

Panamanian to blend arts with sport at Pan Am Games | Toronto Star

By: [Joel Eastwood](#) Staff Reporter, Published on Tue Apr 01 2014

The organizers of Panamanian hope to make next summer's [Pan Am Games](#) as much about arts and culture as sport.

"Arts and culture sell as many tickets as sports," said Don Shipley, the festival's creative director, at a news conference Tuesday in the Distillery District. "People look to come to a city to experience the sport, but also to experience the rich culture."

To that end, the five-week festival will feature a smorgasbord of [music, theatre, fashion and film](#). The festivities run from the start of the Pan Am Games on July 10, 2015 to the closing of the Parapan Am Games 35 days later.

Twenty-seven Canadian artists, including Robert Lepage, Rick Miller and Veronica Tennant, have been commissioned to create new works exploring themes of water, immigration and identity.

Many of the projects will incorporate sports and movement, such as an exhibition of sportswear at Design Exchange in downtown Toronto, and short performances by the indigenous [Kaha:wi dance company](#) blending lacrosse, taekwondo and breakdancing with contemporary and traditional dance.

"What we are organizing for the summer of 2015 is no less ambitious, no less exciting and no less innovative than the celebration of arts and culture we've seen at the recent Olympics," Shipley said.

[Mustafa Ahmed](#), a Toronto [spoken word poet](#), is one of the 27 artists. He will present a new piece about the games next summer.

"It's about stringing in the connection between the athlete and the artist," said Ahmed, 17, who is from the Regent Park neighbourhood.

Audiences will be able to take in the art performances at venues throughout Toronto, including museums, performing arts centres, Nathan Phillips Square and the Distillery District, as well as sites in Hamilton and Markham.

The artists, who will share \$1.5 million in funding, were selected in part for their connection to the 41 countries participating in the games.

Shipley described the projects as a fusion of Canadian arts with Latin American influences.

"In the past, when I've worked here, we've always been very Euro-centric. This is a rare opportunity to go north-south," Shipley said. "The music and theatre and art of the Americas is quite different. It's less cerebral and more about passion and heart."

Not all the projects are centred around sport. Actor and director Robert Lepage will present a one-man show tentatively titled *887*, an address from his childhood. The show weaves Lepage's personal memories with the history of Quebec society in the 1960s, he said.

"It's a show about memory," Lepage said. "Short-term memory, long-term memory. But it's also about collective memory. It has a lot to do with Quebec society in the '60s."

The organizers of Toronto's other major summer arts and culture festival, [Luminato](#), have been coordinating with the [Panamanian](#) team to ensure the two festivals aren't pitted against each other, according to Janice Price, Luminato's CEO.

Price said she was thrilled by the cultural show that will be presented alongside the Games' sporting events.

"More people actually participated in or attended or were in some way touched by the cultural component of the Olympics in Vancouver than actually were able to see or attend sporting events," Price noted.