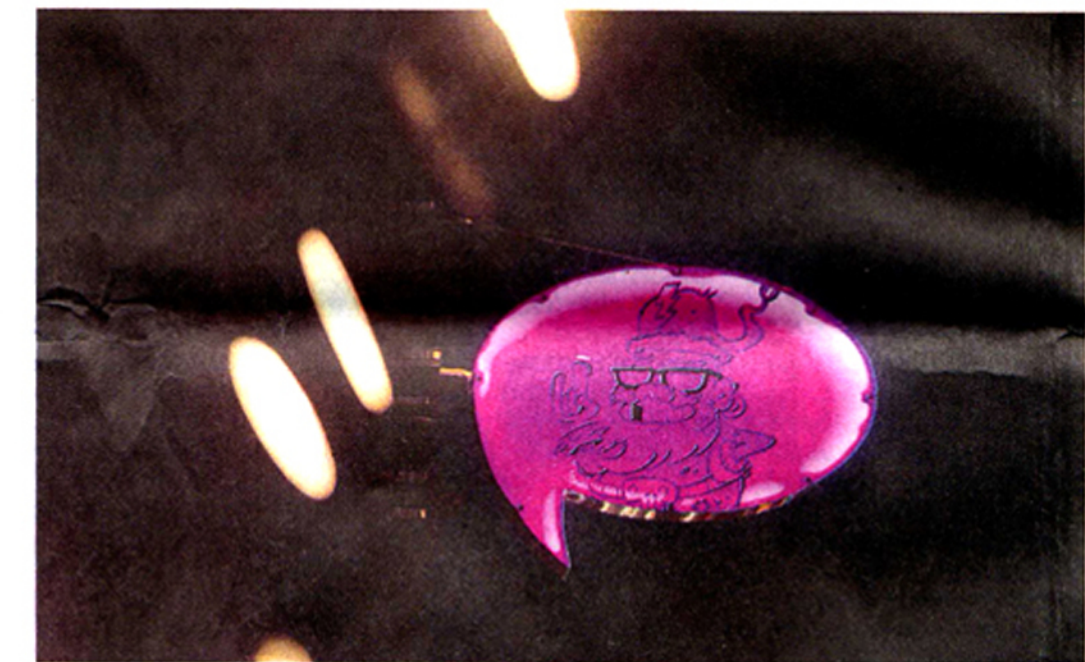
In 2012, the Société de développement de l'avenue du Mont-Royal launched a contest for young artists to create winter lighting to liven up the street in winter months.

Jugant and Belkhir had just started working together and, having lived in the neighbourhood for years, decided to present their concept, entitled *Idée-Ô-rama*.

"We wanted to take a symbol that is now the symbol for discussion, chatting, texting and emailing," Belkhir said. "We wanted to inspire urban discussion."

The two worked on the project for almost a year, spending about a hundred hours every month.

They started by designing the bubbles with a 3D computer graphics program and



Estelle Jugant and Yazid Belkhir, who came up with the street illumination concept, turned to local artists Astro and Jean-François Poliquin for the cartoon-like illustrations.

then had suppliers cut the materials — aluminum for the contour, white plastic to defuse the light and Plexiglas with the imprinted illustrations.

The assembly was done in their studio.

"It was a challenge in terms of engineering and esthetics," Belkhir said.

They wanted the bubbles to be as light as possible, and since Mont-Royal Ave. plans to use them for three full winters, Jugant and Belkhir had to make sure their project could withstand the cold and humidity.

They also wanted to make the illustration panels and coloured LED lights easily changeable, he said.

For the illustrations on the bubbles, they partnered with

local artists Astro and Jean-François Poliquin.

"It had to be about Montreal," said graffiti artist Astro, who was responsible for the cartoons on the bubbles. "So I did illustrations of the Montreal Canadiens, poutine, snow, and so on. I also wanted it to be amusing and entertaining."

To contrast Astro's graffiti style, the duo chose Poliquin for his minimalist graphic design approach.

"It was about simplifying the elements, but it was also about bringing objects back to their essence," said Poliquin, who made the icons decorating the bubbles, such as a snow blower and a staircase.

Jugant and Belkhir, who are originally from France,

came to Canada in the mid-2000s to find work in industrial design.

At first, they meant to stay here temporarily.

"It's the lifestyle that forces us to stay here," Belkhir said. "We couldn't find this lifestyle anywhere else. It's also the opportunities. It's easier to stand out here than it is in Europe."

The two met working for a visual communication and design company in Montreal. But they weren't entirely satisfied with what they were doing.

They wanted to design their own projects.

Jugant and Belkhir say they're going to focus on launching their company — Turn Me On Design — in the next few months.