

Energy giant Total is no stranger to generous support of the arts

Todd Babiak



The Galerie d'Apollon, at the Louvre, is one of the most important rooms in the world of art history. It recently went through a three-year restoration and transformation, an expensive yet necessary act. It had been damaged by centuries of humidity, thanks to rain and its proximity to the Seine.

Fundraising for the arts is difficult in France, as public funding is relatively generous. Yet it was beyond the museum's yearly budget to remake the gallery.

Total, a Paris-based oil company, sponsored the \$7.9-million project. You'll notice it hasn't been renamed the Galerie de Total. You'll also notice that Total is operating in Alberta.

Will our city benefit from the French firm's largesse?

Total E&P Canada has announced its entrance with an impressive advertising campaign. The ads have been on buses and billboards and newspapers.

Unlike some of its oilsands competitors, like Suncor and Syncrude, quietly making piles of money without worrying excessively about corporate social responsibility and greenhouse gas emissions, Total is accustomed to operating in Europe. Citizens are exponentially more engaged in Western Europe, and empty gestures inspire protest — not collective shrugs of indifference.

Total is planning to invest \$10 billion to \$15 billion in the oilsands. This includes a mega-upgrader near Fort Saskatchewan. There are air quality and other significant environmental concerns here. Seeming civilized and human, in this context, is important to Total.

"Community engagement is a priority," says Christianne Wile, Total's public affairs adviser, in Calgary.

"We want to have our brand recognized. It would have been foolish to come to Canada and invest without communicating with the community. We held focus groups to find out what areas we should invest in, what areas are important."

In Calgary, where Total's Canadian operations are based, the company is a founding partner in the gloriously restored Grand Theatre, one of the most visible signs of the city's resurgence as a cultural force. Total is also a marquis sponsor of Theatre Junction, a contemporary theatre featuring theatre, dance, music and film.

"They're a fantastic sponsor," says Carol Armes, general manager of Theatre Junction. "They don't just hand money out. They bring people out, they help in little ways, they participate in our operations. They're very, very generous."

Total was also the major sponsor of *Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*, which recently had its only prairie stop at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. And according to Wile, the French oil company is only revving up.



CODIE MCLACHLAN, THE JOURNAL, FILE

A bus emblazoned with advertising for French oil company Total SA waits for passengers to board at the Sherwood Park bus station on Ordze Road.

So, in Edmonton, where there is also a shortage of theatre venues, also a need

to attract and fund touring exhibitions to the Art Gallery of Alberta, and a scandalously underfunded renovation and renewal program at the Royal Alberta Museum, can we expect Total to step in?

See BABIAK / D2

