

ASSOCIATION of MANITOBA MUSEUMS: KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The Hon Patricia Bovey, LLD, FRSA, FCMA

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PIVOTING TO NEW PERSPECTIVES - CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL FUTURES

Thank you. It's a privilege to be here on this 50th anniversary conference, and I spoke at the first one, so thank you for inviting me to be part of this annual conference! Thanks to the Aviation Museum for hosting us too. I enjoyed my tour here this past summer, and as I did my visit to the Edmonton Aviation Museum last month. Both are excellent museums and while their approaches and histories are certainly different, they are equally important to Canada's heritage!

À mes collègues francophones, c'est vraiment un honneur d'être ici parmi vous aujourd'hui, et mon intérêt en vos activités est vraiment sincère-- mes visites à vos musées et centres culturels avaient été très importantes pour moi comme une muséologue et comme Sénatrice. Vos visions et vos activités, comme celles des autres musées du Manitoba, sont très importantes dans la constellation patrimoine du Canada.

Je parlerai aujourd'hui en anglais, et j'espère que ce ne posera un problème pour vous tous! J'accepterai les questions en français ou en anglais!

I am encouraged by the new forward looking approaches of the museum community across Canada. May those perspectives be 360 so we can build on who we are, and do what we can, and should, in our changing societal paradigm. I am also encouraged by recent studies, like *Museums for Me: Engaging Canadians on the Future of Museums*, with their germane, achievable, compelling, and challenging results. Many of those conclusions align with my own drawn over my years of empirical and anecdotal research.

Clearly museums **must** change. Your conference title, “Pivoting to New Perspectives” and my keynote title, “Challenges & Opportunities for Meaningful Futures” intersect perfectly! Museums must pivot to fulfill our societal roles and to have a sustainable, meaningful future. Building on their core mandates and embracing new paradigms, museums must understand and use their collections, exhibitions, public programming, and outreach in new ways.

Paramount values going forward are balance, creativity, honesty, inclusivity, and the engagement of every part of contemporary society, all peoples, all issues and all perspectives. Museums have the necessary foundations, staff, trust and knowledge to achieve new goals. Dealing with serious societal concerns will reinvigorate audiences and museum professionals.

The large response rates to recent museum surveys impresses me. In one, 2/3 of respondents replied that they visit museums at least three times a year. Some commented that museums have been “too Euro-centric in their approaches”. I felt that in the early 1970s as a curator at the Winnipeg Art Gallery when we presented the early First Nations art exhibitions, such as that in 1972 of the Indigenous Group of Seven. I felt it again through the 1980s and 90s as Director of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria with our Asian collection, exhibitions and artist exchanges.

Securing funding for those, then non-mainstream exhibitions and programs, was truly difficult. I must say I have also felt a certain Euro-centricity in some reactions to my national and international Senate work with Black artists.

I believe the more museums engage multi-culturally, the easier cross-cultural understandings and meaningful reconciliation actions will be. I agree with expressed sentiments that “more should be done to help people understand today’s world and address a variety of social and economic issues, such as inclusion and accessibility... Indigenous reconciliation ... and understand and accommodate people from other regions and cultures.” Museums are key agents for that.

September 30th gave us pause for honest reflection as to where we are on that path towards reconciliation. If we as museums and galleries undertake those goals of understanding, honesty of our past and reconciliation sincerely, I believe present day societal divisions would be fewer. Remember, families go to museums together; they do NOT go to school together.

In August this year, ICOM adopted a new definition of ‘museums’ reflecting these societal concerns:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability.

They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.

Referencing museums as being not-for-profit, the definition includes the words "inclusivity", "accessibility", "sustainability" and "ethics" for the first time. ICOM's president, Alberto Garlandi, underlined those values saying this new definition, was "common ground for museums all over the world." The August 2022 Art Newspaper quoted him:

"This new definition is aligned with some of the major changes in the role of museums today. We have been forced to change. I really think that this this decision will improve the role of the museum around the world."

I hope we are making this change because we want to, not because we have been forced to.

How do we make the change? Partnerships are key. True understanding of our own communities and being open to realities of contemporary societal issues are essential.

In researching my forthcoming book, *Western Voices in Canadian Art*, the clairvoyant role of artists in bringing societal issues to the fore was very clear. Those voices need appropriate platforms; museums should be those platforms.

Museums, society's trusted leaders, stewards of our material, natural, scientific and creative past and present, have the opportunity AND responsibility to change public awareness in today's rapid, and drastic, paradigm shifts. Climate change, reconciliation, the pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, crises of immigration, and humanitarian and environmental realities are huge.

Last spring I asked Minister Guilbeault, Minister of the Environment, how, and if, he intended to work with artists and the cultural sector in meeting his climate change goals. His response was an unwavering yes. Knowing the important role we play, he is engaging with us. I am part of his official COP27 delegation to Egypt in a couple of weeks, and my brief will be that of the museums, arts and culture and the need for us to expand awareness of climate change science and address actions. The impacts of climate change on lives and communities are significant, and we have the substance to illuminate those truths to make those concerns known.

We must also set an example. How do we work? What do we exhibit? What do we have in our collections to underline these issues? What display materials do we use in our exhibitions? Do we break down display cases, or reuse and share them? How do we organize and ship touring exhibitions? What routes and modes of transport do we use to minimize carbon footprints? Do we use digital media to its fullest effect? What do we serve in our cafes?

The 2021 UK Gallery Climate Coalitions conference in London “Decarbonizing the Art World” agreed to adopt a “step-by-step action plan using the carbon calculator designed for the art industry”. We should too.

Museums also unquestionably have a key role in understanding diverse cultures. I was truly moved seeing the Indigenous works in the Vatican collections, as I was by the recent visit of the Pope. Her Majesty’s many visits to our north and to indigenous communities drew attention to poignant realities and challenges too.

We must further cultural understandings, diligently keep that focus in our sights, not give up, and be patient. It took generations to get into the situation we are in; it will take time to get through it.

Senator Sinclair often opined that education got us into this mess and education will get us out of it. Curriculum changes throughout our educational systems are essential. These have started, but I cannot overemphasize how important it is for museums to lead that change by presenting varied perspectives rooted in truth and founded in research.

London's Horniman Museum, one of my favourites, has been confronting its colonialist roots with excellent results. During the social unrest of COVID and Black Lives Matter, they realized they were not reaching their local demographic, more than 40% Black. With their *Reset Agenda* they "reimagined and reinvented the role a museum can play within a local community using these events as points of departure for thinking about what a museum is there for, and what it can do". They reframed their food services, public programming, music presentations, festivals and collections. Heralded as a "model for how museums with traditional collections can be vibrant and relevant places for today's audiences," they recently received the world's largest award for this type of work: 100,000 pounds. That is leadership.

Heather George, CMA President, wrote in this summer's *Muse*:

“A leader works for the betterment of the whole community; a leader knows they ... are only as good as their team; a leader is not silent in the face of injustice; a leader is the first to clear the path for others... they challenge... and inspire us to journey down new paths.” Everyone in this room can do all that!

Museums, individually and collectively, are windows to the past, present and future, as engager, teacher, encourager, inspirer, innovator, and honest broker. Remember, our collections are not ours but are held in the public trust. Our research, exhibitions, publications, and programs are presented for public benefit, not our own personal advancement. We are to serve those of all ages, diversities and perspectives. My late husband often said “we are all better off when we are all better off”. Museums have the power to achieve that by using our collections of ‘real things’ in new ways, and by continuing our important research in our many museological fields. Being firm in our non-negotiables, and knowing and meeting our fuller roles, museums will become even more compelling influencers.

Society knows the cultural sector’s power. Do WE really know how to empower our own sector to deal effectively with society’s shifts?

We should not be afraid to take risks as we build platforms for the future. We must free ourselves from the silos in which our sector has been mired or encaged.

Too often museums are perceived as places people visit in their spare time, if they have the spare money to do so. Our entrance fees are not cheap. I understand charging for special exhibitions, but increasingly I have difficulty in charging our publics to see what they own in their public trust. Changing those public perceptions is in our hands.

The arts, including museums, are essential in every part of society. However, their substantive impacts are not widely known. Those impacts range from health and well-being, to crime prevention, rural sustainability, the economy, employment, education, the environment and tourism. I have researched those stats, national and international, for decades and shared some of my findings with some of you. UK, US and Swedish research showed one striking reality - people who attend arts events, including museums, live on average two years longer, cost the health system less, miss less work and get out of hospital one or two days earlier after elective surgery.

Those international results impelled me to start St Boniface Hospital's Buhler Gallery fifteen years ago, its mission being a place of contemplation, healing and rejuvenation. Its results have been really encouraging and reinforced the international ones.

I applaud Montreal's medical community in prescribing visits to the Musée des Beaux Arts as treatment. The UK's program of arts and wellness, well-funded nationally, is impressive, with significant results. I have had a number of discussions with proponents of both, have attended some of the UK training sessions and have met with their founders, funders and leaders, and hope to again when I am in the UK next week.

We need longer lines of vision, back and forward. We have been forced into the mode of reporting numbers: short-term annual numbers, attendance, self-generated \$, numbers of programs. The expectation has been that all should increase annually. Reports on project grants, done at the end of the program are short-term results, which do not, nor cannot, measure longer term impacts.

That reality was apparent to me a number of years ago when visiting Victoria some years after I moved back to Winnipeg. A young woman, who knew my name, and that I was director of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria when we presented a solo retrospective of Richard Ciccimarra's art, told me she was a student at the near-by middle school at the time and had visited every day after school.

She loved his beautiful botanical paintings and his lonely, deep, psychological inscapes. She told me she was angry when she realized he was not alive to answer her questions. He had committed suicide some years before; a suicide she felt was selfish. She showed me scars on her wrists from her several suicide attempts made before we mounted this exhibition. The exhibition inspired her, and changed her life.

When I met her she had her MSW and was working with young teens who either had tried or were thinking of suicide. For me, that encounter was moving; an exceptional 'outcome', impossible to report on at the conclusion of the project. That was likely one of the most important outcomes of any program with which I have been involved. We all have unknown outcomes of greater significance than we are aware.

Our responsibility to reach all audiences, including those with disabilities or who are deaf, is equally important. At the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, about 40 years ago, in the early 1980s, we developed what I still consider to be an excellent program for the visually impaired. In partnership with the CNIB, we gave special training to our volunteers, involved artists, used hands-on artifacts from our research collection, and gave regular exhibition tours.

That program, which gained many accolades and awards, ran for years. Participants returned time after time for tours and discussions. We know 90% of people who are officially blind have had sight and want to remain engaged. Some participants had had careers as artists. I am pleased more institutions are taking such constructive steps in their programming. At the time, though, I was criticized by some colleagues for 'jumping on a socialist bandwagon.' Several years later those same colleagues asked me how we did it!

What do I do now as a Canadian Senator to advance cultural, arts and heritage issues? My sightlines are multifold and integrally intertwined. The mandate the Prime Minister gave me on my Senate appointment was to work on everything, but to do so through the lens of arts and culture. That is exactly what I do and have done.

Senate committee work, legislation, public issues and my own bills going through parliamentary processes are the essence of my work, as is bringing salient concerns to the fore through statements and questions in the Chamber.

For me personally, highlighting the essential roles of arts and culture and needs of artists and organizations is paramount. My work on artists' resale rights, to my delight, has recently been all over the national and international press. I spoke with Minister Rodrigues last week and he and Minister Champagne agree so I have every hope it will be embodied in the new Copyright Act.

Art theft, frauds and fakes; the illicit art trade; and International illegal appropriation and mass reproduction of Indigenous images, and cultural and family crests, repatriation and reconciliation, are also in my sights and they have made waves nationally and internationally. Again, keeping in touch with ministers and their staff regarding the principles and action plans are critical. Arctic and circumpolar concerns occupy me as well. I was thrilled the 780 parliamentarians at July's OSCE meetings in the UK voted unanimously for the Special Arctic Resolution.

The importance of Black culture is reflected in Canada's role in the Pan African Heritage Museum, opening in Ghana late next year. As the Canadian member of the International Curatorial Council for this project, my role is as liaison, facilitator and connector within Canada and internationally. I thank the Black artists, of every creative discipline, who are involved on our Canadian Discussion Team and Content Steering Committee. The call for Black curators is about to go out. This exciting and important initiative has support from UNESCO, Global Affairs and the Canada Council and my recent conversations with the Ministry of Canadian Heritage have been truly encouraging.

The work in arts and heritage in the Senate is increasing. The Artwork & Heritage Advisory Working Group, which I chair, has updated its policies and procedures to meet museological standards and has instigated a number of programs with Canada's museum community. *Cultivating Perspectives*, for instance, examines the Senate collection. Canadian curators, representing Canada's cultural diversities and museological fields, write about Senate art and heritage pieces, providing varied and interesting contexts drawn from their professional curatorial perspectives and expertise. Their essays, now on line, are drawing positive response. Let me know if you want to take part.

Honouring Canada's Black Artists' two installations have featured Denyse Thomosos, Tim Whiten, Yisa Akinbolaji and Chantal Gibson. *Museums in the Senate*, began this past year with the installation of Inuit art from the WAG in one of our key committee rooms. I thank them! That installation certainly garnered great interest from my colleagues and Senate staff. We look forward to other Canadian museums and art galleries participating. Again, let me know if you are interested!

Senate representation of Indigenous art is important. Greg Hill, the National Gallery's Audain Senior Curator of Indigenous Art, did an important, and excellent, gap analysis of the Senate's Indigenous art for us. It is assisting in our planning for wider representation in the Indigenous Peoples room.

Another recent project is related to current issues, *Visual Voices*, with photographs by Edward Burtynsky and Roberta Bondar, focusing on climate change. Other issues will be featured in coming months.

Committee work is essential. In June 2019, the Senate's Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committee completed the study on culture that I requested. Our resulting report *Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada's Foreign Policy*, is foundational and is being heralded by policy influencers. I hope the government will restore culture as a pillar of Canada's foreign policy.

The 2019 cornerstone report, *Northern Lights: A Wake-Up Call for the Future of Canada*, the result of the year-long study of the Special Senate Committee on the Arctic, addresses many interwoven critical issues of the north, from housing to health, education to communications, science, traditional knowledge, climate change, global warming, international security, sovereignty, country foods, culture, wildlife, mining and more. It is the first Senate report I am aware of that included Canadian Art, and again, I thank the Winnipeg Art Gallery for their assistance in making this happen.

As you know, my work in and for the North has been very important to me, before and after my Senate appointment. Last month I was in Yellowknife and visited the Northern Heritage Centre and the Visual Art Trailer.

I also visited Gjoa Haven where the wider concerns of research in food security, science and hydroponics were the prime reason for my visit. While there I met the individual who gave the information leading to the finding of Franklin's ship, and his story was fascinating as was their Heritage Centre.

My own cultural legislation is moving forward with two bills now before the House of Commons. The *Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate Bill*, to create a revolving position for a visual artist like that of the Poet Laureate, has unanimously passed the senate three times and is now in the House of Commons, sponsored by Alberta Conservative MP Martin Shields. I hope it becomes law before I have to retire from the Senate next May!

My Declaration Respecting the Essential Role of Artists and Creative Expression in Canada, passed the Chamber before Thanksgiving and MP Jim Carr, its sponsor, spoke at First Reading in the House of Commons this week. It is now on the order paper for Second Reading, we hope before Christmas. Please encourage your MPs to move quickly on these as they affect us all and will be a milestone in reconciliation!

Recognizing the vitally important role of artists and the arts in every dimension of Canadian society, it underlines the need to respect and promote that role in health and education, and highlights the need for artists to earn proper, fair, incomes, and have intellectual property rights, and exhibition opportunities at home and abroad. Aiming to ensure all Canadians and residents of Canada have equal opportunity to access and enjoy the fruits of artistic expression, Its measures take into account the diversity of identities, cultures, languages, customs, and practices of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis, and recognizes Francophone and immigrant communities in Canada. The Ministerial action plan includes consultations with the Ministers of Labour, Crown-Indigenous Relations; Justice; Health; the Canada Council; provincial government representatives; arts organizations, including Indigenous artists and their cultural associations; and “all other interested persons or organizations the Minister considers appropriate”. I want parliamentarians and ministry officials to understand and work with museums and the arts.

I sincerely thank the more than 600 participants who took part in my focus groups, public discussions and interviews. These consultations were rich.

As one person said “The power of the arts is being increasingly recognized as a non-negotiable fundamental principle as to who we are.” Bill Ivey, former Chair of the US National Endowment for the Arts, talked of the three categories of human behaviour: “Expressive life, work life and family life, ... and with, the creative spirit is essential for human and societal growth.” Museums are the natural leaders for these goals, for de-colonization, ensuring cultural democracy, and correcting the telling of Canadian history to include Indigenous, Black and diverse histories. Memory and the expression of honesty of our past and present is critical.

Perceptions of the arts and museums must move from being ‘frill’ to that of ‘anchor’, and real care must be taken not to create, or perpetuate, cultural ghettos. I hope this Declaration will assist in balancing the multi dimensions of society and become the foundation for all arts and culture policy frameworks, including the new museums policy, intellectual and economic rights of artists and arts workers, and ensuring audiences, practitioners, and those with any disability, or who are deaf, have accessibility to museums and creative spaces and places.

It behooves us to remember that the four pillars of sustainable communities are Social Capital, Human Capital, Natural Capital and CULTURAL CAPITAL. Without cultural capital, that fourth pillar, society becomes an unbalanced three-legged stool! Australia's John Hawkes, author of *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: culture's essential role in public planning*, said in Winnipeg at our conference as Canada's Cultural Capital:

Creativity = Light from the Dark

Art = Fire from the Light

Culture = Warmth from the Fire

Doesn't that sound like our wider mandate as museums?

Musician and writer Tom Jackson said of the arts' importance in one discussion: "it not as power, but as proclaiming truth, history, memory and future vision simultaneously. ... it saves lives." Embracing compassion, empathy, and hope, he said, it "talks to us, moves us through its tools of change". Why? "People must understand emotion from the heart and not just dollars." So true! I agree wholeheartedly! What a way for us all to build bridges.

What can you do? I am a firm proponent of Hill Days in assisting to building bridges. Enabling you to articulate your goals, Hill Days are your chance for one-on-one connections with Senators and MPs.

I am truly disappointed museums are the only part of the arts sector which has not had one in my 6 years in the Senate, and it's unlikely one will happen while I'm there. A miss, I feel.

Also, do accept invitations to be witnesses at Senate committees, or ask to appear. I cannot over stress the benefit of taking part to develop relationships *and* trust.

In conclusion, what are my take-aways having lived these issues from many perspectives, within the sector, as audience and within parliament? Museums connect with all professions, and should connect with all ministries. We have not explored these links sufficiently. If we as museums don't make those connections, how can we expect others to who don't know the depth of our collections and research?

We can and must assist various sectors to reach their goals. Museums have the collections, the ability, ideas, places, and community trust to make significant societal change, BUT require new ways and connections to be fully effective. We need to think differently so society can think differently. Let's shelve the idea of 'grants' in favour of 'investments'. 'Grants', or 'handouts', as they are perceived, render us as non-self-sustaining whiners. Facts do not bear that out.

I examined three years of grants and taxes and found the arts paid to the various levels of government three times more in taxes than the total of governments' collective grants budgets. Interesting, isn't it, that we are the sector that pays back three times what we are given within the year it is given. Do other sectors?

Again, congratulations on all your work. I know it has been particularly challenging through COVID and I applaud the initiatives you all undertook to keep your audiences engaged. I do follow your ongoing endeavours with great interest and please let me know if I can help in any way.

However, as you will have surmised, I have to retire from the Senate next spring -- it's an age thing -- But I will not retire from my commitment to the arts, museums, and culture, and their roles in society! I will not retire from my work for artists' rights and their enshrinement in the revised copyright act, and I will not retire from my art historical work and art writing in the west.

Thank you again for inviting me today, and for your continuing work and dedication to the public trust.

