

## Watermark

—after Gerald Beaulieu's installation on the Saint John River

By Ian LeTourneau, Cultural Laureate 2017

The river purges itself of thinning  
tectonic plates of ice.  
A great collector of tributes  
and tributaries, the Saint John carries word  
from upriver: the gossip of snowmelt,  
uprooted trees, ripped turf from the banks,  
all the collateral damage of its scribble  
across the landscape. It swerves  
around the latest controversy on the CBC.  
And the river rises. Seagulls flock from floe to floe,  
which drift like a steady campaign  
of EMO advisories. And the river rises.  
And soon it unburdens itself,  
spilling over its banks,  
welling over the trails and streets.  
Flexing its muscles, the river continues to rise.

Eleven copper-clad pillars, instruments  
that measure acts of God, stand sentry  
over the rising water. And from behind  
the sandbags of history, we compare  
today—and an infinite sequence of future todays—  
to the high levels of 1993, 1958, 2010, 2005,  
1923, 1994, 1979, 1887, 2008, 1973, 1936.

Once the river clears its throat, and sets  
its new mark, the water recedes,  
and its song glides like a sparrow's through the city.  
And we collect stories, tall tales perhaps,  
like how in '73 a fish was caught  
on University Avenue. And of divers  
along Waterloo Row, rescuing vintage wine  
from basement cellars. And the controversies  
will begin to crackle over the airwaves again,  
who knew what and when. Another season of ice  
and snow dissolves like a bad dream  
into the eternity of the river,  
and it is then  
we make the startling discovery of spring.