

REGINA CANADIAN CLUB: MACKENZIE ART GALLERY

MARCH 2, 2023

HON PATRICIA BOVEY

What a treat it is to be here -- in the MacKenzie Art Gallery, a place I have visited many times and where I have always had remarkable visual experiences. Thank you. And, Thank you to the Saskatchewan Arts Foundation and the Canadian Club for this invitation today. Gursh Barnard and Lyn Goldman, thank you too and what a wonderful conversation we three had before the holiday season!

Lyn, I also extend congratulations on your brother, Anthony Thorn's exhibition. Tony's arrival in Victoria those years ago, when I was Director of The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, added an exciting and important dimension to the visual art scene in BC's capital city. I always enjoyed my time with him in his homes, his studios, and indeed in my home. I will never forget his showing my older daughter how to use gold leaf and to burnish gold. She later became a Medieval Manuscript specialist in the UK -- and thanks to Tony she knew the techniques those masters used long before she herself got 'hooked' as an academic! Lyn, she was delighted to receive a copy of the book! Thank you!

As for Faye HeavyShield's recent exhibition -- what fantastic and important work and such an important exhibition. I am honoured to say that she is in my book *Western Voices in Canadian Art*. So too are a number of SK artists, including many of the ten in Timothy Long's exhibition and many from the MacKenzie collection. A number of these artists crossed provincial borders with their work and ideas, and made truly significant individual and collective contributions to Canadian art. I thank the Gallery and its staff, and applaud the artists of this region for the work you do in engaging audiences and moving Canada's creative needle forward.

I was asked to speak today on three things: my senate work; my Bill, S208 - the *Declaration Respecting the Essential Role of Artists and Creative Expression in Canada*; and my book. I am delighted to touch on all three.

So what do I do in the Senate as one of Manitoba's six senators, and particularly as the first art historian and gallery/museologist in Canada's history to be in the Senate? It has been a journey of learning and listening, and one of telling of the very important role the arts play in every sector of society.

When the Prime Minister appointed me as a member of the Senate he said:

“Pat, I want you in the Senate, you will be independent, you will work on everything, and I want you to do everything through the lens of arts and culture.”

That friends is what I do, and have done.

Over the years I have spoken on, and put forward, many issues. I sponsored the Oceans Protection Bill which passed both houses. My Committee work has been diverse as deputy chair of several committees, the Transport and Communications Committee, the Social Affairs, Science and Technology Committee, the Special Committee on the Arctic, and the Sub-committee on Diversity. I currently chair the Artwork and Heritage Advisory Working Group. I served on the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committee, chaired by Regina’s Senator Rannell Andreychuk. There I put forward the idea of undertaking the study, *Cultural Diplomacy at Centre Stage of Canada’s Foreign Policy*. That report is gaining strength and presence in a number of our missions, especially the Canadian High Commission in London. I was there earlier this year, and went into the Saskatchewan room, and was at the opening of the John Hartman exhibition curated by Mary Reid, Director of the Woodstock Art Gallery. That exhibition included Hartman’s portrait of Guy Vanderhaeghe who won the 2022 Saskatchewan Foundation’s Glengarry Book Award.

My other committee work includes the National Finance committee, CIBA, the Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration committee, as well as several of its subcommittees. Suffice it to say, committee work, the Chamber and other responsibilities representing Manitobans and Canadians make for a full schedule, and one that has been a true honour to do. My several years as Acting Speaker on many occasions was a further honour! We also have the opportunity as senators to be part of international interparliamentary associations enabling us to connect our work and the needs of Canadians to other countries. Those meetings and connections have been rich and you can be assured that arts, culture, academe and more have been on my topic lists.

So let's now turn to my specific interests and legislative work on behalf of Canadian artists. I have two bills before the House of Commons at the moment. One, that for a Parliamentary Visual Artist Laureate, was to have been voted on in the last Session of Parliament, the day the election was called, so I had to start it all over again in the new Parliament and I did. Having passed the Senate unanimously three times it is currently being sponsored in the House by MP John Aldag of BC. My fingers are crossed that it will pass before I 'age out' of the Senate this May.

It amends the legislation that gives us the Poet Laureate and allows for a visual artist laureate to be appointed, like the Poet Laureate, for two year terms. The goal is for the laureate to portray what is being discussed on the Hill and to advance the visual arts to wider audiences.

The second major Bill I have before the House is my *Declaration Respecting the Essential Role of Artists and Creative Expression in Canada*. I believe it is a critically important piece of legislation for as you know, arts and culture are essential to every aspect of society. For instance, those who attend live arts events live two years longer than those who don't, they miss less work, and tend to get out of hospital one or two days earlier after elective surgery. Also, the recidivism rate for 11-14 year olds tends to be about 40% lower where creative projects with artists are held. The sector is the third largest employer in our nation, yet one whose creators comprise the largest percentage of workers living below the poverty line. Another point of intersection between arts, culture and heritage is with the environment and climate change. I attended COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheik as part of Minister Guilbeault's delegation -- it was eye opening, and it was clear that the creative sector had much to contribute but is not often thought about in this context.

We in the arts, culture and heritage community have a responsibility to be involved, to lead and to provide solutions, sharing expertise and research, presenting solutions, educating audiences, and raising public awareness.

Collectively arts and culture have the collections, research, knowledge and audiences, and UNESCO and national heritage sites around the world are being severely compromised, many being devastated by the effects of droughts, fire, acid rain, and resulting material degradation. Not having been allowed to meet on site in week one, we finally had a session in the Blue Zone on the last day chaired by Princess Dana of Jordan with Ministers from Egypt, Jordan, Tonga and climate heritage specialists participating. I believe this will be the first of many exchanges. Further, culture was recognized in COP's final document, and loss and damage funds were agreed to. This Bill should allow greater connections between arts and culture and climate change and as we all know it is needed.

The Bill, with its ten points and implementation strategies, is intended to be the platform for much needed federal policy revisions, updates and parameters for Canada's creative sector. I also hope it might lead to arts contracts with specific ministries, like Health or the Environment and Climate Change, to tie into their mandate letter goals.

I hope the Bill will assist in addressing these societal realities and strengthen the sector within, and increase its ability to serve every part of contemporary life in Canada.

Creative expression has truly positive impacts in addition to health and wellbeing, the environment, crime prevention, and reduction of recidivism rates, and employment. It is also critical to our economy, tourism, Canada's international profile, and rural sustainability. Indeed, the work and outcomes of every ministry are positively aided by arts and culture.

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 recognize this truth if we are to move the perception of the arts from being considered a frill for those with time and money, to its rightful place as an anchor in our society. Also, as former Senator Murray Sinclair has said, and which I have quoted a number of times in various publications, "art validates cultures". At a time of working towards reconciliation, many of the necessary reconciliations are indeed culturally based.

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

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 which weaves all aspects of society together, and leads us to a better place.

In developing the Bill more than 600 people were involved in my consultations. All made poignant contributions to it. These focus groups, meetings and interviews included individuals of all ages, from high school to those in their nineties; all art forms and sizes of organizations; Indigenous, Black, immigrant, non-indigenous, disabled, 2SLGBTQ+, francophone, and anglophone people, from every part of Canada - east, central, west, north, south, large cities, and rural and small communities.

The discussions were heartfelt and rich and were based on the experiences, training and professions of the participants. One person aptly 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.”

The conclusions in the Declaration cut to the chase as to the integral roles and impacts of the arts to Canadian society. It emphasizes the critical needs of the sector, especially the need to improve the often pitiful incomes of those involved. Artists need to earn proper, fair, incomes; have intellectual property rights, and exhibition opportunities at home and abroad; and places to make and perform their art. At the same time, it calls for opportunities for arts skills training for people of all ages and to ensure all Canadians and residents of Canada have equal opportunity to access and enjoy the fruits of artistic expression.

Its articulated implementation measures consider the diverse identities, cultures, languages, customs, and practices of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, and also recognizes Francophone and immigrant communities in Canada.

Its Ministerial action plan includes consultations with the Ministers of Labour, Crown-Indigenous Relations; Justice; Health; the Canada Council of the Arts; provincial government representatives; arts organizations, including Indigenous artists and their cultural associations; and “all other interested persons or organizations the Minister considers appropriate”.

Australia’s John Hawkes, author of *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: culture’s essential role in public planning*, has written of the importance of governments to recognize the arts. He said :

Creativity = Light from the Dark

Art = Fire from the Light

Culture = Warmth from the Fire

Parliamentary Poet Laureate Louise Halfe, Indigenous poet from Saskatchewan, wrote two poems for me about the roots and needs of artists, indeed the underlying purpose of this Declaration:

For Your Pleasure

Black tie, evening gowns
blue jeans, funky dresses
people a line for the symphony,
theatre, a rock concert
or Leonard Cohen.

They stroll through a museum
view beadwork, paintings,
watch historical documents.
Walk from painting to painting
stall to stall at artisan sale.
Sit in awed silence
the cat ballerinas on stage
tap their feet at a fiddle dance,
admire colorful regalia and
chant with the pow-wow drums.

Their commissioned sculptures
command a street corner,
choirs at the symphony
commemorate veterans.
A tapestry of Canada Geese
feed in the prairie fields.
One of the group of seven
in a medical building.

Artists.
Working as waitresses,
ushers, bus or cab drivers,
shovel barn manure. Others
are lucky enough to have a spouse
to pay their rent.

The muse nibbles and nudges
their fingers
guides them
to a coffee shop, a studio,
to listen to the urge
to leave to you
a re-creation
of life.

AND, her second poignant and equally apt poem:

A Celebration of the Arts

Poets, dancers, musicians, singers,
painters, paupers beg
on bleeding knees
at the foot of dreams. The muse
watches as the artists'
push thigh deep through the
wingless angels in
a winter storms. In summer rains
they part the mist-filled fog
cup the tears of creativity.

Paupers living in squalor,
church basements,
taking refuge in libraries
to keep their bodies warm.
Work for pennies
to pay rent, buy macaroni,
sell their bodies, a few pieces of art,
words of poetry they recite
to four people.
Paupers unable to pay
for prescriptions, dental work,
glasses. Shop at the Sally Ann,
line up at the food banks.
There is no bank account, life
Savings. No insurance. Bus pass.
If the paperwork for mingy grants
passes the muster of critical eyes
and serious competition
mouths will be fed.

Darkness is invasive
Consumes the heart with drugs,
alcohol binges and yet
the artists' muse hangs on walls, dances
in theatres, sings on stage,
collects on shelves
while they feed on the leftovers.
People pass the buster's
guitar, violin, or harmonica.
Making a living on finger bones.

Now unanimously passed the Senate the Bill is in the House of Commons, but I fear we may have hit a speed bump with the passing of Manitoba MP Jim Carr, its sponsor in the House of Commons. He had it as a priority on his desk, its file marked as such in red pen, when he passed away in December, and he was to give his second reading speech on Feb. 6th which would enable debate to take place. We do not yet have a new sponsor, a step which needs unanimous consent in the House. Once second reading debate has taken place it will go to committee, then third reading and then, I hope, enacted into law. That will build the platform for the myriad arts and cultural policies Canadians are requesting.

I ask you all, audiences and artists of all disciplines, to help push it forward to a point where the value and importance of this sector will be properly recognized.

My late husband, John Harvard, who was a former chair of the House of Commons Heritage Committee, had a truly apt mantra: “We are all better off when we are all better off”. Canada’s artists and creative expression do make us better off, and they have the capacity to do so even more with the recognition this Bill gives. 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. ... art saves lives.” Embracing compassion, empathy, and hope, he said, art “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.

The third topic Gursh wanted me to talk about was my book *Western Voices in Canadian Art*. It has been a labour of love for decades, with my quiet collecting of catalogues, reviews and invitations, years of studio visits wherever I travelled, my writing and teaching which helped me focus on the works to include, and of course the editing and production details. It was Russell Harper in 1970 who said I should write it! Little did I know I actually would -- and here we are fifty plus years later! My focus was the pioneering visual directions which emanated from the Canadian west to become significant turning points in Canadian art.

Examining past and present insights and approaches, I have woven innovations by themes rather than according to provincial borders as so many artists, like Regina Five member Doug Morton, transited all four western provinces. Doug was born and raised in Manitoba, worked at the gallery here, was a Regina Five member, he was president of the Alberta College of Art, and Dean of Fine Arts at the University of Victoria -- of course he spent time as Dean at York too! Indeed the travels and work of many artists over the several centuries encompassed all our western regions, and the work of Indigenous artists, before and after contact was truly important.

The first section of the book, "An Evolving History" is an introductory chronological overview from the 1780s to the present, contextualizing major events, issues and the wider environment in which artists worked, as well as various technical developments in the visual arts which either emanated from the west or were used by artists here who adopted and expanded those innovations of materials and approaches.

The second part, “Prevailing Themes in Western Canadian Art” examines a number of specific themes from multiple perspectives, each crossing geographical boundaries and multiple decades. These include: Landscape as Culture; Urbanization and New Meanings; Abstraction into the Spiritual; People: Portraits and Inscapes; and Visual Voices and Societal Concerns. The book concludes with an appendix timeline of Western Canadian milestones.

I give my sincerest and heart-felt thanks to artists across the west for their very real generosity to me, of their time, in their studios over years, on the phone, by mail or email. Their conversations, insights and thoughts were inspiring to me and they were constants for me through all aspects of my career, curatorial, administrative, teaching, consulting and in the senate. Their visual and verbal insights, past and present, are grounding and inspirational.

Linking all this, if I have any message at all in my senate work, this book, or in anything else I have done, it is *to listen to the visual voices of artists*.

Artists tell us so poignantly who we are, what we must cherish, and what we must address as a society, and they often do so before a crisis befalls us.

One can call to mind the work of Joane Cardinal Schubert regarding residential schools as in her *Lesson*, which we presented in Victoria in the late 1980s, and of course the work of Faye HeavyShield. I could name many, many more!

Mavor Moore, playwright and former Chair of the Canada Council for the Arts, and first Chair of the BC Arts Council, once defined culture as to grow, as in agriculture, or with arts and culture, he said, is 'growing people.' I could add, growing communities.

That growth, friends, is what ties this book to my Senate work and the *Declaration Respecting the Essential Role of Artists and Creative Expression in Canada*.

So I thank you, and I thank the Prime Minister for giving me the opportunity to work on everything through the lens of arts and culture -- that is exactly what the Declaration does, and this book goes a way to proving it!

Thank you and please, I am happy to try to answer any questions -- about the senate, my work, my bills or this book!