

A creative, connected Calgary through the arts.

ACCOUNTABILITY & IMPACT REPORT

2020

CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

2020 GRANT
INVESTMENT PROGRAMS

EQUITY, DIVERSITY,
INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY

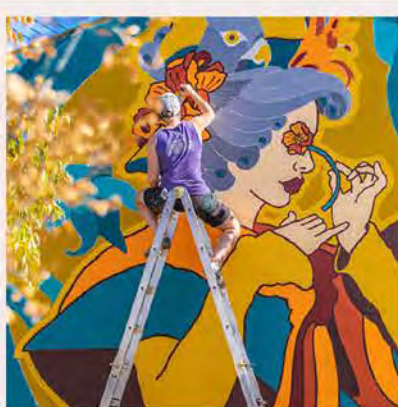
PARTNERSHIPS,
AWARENESS & CONNECTION

RESEARCH

ARTS-LED CITY-BUILDING

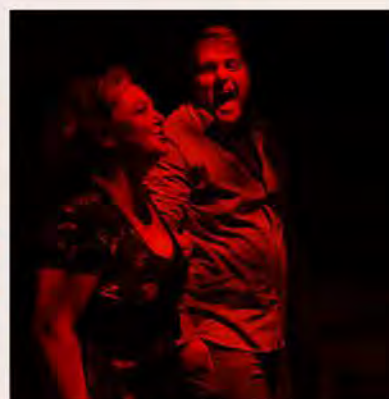
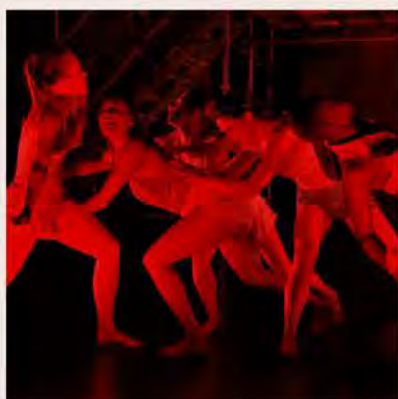
STORIES

PARTNERS



We are the city's designated arts development authority, created to support and strengthen the arts to benefit all Calgarians.

We are proud to put public dollars to work in the interest of the public good. This means all public. We aspire to foster a resilient and sustainable arts sector that is safe and welcoming for all, regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, language, citizenship, creed, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, marital status, physical, or mental abilities.



PHOTOS

Top row: *Snowblind* at Lunchbox Theatre, photo by Benjamin Laird Arts & Photo | Sarah Slaughter works on a mural at the Sunalta Community Wildflower Garden, photo by Lisa Amos, Caydence Photography | Participants wearing masks in a workshop by The Wonderheads, photo courtesy of the Canadian Academy of Mask and Puppetry | *Cultivate / Instigate* Opening at the Alberta Craft Gallery - Calgary, photo by Jeff Yee

Bottom row: Drumbeat, photo courtesy of Drumbeat Entertainment | Decidedly Jazz Danceworks' *Juliet + Romeo*, photo by Noel Bégin | Ethnik Festival of Arts and Culture, photo by Motif Photography | Handsome Alice Theatre's *Between Us*, photo by Tim Nguyen

Overview

WHAT DID 2020 ASK OF US?

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ASSESSORS, ADVISORS, AND JURIES

What Did 2020 Ask of Us?

What a year! COVID-19 changed the world for everyone and the disruption to the arts sector was enormous.

It was one of the first sectors to be shut down and will be one of the last to recover. Yet, throughout the strange year that was 2020, people found many ways to lean on the arts, and artists and arts organizations continued to connect us, lift our spirits, and reflect the world around us. We reacted quickly to the negative effects of the pandemic with some short-term emergency relief programs, and as the year went on we undertook a number of strategic partnerships and initiatives to support the health and sustainability of the arts sector through this devastating disruption. Our response has been guided by relief, recovery, resilience, and reimagining a better future for everyone.

The acceleration of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 had an enormous impact on our work. We sharpened our focus and deepened our understanding of what our values of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) really mean and what actions we can take to imbue those values in everything we do.

On behalf of the citizens of Calgary, we invested \$12.6M through more than 700 grants to artists, arts organizations, collectives, and events in Calgary in 2020. The investment was allocated through operating grants meant to help keep the arts sector alive for the time when we are all able together again in person; project grants supporting innovation and adaptability in the development of artistry and the creation and sharing of work; and grants and sponsorships supporting safe public events.

We thank our dedicated board of directors, staff, and the scores of others who apply their hearts and minds to a variety of assessment panels, juries, and other committees. Together we continue on a path that strengthens our two strategic priorities: fostering a sustainable and resilient arts sector and supporting arts-led city-building.



BRIAN FRANK
CHAIR
CALGARY ARTS DEVELOPMENT



PATTI PON
PRESIDENT & CEO
CALGARY ARTS DEVELOPMENT

BOARD AND STAFF LIST

Board of Directors

Calgary Arts Development is governed by a board of directors, appointed by and directly accountable to our shareholder, The City of Calgary, via City Council. The board of directors governs lawfully, observing the principles of a policy governance model, with an emphasis on strategic leadership and clear distinction of board and CEO roles.

The board also identifies the principal risks of Calgary Arts Development’s business, achieves a proper balance between risks incurred and potential returns, and oversees the development of policies and the implementation of appropriate systems to manage the risks.

The board carries out its responsibilities through the work of a number of committees. Each committee meets at least four times per year, and more frequently as necessary.

FINANCE AND AUDITCOMMITTEE

The purpose of the finance and audit committee is to assist the board in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities with regard to financial information, systems of internal controls, the internal audit process, and investment management activities.

Caitlyn Ducasse (chair/treasurer)
Brian Krywulak
Kathleen McNally Leitch
Karin King (community member)
Brian Frank (ex officio)

STRATEGY AND PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

The mandate of this committee is to make recommendations to the board on matters affecting strategy and public policy, and to provide guidance and evaluation for the development and evaluation of alignment with our mission and vision, including facilitating the strategic planning process.

Barb Howard (member to June 2020 and subsequently chair)
Jeff de Boer
Donna Friesen (chair to June 2020)
Kelly Morstad
Chima Nkemdirim
Susan Veres (to June 2020)
Evan Woolley
Wil Knoll (community member)
Brian Frank (ex officio)

2020 GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

This committee concerns itself with governance matters, including management of the relationships between the board and the CEO and between Calgary Arts Development and the shareholder. It also has oversight of board policy review and development, human resources policy development, board recruitment, development, and evaluation.

Sophia Lebessis (chair as of June 2020)
Oliver Ho
Lisha Hassanali
Barb Howard (chair to June 2020)
Brian Frank (ex officio)
Stacy Petriuk (to June 2020)
Susan Veres (to June 2020)

PUBLIC ART SUBCOMMITTEE

To oversee the possibility of Calgary Arts Development responding to The City of Calgary’s request for proposals for a third party assuming the public art program, a public art subcommittee was created, made up of current and past Calgary Arts Development board members.

Jeff de Boer (chair)
Chima Nkemdirim
Sophia Lebessis
Susan Veres (past board member)
Brian Frank (ex officio)

CSPACE SUBCOMMITTEE

cSPACE Projects is a subsidiary of Calgary Arts Development in partnership with the Calgary Foundation. As such, a subcommittee of Calgary Arts Development board members undertakes specific focus on our relationship with cSPACE as the majority shareholder.

Chima Nkemdirim (chair)
Brian Krywulak
Caitlyn Ducasse
Brian Frank (ex officio)

Assessors, Advisories, and Juries

Our grant investment programs are assessed by peer assessment committees to ensure that Calgary Arts Development is fairly and responsibly distributing public dollars to artists and organizations on behalf of the citizens of Calgary.

Our peer assessment committees bring their experience, knowledge, skill sets, and perspectives through assessment meetings to identify the best opportunities for the arts sector. They help our staff deepen their understanding and view of the sector.

READ MORE ABOUT GRANT ASSESSORS

2020 GRANT PROGRAM ASSESSORS



Alanna Blackrider – OneSpot
Allan Rosales
Allison Dunne
Amelia Marie Newbert
Areum Kim
Bassam Nabil Hafez
Bianca Guimarães de Manuel
Bob Davis
Bobbi Westmam
Bryce Maruk
Carmen Marie Samolia
Carol Holmes
Chris Carson
Clare Pruess
Colleen Krueger
Craig Coolahan
Dani Spady
Dick Avern
Elaine Lee
Emmanuel Ho
Eric Rose
Erin MacLean-Berko
Evan Wilson
Gary Ellis
Ginger Carlson
Glenna Cardinal
Haysam Kadri
Jacie Alook
Jarett Sitter
Jennifer Duncan
Jessica McMann
Jiajia Li
Josh Dalledone
Kara Bullock
Kate Monaghan
Kelly Kaur
Kodie Rollan
Lanre Ajayi
Laura Reid
Lucinda Neufeld
Maria Wozniak
Marianne Elder
Marion Garden
Maud Salvi
Melrene Saloy
Micheline Maylor
Miesha Louie
Miguel Cortines
Mike Maguire
Mpoé Mogale
Nate McLeod
Nicholas Mayne
Nicole Pemberton
Po Yeh
Raeesa Farooqi
Rose Brow
Samuel Obadero
Sandra Sutter
Sharon Moore Foster
Sharon Stevens
Simon Macleod
Stephanie Wong Ken
Steve Gin
Su Ying Strang
Sunny Clark
Tamara Cardinal Himmelspach
Tereasa Maillie
Tim Mah
Toyin Oladele
Troy Emery Twigg
Valerie Planche
Vanessa Gagnon
Wunmi Idowu
Xstine Cook
Yvette Denby

2020 OPIP ADVISORY



The decision-making process for the OPIP is entirely FNMI-led, with committees including representation across nations and artistic or cultural practice. OPIP assessors are included in the assessors' listing above.

2020 OPIP Advisory Committee members included (listed alphabetically):

Elder Rose Heavyhead
Glenna Cardinal
Jarret TwoYoungmen
Jessica McMann
Seth Lakota Cardinal Dodginghorse
Staci Duchene
Suitaakii Black
Yvette Denby

CULTURAL LEADERS LEGACY ARTIST AWARDS



Recipients of the 2020 Cultural Leaders Legacy Artist Awards were selected by a jury for each award, comprising a past award-winner, a representative from the benefactor organization, and artistic peers.

2020 Cultural Leaders Legacy Artist Awards Jury members (listed alphabetically):

Alexandra Gmiterek
Amanda Koyama
Anna Ko
Areum Kim
Bassam Nabil Hafez
Bethany Yon
Bianca Miranda
Brigitte von Rothemburg
Carol Schwartz-Kapuscinski
Cheryl Sung
Clem Martini
Daorcey Le Bray
George Webber
Geraldine Ysselstein
Jerilynn Daniels
Jess Knights
Lanre Ajayi
Mark Hopkins
Mark Vazquez-MacKay
Matt Blais
Michelle Brandenburg
Natalka Lewis
Rosemary Griebel
Samuel Obadaro
Sandi Somers
Shelley Youngblut
Sheri-D Wilson
Simon Mallet
Stephanie Banszky
Stephanie Horner
Stephanie Hutchinson
Sunny Clark
Teresa Coulter
Vanessa Toews

AININNA'KIIKS STEERING COMMITTEE



The Aisinna'kiiks dinner and dialogue series was guided by Elder Saa'kokoto (Randy Bottle) and the following steering committee members:

Anila Lee Yuen
Chantal Chagnon
Cherie McMaster
Clancy Evans
Helen Moore-Parkhouse
Hyder Hassan
Kaley Beisiegel
Latasha Calf Robe
Marichu Antonio
Sable Sweetgrass

BOARD AND STAFF LIST

2020 Grant Investment Programs

2020 GRANT INVESTMENT PROGRAMS

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19

Each year, at least 75% of our funding from The City of Calgary goes directly into grant investments.

OVERALL FUNDING



\$12,663,982
invested through more than 700 grants to organizations, individual artists, and arts collectives in 2020.

OPERATING GRANT PROGRAM

\$6,730,335
invested in **169 non-profit arts organizations**

SHORT-TERM RELIEF FUND

\$1,149,747
invested in **57 organizations** and **133 individual artists**

CITY OF CALGARY'S EMERGENCY RESILIENCY FUND

\$2,281,400
invested in **125 non-profit arts organizations**

PROJECT GRANT PROGRAM – INDIVIDUALS AND COLLECTIVES

\$850,020
invested in **94 projects**

ORIGINAL PEOPLES INVESTMENT PROGRAM

\$399,398
invested in **44 projects**

ARTSHARE PROGRAM

\$351,936
invested in **32 projects**

CULTURAL ACTIVATION FUND

\$649,425
invested in **36 projects**

ONLINE PROGRAMMING FUND

Via contributions by Calgary Arts Development , Rozsa Foundation + Calgary Foundation

\$151,271
invested in **29 projects**

CHANGEMAKER PROGRAM

\$100,450
invested in **17 artists and projects**

Calgary Arts Development is pleased to release the results of its 2020 grant investment programs. A full breakdown of each of the programs can be found at calgaryartsdevelopment.com.

PHOTO

Handsome Alice Theatre's *Between Us* | Photo: Tim Nguyen

The Effects of COVID-19

2020 was a year like no other. On March 13, when mass gatherings were necessarily prohibited, performances and exhibitions were immediately shut down.

Through targeted surveys, including a COVID-19 impact survey, we learned how deeply organizations and individual artists were affected in the immediate short-term and what was expected over the following three months. deeply organizations and individual artists were affected in the immediate short-term and what was expected over the following three months.



88%

of organizations had to cancel or postpone performances and exhibits



Organizations were planning on hiring

81%

fewer artists



53%

of staff were laid off



84%

of organizations stated that the financial impact of COVID was significant or major

We knew a serious and quick response was necessary and we understood that the end wasn’t in sight any time soon. What no one knew when the pandemic hit was that the disruption would last the entire year and continue into 2021.

We responded quickly with a number of measures to mitigate the effects of this major disruption in an effort to help an overwhelmed sector.

Assurance was given to the 160+ non-profit organizations who receive annual operating grants that their grant investments would not be held back regardless of the programming restrictions they were facing due to COVID-19.

SHORT-TERM RELIEF FUND

\$1,149,747

invested in **57 organizations and 133 individual artists** to help them navigate the immediate shutdown of programming and cancellation of contracts

EMERGENCY RELIEF FUNDING

Administered on behalf of The City of Calgary

\$2,281,400

granted to **101 organizations** in recognition of the devastating effects of COVID to the arts sector

ONLINE PROGRAMMING FUND

Via contributions by Calgary Arts Development , Rozsa Foundation + Calgary Foundation

\$151,271

granted to **29 arts projects**

PROJECT GRANTS

\$100,000

was added to the \$750,000 pool of Project Grants for **Individual Artists and Collectives** through donations from RBC and Calgary Foundation, via the Calgary Arts Foundation, bringing the total of that fund up to \$850,000 granted to 94

The kinds of numbers reported in previous years were all affected by COVID.

The total number of public events presented by those organizations who received funding through our operating grant program in 2020 was 8,129 with a total attendance of 1,720,272. This is a 39% drop in activities and 59% drop in attendance from 2019 due to the pandemic.
Of the total number of public events, there were 4,494 activities for youth provided by our operating grant clients with a total attendance of 79,516. This is a 50% drop in activities and a 75% drop in attendance from 2019 due to the pandemic, as well as changes in the delivery of arts education programming by school boards.

Even though there wasn’t as much of a need for volunteers in 2020 due to the decreased live programming, arts organizations reported that 11,402 people volunteered contributing more than 203,795 volunteer hours of service. This represents a 55% decrease in the number of volunteers and a 64% decrease in the number of volunteer hours due to the pandemic.

We responded quickly with a number of measures to mitigate the effects of this major disruption in an effort to help an overwhelmed sector.

Assurance was given to the 160+ non-profit organizations who receive annual operating grants that their grant investments would not be held back regardless of the programming restrictions they were facing due to COVID-19.

PHOTO

Left to right:
Decidedly Jazz Danceworks' *Juliet + Romeo* | Photo: Noel Bégín
Ethnik Festival of Arts and Culture before COVID shutdowns | Photo: Motif Photography
The Wonderheads workshop | Photo: Courtesy of the Canadian Academy of Mask and Puppetry
Snowblind at Lunchbox Theatre | Photo: Benjamin Laird Arts & Photo

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

Our EDIA Journey Accelerated in 2020

As Canada’s third most diverse city, we want to ensure our arts sector and arts leadership reflect the rich diversity of our city.

As a public agency stewarding public dollars for the benefit of ALL Calgarians, we aspire to foster a resilient and sustainable arts sector that is safe and welcoming for all, regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, language, citizenship, creed, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, marital status, physical, or mental abilities.

Truth and Reconciliation

At Calgary Arts Development, EDIA work is grounded in our truth and reconciliation journey, which began in a serious way in 2017.

In 2020 we hosted a second Aisinna’kiiks dinner and dialogue series with Calgary Board of Education to explore and strengthen relations between Indigenous peoples and settlers. The series included Elders, artists, educators, youth, community and arts leaders. Artists are an important part of these gatherings, not only participating in the conversations, but also providing an artistic response to the dialogues and learnings at the end of the series. Aisinna’kiiks was disrupted by COVID and moved to online gatherings, with the final presentation of the artistic responses in March of 2021.

VIDEO ABOUT AISINNA’KIIKS

The [Original Peoples Investment Program](#) (OPIP) supports the preservation and revitalization of First Nations/Métis/Inuit (FNMI) art through arts-based projects and activities that are supported and validated by FNMI artists, community, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers. OPIP is open to FNMI artists and collectives demonstrating a serious dedication to artistic practice at all stages of career, and FNMI-led organizations, all primarily practicing or operating in the Calgary Moh’kinsstis area. Work can be in any artistic discipline (traditional, contemporary or other). In 2020, \$399,398 was invested in 44 artists or projects (57% of those who applied).

Black Lives Matter

The murder of George Floyd on May 25 ignited people throughout North America to engage in meaningful ways to put an end to anti-Black racism.

We were called out, and rightly so, for not responding quickly enough. As a result, we published a [Black Lives Matter statement](#) on our website, which also listed a number of actions we would undertake to support and show our solidarity for Black artists and the trauma that has and is experienced by all Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC), and artists with disabilities.

In the second half of 2020, we undertook the following actions:

- Hosted five [anti-racism virtual town halls](#) with guest speakers to share ideas and learning in our community.
- Created an EDIA staff working group to examine our commitment to EDIA at every level of our organization, and further develop anti-racist policies and practices governing our work, including recruitment, access to granting programs, procurement processes, community engagement.
- Commissioned and compensated an EDIA community working group to build a community of trust and to respond to the EDIA actions being taken by Calgary Arts Development.
- Facilitated a series of Chat and Chew discussions for BIPOC artists.
- Continued to support the work of equity-seeking artists through our granting programs, with emphasis on the Original Peoples Investment Program, the ArtShare Program, and the Artist as Changemaker Program.
- Contributed financial support for the Cultural Instigators—a group of artists-organizers learning and helping to build collective capacity in the arts communities for EDIA, working on community initiatives for change.
- Amplified the stories of artists that reflect the rich cultural diversity of our city through [The Storytelling Project](#), with a particular focus on sharing diverse stories through the podcasts and a new web series.
- Provided financial flowthrough of City funding for [Pink Flamingo’s Black Lives Matter](#) mural project.

Partnerships, Awareness and Connection

The Power of Partnerships

Research and community engagement tell us that the arts are important to people for a variety of reasons—as a means of expression; to feel connected to oneself, to others and to place; to bring meaning to our lives; to offer opportunities for shared experiences with friends and loved ones; to connect to our emotions; to tell our stories; and to engender a sense of belonging. A vibrant arts scene is extremely important to attract talent and business to our city, to attract visitors, and to make Calgary a great place to make a living and a great place to make a life.

A powerful way to leverage support and develop the arts sector is by ensuring that artists and arts champions are included in important strategies, conversations, and events in our city. Calgary Arts Development works hard to develop reciprocally beneficial relationships with orders of government, civic partners, community organizations, foundations, associations, committees, and individuals in Calgary and beyond.

Throughout 2020 we realized more than ever before the power of collaboration with other organizations and agencies who have a shared vision for Calgary. Members of our leadership and managers teams were active participants in a variety of roundtables, collaborations, and workshops whose work centered around the ideas of economic recovery for the live event industry, public safety during the pandemic, shared prosperity, inclusion, and social cohesion. Some of the key work undertaken in 2020 included participation in the following:

- [Business Sector Support group hosted by The City of Calgary](#)
- City Partners Marketing group supporting LoveYYC, Buy Local, and a number of other local initiatives
- City of Calgary's *Downtown, Festivals & Events, and Winter strategies*
- [Chinook Blast](#)
- [West Anthem's Music City Report launched on October 29](#)
- Network of Indigenous Funders of Alberta
- [CLIP Council \(Calgary Local Immigration Partnership\)](#)
- Fine Arts Advisory Council for Calgary Board of Education
- [The New Experience Economy longitudinal study](#)
- [Bounceback YYC](#)
- Suncor Town Hall hosted by Calgary Economic Development on the future of our city
- [Soul of the Next Economy](#)
- [The Case for Basic Income for the Arts](#)
- [RISE UP Calgary](#)
- [Creative Economy Strategy](#)

Awareness and Connection

Increasing awareness of the arts in our city has been a need since the inception of Calgary Arts Development and 2020 was no different. Even though in-person events weren't possible for most of the year, artists and arts organizations adapted quickly and offered a wide array of programs, classes, and events online. [What's On in Calgary](#) and [yycwhatson.ca](#) continued to give people an up-to-date listing of the many safe arts events they could take in all year long.

COVID-19 meant that our own in-person events, such as The Mayor's Lunch for Arts Champions and the Report to Community were cancelled, but we were able to host a series of [virtual town halls](#) in order to keep in touch with the arts community. And despite The Mayor's Lunch being cancelled, we were able to celebrate the recipients of the [2020 Cultural Leaders Legacy Artist Awards](#) with an online gathering of the award winners and the Mayor.

Our online [community directories](#) are growing with rich information for people who want to learn more about artists, cultural groups, resources, and arts spaces in Calgary.

2020 marked the final year of Poet Laureate [Sheri-D Wilson](#) and welcomed Calgary's new Poet Laureate [Natalie Meisner](#). Sheri-D Wilson's legacy project [YYC Pop: Poetic Portraits of People](#) included the publication of an anthology that included pieces by 76 writers who live and work in Calgary, with a poem by our own Mayor; an online exhibit; and a *Poetry in Transit* project that included lines from 10 of the poets featured on interior banners on Calgary Transit throughout October.

Research

Arts-Led City-Building

Our EDIA Journey Accelerated in 2020

We aspire to a future that includes arts and creativity as part of our city's DNA.

We see great benefits to helping create conditions for Calgarians to live their most creative lives, including opportunities to develop the creative economy, increase the vibrancy of downtown, enliven neighborhoods, and enhance quality of life.

The pandemic caused a lot of people to reexamine what's important to them, and to start to imagine a better future for our city. Having safe ways to gather with others, to celebrate, and to express ourselves are important to Calgarians, and throughout 2020 the arts community was incredibly adaptable, providing many opportunities.

There were hundreds of safe arts experiences offered after the onset of the pandemic in 2020, some live but most online. Here is just a handful of examples of how the sector adapted:

- [Stagehand's Clean Hands, Clear Heads, Open Hearts Festival](#) was one of the early responses to COVID-19, presenting a series of live music concerts online.
- [Curbside Concerts](#), founded by Matt Masters and Amanda Burgener, offered a safe, innovative solution to offering live concerts.
- [Hotels Live](#), is a live event series that takes place in hotels in Calgary, offering people a live performance from the safety of their hotel balcony, with room service and an overnight stay.
- [The Big Art Drive-In](#) at TELUS Spark, shared its stage with local artists and arts organizations at a Rise Up Weekend.
- [Vertigo Theatre's](#) online listening parties offered audiences an opportunity to listen to theatrical productions in a radio story format.
- [WordFest](#) developed a new technical capacity to deliver online programming that garnered a global reach both in terms of the artists and the audiences they engaged.
- [Calgary International Film Festival](#) pivoted their annual fall event to an online festival, which proved to be very successful in terms of programming and reach.
- [Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra](#) had already been streaming concerts pre-pandemic, and was able to offer compelling music experiences online during 2020.
- [Theatre Calgary's TC Takeout](#) provided artists an opportunity to share their talents with audiences.
- [Storybook Theatre](#) kept its passionate and talented young performers and audiences engaged with filmed performances that were streamed online on demand.
- [Dave Kelly Live's Holiday at Home](#) live streamed event wrapped up a difficult year with gratitude and hope, offering Calgary all the best for 2021.

Vibrant Downtown

Calgary's downtown continues to be the cultural heart of our city and a vibrant arts scene is crucial to creating vibrancy for those who work, live, and visit downtown.

The [Downtown Strategy](#) states that, "A thriving downtown means a thriving Calgary. The success of our city relies on our downtown being a place where people want to live and be, and where businesses want to set up shop, now, and for decades to come. Downtown must transform toward a vision of a resilient and vibrant downtown for everyone, with welcoming neighbourhoods, active streets, and well-used public spaces."

Calgary Arts Development has been participating in many sessions about the downtown strategy, as have artists, arts organizations, and festivals. The arts sector's ability to offer vibrant experiences and welcoming spaces is of great benefit to re-imagining Calgary's downtown.

Everyday Creativity

Living a Creative Life, Calgary's arts development strategy encourages everyday creativity for all Calgarians.

At the end of 2020 there were 192 signatories to the *Living a Creative Life* strategy. [The Storytelling Project](#) is one of the ways we share stories and podcasts about Calgarians who are living creative lives, and in 2020 we launched a new [web series](#) with the intention of digging deeper into the rich diversity of stories about creative Calgarians.

Creative Economy

RISE UP Calgary

An open source collaboration between community partners who have an interest in restarting the live experience economy in a safe way.

Calgary Arts Development is one of the leading proponents and supporters of Rise Up, which includes input into a creative economy strategy (to be published in 2021); promoting events that are safe, local and collaborative; and hosting RISE UP Relaunch Lunches.

Future of Calgary's Live Experience Economy

MULTIPLE WAVES RELEASED IN 2020 & 2021

Calgary Arts Development is one of the sponsors of a longitudinal study [Stone-Olafson](#) is undertaking to measure the public's attitudes toward live experiences.

It has been extremely helpful in gauging the public's concerns as well as their motivations, behaviours, and pent-up desire to return to in-person gatherings. The learnings from this work will help guide arts organizations as they plan for re-opening when the time is right.

We supported the [Alberta Music Industry Ecosystem Report](#) (October 2020) studied the Edmonton and Calgary music industries and made recommendations of key changes to make Alberta an internationally recognized music hub. The creative industries are key to diversifying our economy and this research helps advance Calgary as an emerging music city.

Arts Spaces

Accessible arts spaces play a huge role in increasing vibrancy and creative opportunities throughout Calgary.

The arts and culture infrastructure ecosystem supports all disciplines in the sector, including dance, film, literary arts, music, new media, theatre, and visual arts, as well as heritage and other cultural practices. It supports community and professional arts and culture and education.

Spaces can be developed and operated as for-profit or not-for-profit. Arts and culture spaces support the career trajectory of Calgary's artists and cultural workers and arts and culture organizations including incubator space for emerging practices and could include affordable housing or live-work spaces for artists and cultural workers and their families.

COVID-19 was really hard on spaces and many arts spaces were severely underused, or even empty, during the pandemic.

In 2020, the developers behind SpaceFinder announced that they were wrapping up this continent-wide online space-matching platform. Alberta was the most successful SpaceFinder in all of North America in terms of space listings per capita. It was an effective way to connect venue operators with short-term renters all over our province, animating venues and helping renters find the perfect space. 2020 gave us the opportunity to thoughtfully investigate a more accessible platform, especially during this time when demand for space was very low due to the pandemic.

Collaborating with other organizations from Alberta and across Canada, Calgary Arts Development is leading the investigation of a new platform that continues to build community and provide the rich data generated about supply and demand for creative space in our city. In the meantime, space-seekers can find a directory of available spaces on our website and support is available through spaces@calgaryartsdevelopment.com.

To understand more about what guides our work regarding arts and culture spaces, read our 2017 *Arts and Culture Infrastructure Strategy: [Building on our Momentum](#)*.

Calgary Arts Development envisions a Calgary where arts and culture infrastructure supports the right of all citizens to live a creative life. Accessible, appropriate arts spaces play a huge role in increasing vibrancy throughout Calgary.

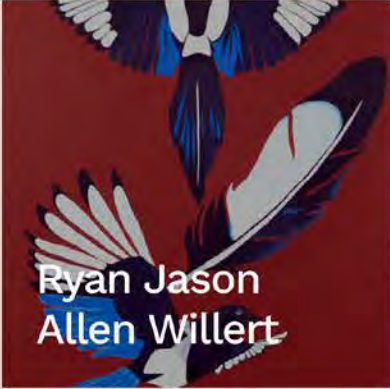
cSPACE was created in 2011 as a subsidiary of Calgary Arts Development in partnership with the Calgary Foundation to strategically address a critical demand for creation, production, presentation and rehearsal spaces that are affordable, sustainable and collaborative. cSPACE King Edward opened in 2017 as their flagship project, delivering 47,500 sq. ft. of arts hub, innovative event venue and coworking space in Marda Loop. The facility has remained 100% leased since opening and boasted an average of 4500+ weekly visits to the facility in the months before the pandemic.

While use of the Studio Theatre and other community events were greatly diminished throughout 2020, exhibitions and community facility rentals continued as health restrictions permitted. cSPACE remained active in their creative placemaking efforts and engaged with the arts and local community with the [20/20 Wavelength Project](#). This profiled the creative practices of Calgary artists through exhibitions within the building, on digital platforms and with public artworks on the grounds. cSPACE King Edward was also recognized by the Alberta Chapter of the Green Building Council with an Honourable Mention for its green building efforts and the creative community of tenants were supported with rent assistance during a difficult year.

In 2021, cSPACE will pilot its [Creative Incubator Initiative](#) to support artists whose practices are responding to the pandemic in innovative ways.

Stories

Stories





Alanna Bluebird-Onespot | Photo by Russell

Alanna Bluebird-Onespot

By Meng Wei

Alanna Bluebird is an Indigenous spoken-word poet. She started writing poems when she was in Grade 8.

She uses her gift of language to tell stories of the people who have walked this land on Treaty 7 territory for centuries, as well as to heal.

In 2020, for the first time ever, Alanna Bluebird published a poem for her daughter into a book.

“It was all meant to be going towards my vision of an artist, and how I want to develop myself,” she says. “I felt like this was a perfect opportunity to create a book.”

Coming from Siksika Nisiiitapi and Tsuut’ina Dinatii, she has inspired Indigenous youth through words of healing and empowerment in her performances across nations.

“Our people are very verbal. We have an oral tradition where 500 words are passed down exactly the same for thousands of years, nothing has changed, and that’s how we kept our traditions alive.”

Indeed, moving to publishing was a big step for her, but in the end, the beauty of collaboration and the power of creation came through in *The Light Within*. The poem was published with every word of her own, the illustration by her sister, and the Tsuut’ina translation by her grandfather. The book is for her daughter Lindey.

“I’ll show her and tell her ‘this was for you,’ and I’ll read it to her and eventually she’ll understand what I’m saying in the book.”

Now working as the resource development assistant at the Tsuut’ina Gunaha Institute, Alanna plans on taking this experience even further as an artist, carrying the legacy to the next generations and sharing with them the ancient Indigenous culture.

Just before bedtime, we’ll see mothers holding their babies in one arm, surrounding her with a book of love and spirit and read, “I am the wisdom that you carry from the past life, carrying generations of strong DNA, a light that guides your path...”



 Watching the Calgary Underground Film Festival online | Photo: Caitlind R.C. Brown

Calgary Underground Film Festival

By Meng Wei

Every year in April since 2003, the Calgary Underground Film Festival (CUFF) has been showing independent films that we rarely have the chance to see elsewhere.

After having their biggest audience ever in 2019, the iconic film fest in Calgary decided to continue in 2020 despite all the complications of putting on a film festival online.

“It just felt important for us to do it for the fans regardless of the situation,” says CUFF’s Director and Lead Programmer Brenda Lieberman.

And despite the challenges, CUFF successfully showcased the full lineup. Most of the films were shown on digital platforms, but CUFF also came up with a solution to still give that experience we enjoy so much when we sit in front of the big screen gasping and laughing with the rest of the audience.

“The drive-in gave us an opportunity to have an in-person experience, and also to show some films that we wouldn’t have been able to show virtually.”

With the support of public funding, CUFF was able to purchase the drive-in equipment and pay for protected online distribution, making it one of the first festivals to transition online.



 Photo: Caitlind R.C. Brown

“We had already programmed the whole festival, and if we waited too much longer, we weren’t going to have the ability to use the content that we’d worked on, so we made a decision really fast,” she says.

With the dedication of their limited staffing during the pandemic, CUFF managed to make the festival more accessible to audiences who couldn’t have made it to the festival in previous years.

“The hard of hearing community responded favourably to the fact that they closed captioned all of the films, and being able to watch the films from home made them more accessible for people with mobility challenges. We’ve definitely seen interest in people from outside of Calgary as well, so I hope that it translates in the future to when we’re in person—maybe they’ll make a trip.”

In a new era where a niche production can be easily buried among the hundreds of films that pop up on your screen, Brenda talks about the value of festivals like CUFF.

“Independent film festivals are good at curating selections and making recommendations so audiences can have a sense of what’s out there that they wouldn’t normally find,” she adds. “It’s great to see everyone having a good experience at the festival, while also being grateful and enthusiastic that we did it.

“We are really motivated by the fans and the sponsors and everyone who is so appreciative.”



Casa Mexico

By Meng Wei

Casa Mexico took the opportunity to present a virtual 45-day celebration of Latin American Arts and Culture in 2020.

“We are a mosaic of talent,” says President and Executive Officer Miguel Cortines of Casa Mexico Foundation. “When we put together the diverse artistic disciplines of our Latin American community, we have the privilege of projecting the artists and an explosion of talent and emotions for our target audiences.”

The goal of Casa Mexico has always been to create spaces that project the works of artists and creators in our community, according to Miguel. They promote the best of Mexican culture, Latin American heritage, and the Spanish Language supporting multidisciplinary collaborations between the artists and community partners.

“Everybody contributes a piece. We produce, we present, we are the connectors,” he says.

The *Virtual Latin American Art Exhibition and Festival* presented 22 visual artists from Canada, Mexico, and Ecuador in an online platform. “We hosted and streamed live interviews to showcase the profile of the visual artists participating at the festival,” Miguel says.

“We started with the exhibition, and added elements on the way. With a surprising level of activity, the 30-day celebration from May 15 to June 15 was extended to June 30 to have 40 online events, including Spanish poetry nights, theatre performances, musical night, storytelling with puppets for kids, and conversations with Latin American artists across disciplines.

Miguel confirmed that even though the food and the friendly passionate kisses were missing during COVID.

“It was amazing, the combination of all the elements created a festival.”

It took a lot of planning and communication to coordinate moving all the artists online.

Miguel says some artists were hesitant to present their work in a virtual format, but after exploring their creativity in the virtual realm, the outcome was amazing for everybody.

By the end of the festival, Casa Mexico had a significant number of virtual events, including cultural days that presented the culture of Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and the Día de Muertos—Catrina Festival, attracting approximately 95,200 audiences worldwide with 62 activities in total.

“The opportunity right now is to giving continuity to our work and evaluating how to better serve our stakeholders. There is a lot of content, very good content online, so we need to continue to create and present meaningful digital and hybrid programs.”



Behind the scenes at Dancing Monkey Laboratories | Photo: Mike Czuba

Dancing Monkey Laboratories

By Meng Wei

What can we make in a theatre with a six-member team and no audience?

In a world where we lost touch with one another and need that extra boost of show-me-everything live performance instead of just munching away on Netflix, [Dancing Monkey Laboratories](#) brought us *Like Tom Cruise Likes Running*.

It's not like the usual online versions of a performance where cameras are static and the audience still yearns for that tension and energy in a live theatre. *Like Tom Cruise Likes Running* transports the audience onto the stage by placing the camera on the stage with the actors, and lets them have that meta discussion with the play.

It was all made possible by bringing Tim Nguyen on the team as the director of cinematography, Wil Knoll as technical director, alongside Mike Czuba, the writer and producer of the play and one of the founders of Dancing Monkey Laboratories, who is no stranger to bringing unique elements across disciplines to maximize audience experience. I recently had a conversation with Mike Czuba, who told me about the project.



Trevor Loman | Photo: Mike Czuba

“We understand that we’re watching live theatre, but we have to understand, as creators, that we are making this theatre for people watching on screens, so we can’t just fall on the old ways, we have to adapt to these new conditions,” Mike says.

The online format challenges the theatre to innovate with unfamiliar technologies and knead them together to create a hybrid form. Wil Knoll worked his tech magic to allow Tim to perform live with his camera and not cut through the performance of the actors. The online production quality is top-notch.

“I think we found a really sweet spot where it was live, it was theatre, it was performance but it had the camera moving, and I think we kind of found a really great middle.”

He says that the successful outcome of their free exploration was possible because of an Online Programming Grant from Calgary Arts Development and the Rozsa Foundation.

What this production achieved was not only for the team to move forward but also to share this process, to show another way of creative problem-solving in the industry.

“We’re trying to create a model that can be easily duplicated by somebody else. The camera will be moving on the stage when people are watching the show. If things continue to be upside-down and we can’t gather in person, we’ll just shut the door but the performance will continue. All the work will be the same.”



Donna Ng | Photo: Mike Czuba



Drumbeat Entertainment

By Meng Wei

Drumbeat Entertainment is the first of its kind in Moh’kinsstis Calgary in Treaty 7. It was created by Richard Sparvier (DJ BLKFT) in 2018 to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists together through music and community.

In 2020, its Virtual Pow Wow Festival (VPWF) generated a wave of Indigenous and electronic music hype.

“It feels great. It feels good. It was something that I would never have thought to be able to do in such a short amount of time,” Richard says.

The VPWF was sponsored by the Online Programming Grant funded in partnership between Calgary Arts Development and the Rozsa Foundation. It took place on National Indigenous Peoples Day and put the spotlight on seven artists with Indigenous backgrounds to celebrate their originality and community.

“It was so important to have this, to continue to give voice and space for Indigenous artists and Indigenous music.”

Richard was once a one-man team coordinating DJs and producers from all over Canada to mix and mingle with local artists that eventually led to collaborations with groups like Snotty Nose Rez Kids and Cartel Madras.

Last March, he was about to have the first in Canada Indigenous Bass and Dubstep Night when the COVID-19 pandemic hit like an endless snowstorm in the middle of the summer that you can’t do anything about.

“It was a little bit disheartening to do all the work prior and have those events cancelled,” he says. “Everybody was quite supportive and everybody understood this is a weird time that we’re in a global pandemic.”

Then the circle of friends quickly got back on their feet, from knowing nothing about the online streaming platform Twitch to streaming with green-screens, gaining new perspectives on showmanship, and going live online.

“The quality of the stream just went from zero to 100 within like a month, and everybody grew honing in on their craft of streaming,” he says. “It’s definitely a powerful tool to be able to connect through music and to connect with one another virtually during this time.”

More artists came online and joined the show again from everywhere even though their only payments were by donation most of the time.

Drumbeat Entertainment’s channel is a community that brings people together from isolation, and it’s also a platform with opportunities that many Indigenous artists don’t usually have.

“A lot of the time, we’re just brushed under the rug. With this opportunity... we give them a chance on our channel to not only play their music but also get it heard by a wider audience.

“Calgary Arts Development helped us pay our artists, and also gave the business a fair honorarium for the work that we put in behind the scenes. That really helps us stay motivated and keep doing these events.”

With the power of the internet, Drumbeat Entertainment has grown with more reach and better capacities to connect the audience with different music and artists.

Richard is hopeful about the future. “It makes me optimistic for what’s to come, and it makes me excited for life after the pandemic to see where we can go, whenever that time comes, you know, we’re going to be ready for it.”



Photo: Lili Tayefi

Lili Tayefi

By Meng Wei

Lili Yas Tayefi is an Iranian-born independent artist who moved back to Calgary after living abroad for four years learning and searching for her own artistry.

Since then she has launched a career in a perfect point of convergence—combining years of her multidisciplinary practices, her passion, her philosophy, and her heritage.

The Tayefi family immigrated to Canada when she was five. She would hang around in her dad’s architecture firm and attend extracurricular pottery classes instead of playing sports, so naturally, Tayefi went into a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Calgary where she studied drawing and printmaking.

“I think creating art came to me naturally, and I had an affinity for math and physics, so I thought: I should be an architect, obviously,” she says.

And she dove right into minoring in architecture at the University of Calgary and went on to get a Master’s in Advanced Architecture at the Institution for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia, in Barcelona, where she specialized in Robotic Fabrication and Material Science. She came out finding herself in love with traditional Iranian clay architecture as well as other sustainable, organic materials, with endless complimentary possibilities in 3D printing—such as affordable passive house designs.



Photo: Sheena Zilinski

After coming back to Canada, she felt somewhat detached from the community she had found overseas.

“I was a little bit disheartened to find a slow mobilization of digital fabrication at an architectural scale in the Canadian landscape.”

As a scholar and an artist, she reached out to Professor Bryan Cera at the Alberta University of the Arts and built a model of his unique clay extruder, the CERA-1, for her desktop 3D printer. She also got her own studio space at Workshop Studios, where she continued to practice her pottery skills in hopes of making expressive sculptural ceramics and 3D print product designs.

“I wouldn’t be doing what I was doing if I wasn’t in my hometown,” she says.

The support came from her family and friends, who helped her to create a well-structured business plan in a locally absent market, and the professional art community who has been a resource in ongoing learning.

Lili received a grant from Calgary Arts Development through the Project Grant Program for Individuals and Collectives.

“The most important thing CADA gave me was not just funds, CADA gave me a sense of confidence that what I’m doing is actually a valid contribution.

“I think a tough area for most artists,” says Lili, “is that you are actually a small business owner: Branding and curating yourself while also finding the space and the time to create.”

The pause during the COVID-19 pandemic has given her a chance to reflect inwards and find her artistic integrity that combines her passion and skills, so she can live a career as an independent artist. Where she is now is made possible by the support of the community, and she is working to bridge her communities even further by connecting people internationally.



Photo: Lili Tayefi



Cars at the Luminous Voices drive-in performance | Photo: Kenton Smith

Luminous Voices

By Meng Wei

There are two places in the world that any of us can deliver our best singing ever: the bathroom, and the car. They will never fail us. The potential is immense.

Now, imagine half of a parking lot is taken up by a choir in cars and the other half by an audience of cars, like the Pixar movie where there is a stage and the cars in the audience go crazy over a performance jumping up and down and honking their horns.

That came so close to reality in 2020.

David Newman, a music professor in the U.S. and a colleague of Luminous Voices' founding director Timothy Shantz, successfully experimented with a technical setup for the pandemic. His solution allows a choir to sing together from their cars and hear each other through the radio without any delay. Luminous Voices is one of the professional choir ensembles utilizing it and bringing concerts to people in cars.



Photo: Bandi Szakony

"It's amazing to hear," says Meghan Goguen, the general manager of Luminous Voices.

"You're sitting there, and people are honking their applause and just the feeling of being in that place... you get a feeling of community in that moment."

When the pandemic disrupted their busy season, Luminous Voices explored what they might be able to do while artists, although they could still have online workshops, didn't know when they could get together and make music again.

The car choir was one way to sweep away the isolation that was looming over everyone's head. It recalled an essential part of our "old normal" for both the artists and the audience.

"One person brought her newborn baby, and she said 'this was amazing, I was able to enjoy this concert without worrying about my baby. I was able to breastfeed in the middle of a concert and not miss a single thing.' We also had somebody who said that they brought their child who is autistic, and they didn't have to worry about sensory overload."

"Calgary Arts Development has been our biggest supporter this year, and we are so grateful. CADA has just given us that freedom to take risks and be bold and to say, we need to share our music with the community. And it has worked out brilliantly."

Art and creativity is that one thing that we always sought to make joy within hardship, and it never fails because it's crucial, irreplaceable, priceless, and essential.

"This is a beacon of hope in a really dark time. This is a balm for our nerves. And it is amazing to see that people are still making music."



Photo: Jason Lee



National accessArts Centre

By Meng Wei

The formation of the National accessArts Centre (NaAC) happened just so naturally because it was the right time, the right team, and the right opportunity.

The 2018 roof collapse of the Fairview Arena, directly attached to the centre's current facility, induced a series of discussions and collaboration between Indefinite Arts and celebrated Calgary-based mixed ability dance company Momo Movement with incredible synergy—a long-awaited chance for Jung Suk (JS) Ryu, the President and CEO of the NaAC, to finally bring together something that was meant to be in one unity.

Throughout 2020, the organization formerly known as the Indefinite Arts Centre—already Canada's largest and oldest disability arts organization—entered into conversations with Momo Movement and another disability arts organization, Artistic Expressions, to envision a more streamlined and accessible arts environment for Calgarians and Canadians living with disabilities. And in November 2020, the three organizations combined forces to become the National accessArts Centre.

“Can we have one organization that opens up a multidisciplinary opportunity for artists to be able to create and move between disciplines, and really expand their creative horizons through that sort of unified structure, unified organization?”

JS started thinking about this idea when he first came on board with the organization in 2017. Now, this idea has turned into reality with Canada's first multidisciplinary disability arts organization.



Photo: Neil Zeller

Since 2018, from exhibitions in major cities including Dubai, Hong Kong, Seoul, New York, and Guadalajara, to having artists' works now be a part of the permanent collection of the Government of Canada's foreign affairs ministry, what the NaAC's artists have accomplished is remarkable.

In 2020, NaAC had a banner year—more than doubling its fundraising goal—based on its relentless commitment to and confidence in its community of extremely talented artists. This made it possible for the organization to push even further, letting its artists fully explore their potential, expanding beyond visual arts, to performing arts and other disciplines—even during the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdown.

That increase in programming also allowed them to do even more and to follow through on those ambitions to provide world-class programming.

“Our community deserves nothing but the best constantly at all times,” JS says.

And the support of the community doesn't stop at providing the artists with professional careers. It has become the lifeline for many of them, especially when the COVID-19 pandemic created acute situations of social distancing and isolation.

“An artist had written to me and said the person who delivered our artist supply kit was the first person that he had seen in weeks,” JS recalled an email after a few weeks into the shutdown.



Photo: Neil Zeller

To date, the NaAC has delivered more than 3,500 artist supply kits—named flux kits after the fluxus art movement—to their artists, and continues to facilitate and support the needs of its artist community, through daily online studio sessions, as well as using more traditional forms of communication—including letter writing and phone calls.

“We need to move away from the mindset that our community needs this kind of support simply to be kept busy and occupied,” says JS. “Through our work and the incredible support we've received, the NaAC is proving to our community— and to the world—that it has tremendous creative potential.”

With a vision of a society where artists with disabilities are recognized and supported by all communities, Ryu hopes to see a day when the NaAC is no longer needed.

“When we have arts organizations as well as audiences understand and appreciate the incredible creative potential that people with disabilities have, when galleries and performing arts halls understand that they need to adapt in order to provide equitable opportunities and break down those barriers so that individuals with physical and developmental disabilities can bloom as artists in their own right... my gosh, that means that we would have done our job.”



Photo: Ryan Jason Allen Willert

Ryan Jason Allen Willert

By Meng Wei

It’s said that art is about creativity and initiating some change. For some, art is also a trade to ensure survival.

Ryan Jason Allen Willert started selling his art on the streets when he was 18. Over the past 20 years, he kept “grinding,” to use his word, to make a living as an Indigenous artist—going from only being able to draw stickmen to painting murals and creating landmarks.

His art marks his talent, his healing, and Indigenous teachings when he became a Knowledge Keeper. But it’s not often that a full-time commissioned artist gets to create art for himself, not even during the pandemic.

On the one hand, recognition brought him a consistent income, but on the other, it didn’t give him time to stop and have some space of his own.



Magpie | Image: Ryan Jason Allen Willert

nvrInd. Arts Foundation reached out to Ryan and offered him a one-month residency. Busy making money and fulfilling his obligations, Ryan was going to turn it down until a funding opportunity came and allowed some breathing room in his life.

“I was able to go in there, and I was able to put hours and hours into just one painting where I don’t get that luxury as a full-time artist,” Ryan says. “It was such a therapeutic feeling for me.”

He says he produced “the best pieces of art I’ve ever made” because for the first time in a long time, he painted in peace for no one else but himself on pieces that are not to be sold.

“I’d like to create a large body of work and come up with a plan for them,” Ryan says. “I’ve got all sorts of ideas for what I want to do.”

Ryan’s next goal is an exhibition at a gallery with his original works carrying his identity and the knowledge he inherited from the teachings that have been passed down for centuries.



Pronghorn | Image: Ryan Jason Allen Willert

Myke Buckingham, an artist and the residency director at nvrInd. says, “Ryan has been my mentor as I seek to better understand the ongoing process of reconciliation in Canada. I want to help Ryan to teach others much like he has taught me.”

Ryan is going to keep himself busy teaching and helping with ceremonies as an Elder in the making. At the same time he’ll continue as an artist to bridge Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

TOP PHOTO

“Photo shoot at the Dry Island buffalo jump. Wearing my buffalo robe, holding my Golden eagle fan and wearing my moccasins.

The residential schools plagued my people and family. My father went to residential school and he died from alcoholism. I feel as my protest in life for a better tomorrow is to heal from my trauma and pain. Believe me this is very hard and does not happen overnight.

My healing starts with sobriety and the involvement in the ceremonial ways of the Indigenous people. I am truly drawn towards Indigenous teachings that really go into depth on the direction on the path of healing. Step by step healing methods.

The world is a better place when you and your neighbors truly have unconditional love for themselves. Hard to have a healthy love for others when you don't love yourself 🍷”

-Ryan Jason Allen Willertto



Installation view of Claudia Chamorro's artwork | Photo: Han Sungpil

Stride Art Gallery

By Meng Wei

American Sociologist Lowell Juilliard Carr's study showed three stages of social change: a precipitating event or condition; adjustment-dislocation; and individual, interactive and cultural readjustments.

The format that each entity takes within those three stages can vary, and like many other groups during the pandemic, [Stride Art Gallery](#) is taking 2020 as a "fallow year" to go through their own necessary cycle to realize the mandate of equity, diversity and inclusion from within the organization.

Being a non-profit artist-run centre since 1985, Stride Art Gallery supports artists through exhibitions, workshops, public programs, publications and various other platforms to the fluctuating needs of the art community. With the pandemic pausing most of their programming in 2020, Stride took the time to look deeply into their organization and started to make changes from within.

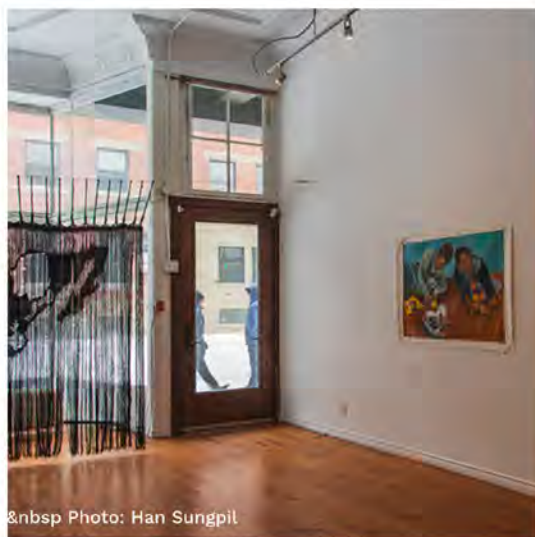


Photo: Han Sungpil

The current director Areum Kim said there have always been strong voices for a deeper conversation to "dismantle the legacy of a white institution," but they never had the chance to digest it properly until the COVID-19 pandemic.

"If we were doing business as usual, I don't think we would have had the capacity to change," she says. "That was a moment to actually dissect everything we do beyond the roster of artists that we present."

Stride onboarded Dan Cardinal McCartney and Eva Birhanu as new staff, and this current team signals a commitment to BIPOC representation within the institutional structure

"I have learned a lot from them," says Areum.

Stride is now holding conversations through the board to hear the intersectional needs of artists. The aim is to support the artists from each nuanced community with a better understanding and a culturally-specific strategy.

That conversation-style communication with the board has sent a welcoming message not only to artists but also other institutions to invite collaborations.

"We hear perspectives that really focus on Stride's role, not just as a place that supports artists through exhibitions and programming, but also as an established institution—how many resources we have and how we can share those resources with emerging artists and other equity-seeking organizations while we're doing the work of supporting artists."

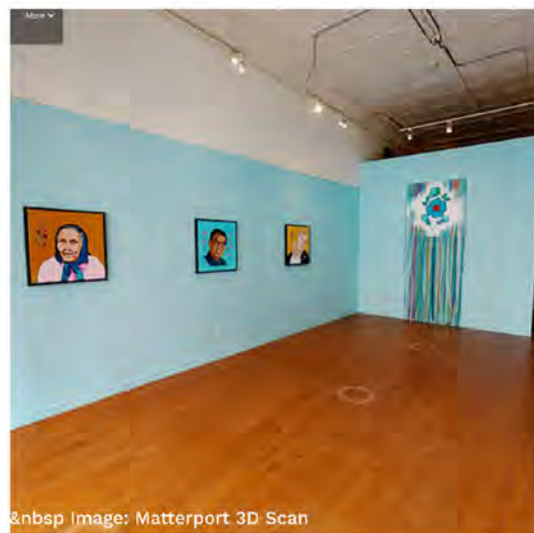


Image: Matterport 3D Scan

"We are realizing that to create a safe space, we need to go through a process that opens up sharing on a human scale without over professionalizing. It was really nice to be able to try out this new model."

Stride is calling to emerging artists to join the board, prioritizing new perspectives that can be brought into the conversation.

"We have a new board now, and we are still trying to fill some gaps," she says.



Trickster Theatre's Sweat Shop | Photo: Courtesy of Trickster Theatre

Trickster Theatre

By Meng Wei

While the parents and teachers were concerned over students' social experiences during COVID, Trickster Theatre swiftly developed their virtual theatre programs to bring back as much interaction and fun to the classroom as possible.

"Finding things to do on the web that are creative, exciting, interesting and entertaining is not that easy," says David Chantler, the founder and producing director of Trickster Theatre. "I think that our programs have been popular because they offer fun interactive online experiences."

Trickster Theatre is a non-profit organization that has been bringing the fun of theatre and education to schools in Alberta for over 40 years. With 30 artists in their Artist-in-Schools residency program pre-pandemic, this program of Trickster's was a major success.

Then there was COVID. With school closures and government budget cuts, Trickster had to make quick decisions to keep things afloat.

"In our residency program we pivoted to video, so instead of telling theatre-based stories, we switched to telling video-based stories."



Photo: Courtesy of Trickster Theatre

Within six months from the start of the pandemic, Trickster was able to make the pivot. Using greenscreens, cameras and microphones, the artists worked with the students to make all kinds of creative video stories remotely, with a few projects on-site as well.

Trickster also created a new online storytelling program. This became very popular and has been used in more than 250 classrooms around the province, with 21 artists now trained to deliver the program. Two other online curriculum based programs are also in development.

"If there is one highlight, it's all of those stories that got created between the artists and the students," David says. "The demand is there for teachers to try and find something that their students are going to enjoy that is based on virtual interaction."

The pivot to video in the residency program was a big challenge. The artists had to be trained in videography and video editing and the company had to outfit itself technically with all the necessary equipment.

"It was a huge task and we're very thankful that Calgary Arts Development and the other funders trusted we could pull it off—and we did—in the end we recovered about 60% of the season's residency bookings and created brand new programs as well," says David.

"We're just piggybacking on that acceptance of new technology, and creating new programs that use the technology, so that puts us in a position where we have to keep paying attention to what's being accepted.

"You know, the beauty of that is that when it goes back to us being able to be together, the best of those technologies will still be there. It's been a heck of a challenging year, but at the same point, we have been quite successful at adapting to COVID."



Photo: Courtesy of Trickster Theatre



Uganisha Cultural Fair vendor Celyn Roze and owner Ropa Mupambwa | Photo: Motif Photography

Woezo Africa Music & Dance Theatre

By Meng Wei

Woezo Africa, meaning welcome to the land of perfection, is a Black-led organization founded in 2006 by Wunmi Idowu, a local Albertan choreographer, performer, and producer.

With a multidisciplinary approach that uses music, dance, theatre, and storytelling, [Woezo Africa Music & Dance Theatre](#) aims to ignite an appreciation and love for African cultural values.

At its core, the performing arts organization contracts Black artists and creates opportunities for them to participate in an artistic process free from creative hierarchy. These artists can build artistic integrity and are encouraged to acknowledge their African, Caribbean, and Black roots—an opportunity they may not have otherwise had in the Western art scene.

Within 14 years, Woezo Africa has partnered with over 40 African, Caribbean, and Black communities and 180 organizations across Alberta and the globe. The organization explores who we are as Africans and people of African descent and reconnects the younger generation with their heritage through a wide range of family-friendly activities, workshops, and networking events.

“We are trailblazers; we are inspiring; we are unique. And what we are doing is something that has never been done before,” says Wunmi.



Photo: Motif Photography

Just to list a few of their programs: Woezo Africa’s Uganisha Professional Networking Mixer (UPNM) event connected professionals, entrepreneurs, university students and creatives from the African and Caribbean communities in Calgary; their annual Uganisha Short Story Writing Competition with their 2020 theme being “discovery,” yielded stories submitted from 17 Black writers.

The winner, Chinemerem Oluchi Agbasi, had her story translated into a stage play, *Girl Discovered*, and received a \$1,000 prize with her story serving as the foundation for the script for 2020 dance theatre production.

For Black History Month in February, they hosted the third iteration of *Uganisha: Explore. Connect.* dance production event at The GRAND. The event included a cultural fair that featured 17 black-owned businesses and four African and Caribbean community associations as vendors. Within three hours, the fair vendors sold over \$10,000 worth of merchandise.

People feel at home returning to their roots. Wunmi talks about an African girl adopted to Canada who attended their *Africa is not a country, it’s a continent* Arts and Crafts Workshop at the Calgary Public Library.

“She was so excited to learn about her culture and looked forward to seeing everyone at the workshop because they looked like her, they had the same hair texture as hers and the same melanin-rich skin like her.”

In addition to the events mentioned above, the inaugural Woezo Africa Cultural Festival (WACF), themed “Emerge from the Roots,” hosted 14 virtual events for the 2020 Alberta Culture Days and the National Culture Days, including a digitized version of *Uganisha*, panel discussions, traditional African drum and dance performances, visual arts activities, spoken word performances and various online workshops all live streamed from the homes attracting over 6,000 viewers.



Photo: Danielle Nicol

“We saw tremendous results in the impact of our events to the community at large,” says Wunmi. “We strive to present thought-provoking art to empower our audiences and help establish our artistic practice in Calgary.”

The festival paid over 50 local artists, and Idowu says it was the first time that six of the Black artists that performed got paid.

Being a social enterprise, not a non-for-profit arts organization, Woezo Africa’s empowering representation has garnered support from public dollars through Calgary Arts Development’s ArtShare program and support from other funding sources such as local organizations and businesses after many years of pushback from oppressive systems.

“Let’s find other ways to get funding to do what we need to do and be authentic to what we stand for. What we have done has connected us with people globally during the pandemic,” Wunmi says.

In 2020, support came from a variety of sources, such as StoryBook Theatre and Inside Out Theatre who provided a safe rehearsal and venue space and several Black owned businesses who donated over \$1800 worth of sponsorship funds for the Woezo Africa Cultural Festival. Such support makes events like the festival possible as we can acquire the resources that support paying artists, renting venues, and streaming our programming online.

Wunmi’s accolades in the arts industry span winning the 24th Annual Immigrants of Distinction Award and the Canada Vendors Entrepreneur Award in 2020, both of which were for the category of Arts and Culture. She also won an Afro-Canadian (AC) Community Leader of the Year Award in 2020. Her recent achievements include nominations for the 2021 Doug and Lois Mitchell Outstanding Calgary Artist Award in addition to Avenue Calgary’s 2021 Top 40 Under 40 list.

Moving on to 2021, Wunmi says everything will continue online. New programs like the Black Art Development Program, Roots to Branches animation project and the second edition of the Woezo Africa Cultural Festival will focus on promoting equity so we can amplify the stories of the Black communities in Calgary.

“Through our presence, our community will continue to feel empowered in their cultural identities,” she says.



Wordfest

By Meng Wei

Since its launch in 1996, Wordfest has grown from an annual celebration to an organization that connects the minds of great authors with 26,000 Calgarians all year round.

In 2020, all in-person events were cancelled after March 13, but Wordfest doubled their reach through online programs to reach 37,000 audience members with 57 online and 16 live stream shows—all packed with the insights of those incredible thinkers and conversations that go beyond the words on the pages.

“The only way to succeed was to just over-deliver, so we made a decision right away that we would not treat this as a stop gap,” says Shelley Youngblut, Wordfest’s CEO and Creative Ringleader.

The online programs diversified their already dynamic programming even more.

In June, Wordfest put on the first uniquely-theirs Jerry Lewis type telethon—the Eugene-a-Thon, featuring Calgary’s own Eugene Stickland—with artists and performances across disciplines for six hours live online. The event raised \$5,000 for their Youth Program, matched up to 50% through Shaw Birdies for Kids.



In addition, as a virtual celebration of the organization’s 25th anniversary called 25@25, Wordfest connected 25 of Canada’s leading fiction writers with audiences across the globe with an intimacy that would have been impossible to achieve at an in-person large-scale event.

“We believe that we can put on a good show online that doesn’t replace the live experience but complements it,” Youngblut says. “Knowing we can get access to writers we could never bring to Calgary, we now have a format that we can replicate.”

After experimenting with platforms like Zoom, OBS, and finally landing on vMix, Wordfest’s technical expertise is a leader in the publishing industry and enabled the organization to launch an on demand channel called Imagine On Air in June 2021. Youngblut confirms that Wordfest will be moving into 2022 with a hybrid programming model.

“Whatever we can do better live, we will do live. Whatever we can do better online, we’ll do online,” she says.

Whether it be the global reach or the consistent delivery of amazing shows, Youngblut believes that the investments Wordfest is making in technology and creativity are putting Calgary on the map.

“We are creating an organization that could attract and retain really interesting Calgarians,” she says. “If we want to present ourselves as being innovative, if we want to present ourselves to the world as a place to move a family to—and to be citizens that are engaged in global conversations—we want organizations like Wordfest to play a part in creating a dynamic city.”



Partners

2020 PROGRAM PARTNERS

Thank you to all of our sponsors and partners for their generous support.

CALGARY POET LAUREATE



CULTURAL LEADERS LEGACY ARTIST AWARDS



PROJECT GRANT PROGRAM, INDIVIDUALS AND COLLECTIVES



SPACEFINDER





SUITE #501, 237 8TH AVE. SE
CALGARY AB T2G 5C3
403.264.5330

CALGARYARTSDEVELOPMENT.COM