

**PRESENTATION TO ARTS ACCESSABILITY NETWORK MANITOBA  
OCTOBER 29, 2022  
The Hon Patricia Bovey**

Thank you! It is such an honour to be with you today. It gives me another opportunity to applaud your work in all your creative disciplines. Your work as artists is critically important for every Canadian. So too is your advocacy work on behalf of artists and audiences who are disabled or deaf.

The three international languages, movement, music and the visual arts, take on particular prominence for audiences and creators with disabilities. Artists with disabilities working in all disciplines create excellent, poignant art, and in my view, Manitoba leads the way. Look at the work of Ted Howorth, Debbie Patterson, and all of you in this room!

I have spoken of the Network and the work of some of you in the Senate Chamber a number of times in the context of the importance of your artistic expression for Manitoba, and your achievements nationally and internationally.

I have also met with organizations and associations across Canada that provide services or arts programming for people with disabilities, like Kington's H'Art, whose multidisciplinary programming includes visual art, music and theatre.

You, Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba, are THE voice for our province's artists and audiences with disabilities. Your dedication to the full inclusion of artists and audiences with disabilities in all facets of the arts, and your support of artists in achieving their artistic excellence and gaining a higher visibility is fantastic. Your promotion of policies and practices making the arts more accessible to all Manitobans, and your providing access to resources to bring artists with disabilities and stakeholders together, is impressive.

I look forward to your important disability-led front of house and back stage audit of concert halls and theatres and the resulting data base of accessible venues. Too often, if at all, there is only accommodation for one or two wheelchairs and those are at the back of the hall.

Performers with disabilities may be able to get on stage, but few green rooms are accessible. This must change. With the upcoming Disability legislation please agree to be witnesses in Senate committees. Your role is key.

The needs across Canada are great for artists and audiences dealing with disabilities or deafness. I have implored my Senate colleagues to listen to their voices, act and celebrate their work, and help ensure everyone can participate as they wish. I will not stop!

My late husband often said “we are all better off when we are all better off”. Each of you makes society better off with the work you do. Society knows the cultural sector’s power. The arts are essential in every part of society. Their substantive impacts are not widely known, but are growing. Positive arts’ 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. 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.

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.

My sightlines as a Canadian Senator in advancing culture and arts 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, highlighting the essential societal roles of arts and culture, and issues of fairness and artists' rights. My work on artists' resale rights, to my delight, has recently been all over the national and international press, and has the support of both Ministers Rodrigues and Champagne. I have every confidence it will be in the next Copyright Act.

Repatriation of Indigenous art and cultural works and the return of looted and ill-gained stolen works are key issues too, as are steps to reconciliation and issues of Black culture. These will only be achieved through multiple reconciliations.

In the Senate the role of the arts and heritage is increasing. The Artwork & Heritage Advisory Working Group, which I chair, has initiated a number of programs including *Cultivating Perspectives*, for which several Manitobans have written. Others are *Honouring Canada's Black Artists'*, including the work of Yisa Akinbolaji; an increase in the presentation of Indigenous art; and *Visual Voices*, an installation aimed to highlight issues on the floor of the senate. The first features climate change with Roberta Bondar and Ed Burtynsky. Our first museums at the Senate was from the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Senate committee work is essential. In June 2019, the Senate's Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committee completed the study on culture that I requested. The resulting report *Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada's Foreign Policy*, is a landmark study, now part of the review of Global Affairs policies and work.

Senate Public Bills are our way to bring issues we deem important into legislation, and my two Bills passed the Senate unanimously and are now in the House of Commons.

*My Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate Bill*, to create a revolving position for a visual artist, like that of the Poet Laureate, is being sponsored in the House by Alberta Conservative MP Martin Shields. My *Declaration Respecting the Essential Role of Artists and Creative Expression in Canada* was given first reading in the House two weeks ago by its House sponsor, MP Jim Carr.

It recognizes the vitally important role of artists and the arts in every dimension of Canadian society, underlining the need to respect and promote that role in health and education. It highlights the need for artists to earn proper, fair, incomes, and have intellectual property rights, and exhibition opportunities at home and abroad. It aims to ensure all Canadians and residents of Canada have equal opportunity to access and enjoy the fruits of artistic expression. In the Senate committee I emphasized that it very much includes artists with disabilities and who are deaf.

Its ten points and implementation strategies are intended to be the platform for much needed policy revisions, updates and parameters for the creative sector in this country.

It is trite, perhaps, to repeat that our artists portray who we are, our places, our ideas and our issues, but it is necessary to do so if we are to move the perception of the arts from frill to its rightful place as anchor in our society. Former Senator Murray Sinclair has said, as I have quoted a number of times, “art validates cultures”.

Alberta and BC artist Maxwell Bates wrote in 1962 of his own work after his stroke:

I am an artist, who, for forty years  
Has stood at the lake edge  
Throwing stones in the lake,  
Sometimes, very faintly,  
I hear a splash.

His splash was far greater than he realized, and so too is the splash of Canada’s artists and arts organizations in all dimensions. I hope this Declaration, will be at least a faint splash in furthering the understanding and needs of the work and contributions of this insightful, innovative, sector as it weaves all aspects of society together, leading us to a better place. Louise Halfe, Parliamentary Poet Laureate wrote two poems for me regarding the Declaration and those of you on my ‘list’ will have received them!

Remember my late husband's mantra: "We are all better off when we are all better off". You and your creative expression make us better off.

My consultations in developing the Declaration were rich and I thank the more than 600 participants in my focus groups, public discussions and interviews. One 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 that ... The act of participation in, and with, the creative spirit is essential for human and societal growth."

Perceptions of the arts must move from being 'frill' to that of 'anchor'. 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 to become the foundation for all arts and culture policy frameworks, including 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 creative spaces and places.



It behooves us to remember the four pillars of sustainable communities: 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***

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, it talks to us, moves us through its tools of change. ... People must understand emotion from the heart and not just dollars." So true!

We must 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?

There is much to do, and 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 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 and congratulations on all you are doing and do do -- I value it, as does society as a whole.