

## *Digital Orca*

A cult writer and artist pays tribute to people who lost their lives in one of the biggest industrial accidents of this century

On June 17, 1958, 79 men died while constructing the Second Narrows Bridge, which connected Vancouver to the Burrard Inlet. During the building work, a temporary suspension pillar had been incorrectly installed and, unable to withstand the weight, it collapsed, plunging all the construction workers into the water where they died instantly. *Digital Orca* is a tribute to those lost lives. Through his work the artist Douglas Coupland, also a science-fiction writer, presents his sophisticated perception of how technological industrialization can hurt us. This was famously seen in his 1990s cult classic novel, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, in which a group of friends become increasingly disillusioned with their tech jobs.

The 21 meter (70 ft) *Digital Orca* is a towering, intimidating sculpture of

an orca, a reminder of Canada's history of killer whale sightings off the western Pacific Ocean coast of Vancouver. This whale, however, looks as though it is leaping out of a computer screen. Known for writing about the perils of global digitization, Coupland wanted to look at the past, present, and the future of Vancouver through a pixelated and computerized lens. By "digitizing" the orca, he challenges his audience to consider the loss caused by industrialization—that physical loss, as experienced in the 1950s, or the emotional loss we experience in technology today.

In *Digital Orca*, perhaps Coupland is asking us to consider the line in *Generation X*: "There's too much weight improperly distributed: towers and elevators; steel, stone and cement. So much mass up so high that gravity itself could end up being warped."

