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DART 349 A

24 Feb. 2026

Diamonds in the Rough: The Price of Municipal Decay

Critiquing Montreal's built environment is nothing new, but the condition of the city's roads this winter feels particularly dire. It is deeply unnerving to brace for impact on a bicycle, anticipating that a concealed crater might send you over the handlebars, or to be jolted upward on a bus as it lurches across uneven asphalt. Repeated vehicle traffic, intense temperature variations, and water infiltration under the asphalt have contributed to the deterioration of the streets ("Report a Pothole"). Although this project does not attempt to solve that systemic issue, it asks whether parody can disrupt the normalization of infrastructural neglect.

The proposed website adopts the visual language of a luxury jewellery retailer, presenting Montreal potholes as if they were rare diamonds. It borrows the prestige-driven vocabulary popularized by brands such as Tiffany & Co., translating carat, cut, colour, and clarity into diameter, fracture pattern, asphalt tone, and surface condition. By recasting civic failure through the rhetoric of exclusivity, the site underscores the absurdity of accepting chronic infrastructure decay as inevitable.

The visual identity reinforces this tension. Montreal's vivid red logo (#e00101) is reinterpreted as a darker monochromatic red (#940101), positioned as the "company" colour. Deep palettes are

commonly associated with opulence, signalling heritage and exclusivity (Rouhana). At the same time, this dark red evokes blood, subtly referencing both the violence historically linked to the diamond trade ("Ensuring Conflict-Free Diamonds Worldwide") and the very real risk of injury posed by deteriorating roads.

Roadways are built on a structural base that provides stability, topped by a thinner surface layer designed for traction. In Montreal, most repairs involve replacing only this upper layer due to budget constraints (The Canadian Press). While cost-effective in the short term, this approach leaves the underlying foundation compromised, allowing structural failures to resurface. The repeated cycle of patching rather than rebuilding becomes an ongoing financial burden for the city, which holds legal responsibility for compensating vehicle damage caused by deteriorated roads (Luft). The metaphor aligns neatly with the jewellery framework, where surface brilliance often obscures the extraction processes beneath.

Every pothole featured on the site is "certified" according to standardized criteria, mirroring the authority of gemological assessment. Repeated freeze–thaw exposure is reframed as "refinement," exaggerating the notion that environmental stress enhances value. Potholes formed near active construction zones are described as "ethically sourced," drawing directly from the discourse surrounding conflict-free diamonds. By borrowing the language of supply chain transparency, the project reveals how easily responsibility can be softened through branding. Higher grades in the catalogue indicate both increased visual intrigue and heightened risk to

cyclists, drivers, and transit passengers. What is framed as exceptional online exists offline as a daily hazard.

A key layer of the satire lies in the humour of gemological terminology itself. Diamond grading systems rely on hyper-specific classifications such as “Very Very Slightly Included” (“Clarity is the Key to Quality”), phrases that are at once technical and faintly theatrical. The repetition of “very” attempts to quantify subtle distinctions that are nearly invisible to the untrained eye. This exaggerated precision produces an aura of scientific objectivity while simultaneously sounding excessive. By adapting this structure to potholes, the language becomes comically disproportionate to the object it describes. The pothole remains dangerous regardless of how elegantly it is categorized.

Through this inversion, the project demonstrates how value is manufactured rhetorically. Natural deterioration becomes refinement, institutional disruption becomes ethical sourcing, and hazard becomes rarity. By adopting the visual and linguistic codes of luxury commerce, the website transforms visible civic failure into a curated object of desire.

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