

Why did Calgary Arts Development take on the stewardship of the public art program?

In 2020 the City of Calgary, as directed by Council, put out a request for proposals (RFP) for a third-party operator of the public art program. Calgary Arts Development Authority was selected as the successful proponent to run the commissioning arm (new project development) of the program on March 20, 2021. The work we do at Calgary Arts Development is in support of the arts and artists and for the benefit of Calgarians. The public art program aligns with our mandate to disburse municipal funds in support of the arts, our belief in the power of the arts and artists to shape the city of the future, to connect us to our stories and identities, and to see Calgary's creative economy thrive.

Why is public art important?

Public art is one of the most approachable forms of art; it exists in common space, it's available to everyone; and it is free to access. It makes our city a vibrant and interesting place to live; it generates conversation, creates points of interest, connects us to this place and to each other, supports our economy, and is part of Calgary's identity. It is a result of the incredible creativity and ingenuity of artists and the many people and industries they collaborate with. Public art can help us to better know and understand our city; the times we live in, our stories, and what is important to us. It can enliven our urban environment, increase livability and safety, and allow us to experience something extraordinary in the midst of our everyday lives.

What is CADA's involvement in the existing public art collection?

Calgary Arts Development is the commissioning arm of the public art program and is responsible for the creation of new artworks. The City of Calgary owns and stewards the Municipal Art Collection on behalf of Calgarians, and maintains, conserves, and activates over 1,300 existing artworks through exhibits, educational activities, loans, and other initiatives. Calgary Arts Development does not collect, or own artworks created, accept donations of public art, or re-site existing artworks created by other entities. Artworks commissioned by us that are destined for the Municipal Art Collection are transferred to the City upon completion. We share stories, celebrate, and create educational programming and conversation around works of art we commission in collaboration with artists, and the stories of artworks in the Municipal Art Collection.

What is considered public art today and what are the possibilities?

What we often think of when we say the words "public art" is large scale iconic sculptures. However, public art has evolved and includes so much more. At its core, public art is working with an artist and a community to realize ideas in public space. The resulting artwork can be

interactive; it can make use of digital technology; it can be temporary; it can be functional; it can be social; it can be a living artwork such as a garden — the possibilities are endless. These are exciting times for public art in our city. Previously, public art in our city was governed by restrictive policies that mandated it be physically connected to the infrastructure project that funded it. Now we have the flexibility to determine whether it makes sense to connect public art to infrastructure, or choose another location for the artwork where people gather. The entire city is now the canvas, and it will be interesting to see how artists respond to different locations, work with communities, and what they create together.

What does “Percent for Art” mean and how much is it?

“Percent for Art” programs are a standard tool used to support the creation of public art in cities across North America since the 1950’s. The City of Calgary’s public art policy allows for up to one percent of the budget of eligible capital projects (to a maximum threshold), to be directed towards public art. This means that a small percentage of money from projects and upgrades the City is already undertaking such as roads, leisure centers, and other projects, continues to be invested in ways to make our city more livable and enjoyable. This model is responsive to upturns and downturns in the economy as well. Calgary Arts Development’s work is guided by the City’s public art policy, and we receive funds through the percent for art mechanism, in order to deliver public art investments on behalf of Calgarians.

How does public art support our local economy?

An investment in public art provides work for artists, and supports the wider creative industries and the many collaborators that make public art possible. This includes: fabricators, designers, architects, engineers, suppliers, curators, installers, technologists, construction workers, many of whom live right here in Calgary. Public art contributes to tourism and encourages people to travel to Calgary as a dynamic and vibrant place to visit. It attracts people to live and work here, and make this their home.

How can we see more local artists making public art?

Local artists continue to be eligible to apply for all public art commissions. We feel it is important to see local artists thrive and grow their practice so they can compete internationally. Supporting the local creative economy in Calgary is what we do.

Calgary Arts Development is obligated to observe government trade agreements that stipulate public dollar contracts over certain thresholds must be open to international markets. What this means for public art is that larger commissions are more competitive and see applications from around the world. This also means that local artists can apply for international commissions, and we see the talent of Calgary artists spread across the globe. Often when an artist is commissioned for a public art project local knowledge and local expertise from people working in the creative industries here in Calgary is employed, regardless of where the artist is based.

In 2020 the City of Calgary conducted extensive engagement on the future of the public art program. Calgarians shared that they want a varied and dynamic program which includes local and international artists, and projects of different types and scale. We are committed to providing a program that addresses these needs, and will encourage opportunities for mutual exchange, learning and mentorship, between international and local artists to increase the skills, upward mobility, and networks of both. You can read the 2020 Public Art Program Community Engagement Report [here](#).

How will you know where public art should go?

There are many needs in our city, and many ways public art can help to address them including creating more livable and safer neighbourhoods. We work closely with the City of Calgary to determine needs and identify gaps, discuss where capital investments are happening, where they are not, and where opportunities may exist for public art, and engage directly with communities along the way to learn their needs and where they would like to see public art in their city.

Public art seems controversial. Will Calgary Arts Development be able to prevent controversy?

Public art exists in collective space and everyone brings different histories, experiences, ideas, and responses to it. It is often designed to generate dialogue and engagement; and can serve the purpose of initiating important conversations that we need to have as a community. It can uplift those histories and stories that have been forgotten, and shed light on underlying issues and concerns. Calgary Arts Development will engage in productive conversations about public art and the important dialogues that stems from it.

How will Calgary Arts Development deliver on a public art program for the city?

Calgary Arts Development is a smaller and more nimble organization than the City of Calgary. We are also directly connected to the arts community and to artists. We have a strong team of incredible staff who are each artists in their own way, and with experience delivering public art projects around the world. We are connected to artists and the arts community in the work that we do everyday as the City's designated arts authority.

What will be different in the future?

We know there were issues with the public art program in the past, and we are working to learn from them. There were also successes of the previous program that we are building upon.

Public Art – Frequently Asked Questions



We are committed to communicating and engaging with communities throughout the public art process, and particularly with Indigenous partners and artists to be sure we are building good relationships and working in culturally respectful ways.

How can I get involved?

Public art decisions are made through a juried process. If you are interested in being part of a selection committee, you can find an application form on our website [here](#). Our selection committees consist of local artists, arts industry professionals, and community members. Please be aware that due to volume of interest and the specific needs of a project, we are not able to invite every potential assessor to be on a committee.

What are you doing now and where can I learn more?

There are several projects and programs underway that you can learn more about on our website.

[Sign up for our newsletter](#) to stay on top of public art news and opportunities. And check back to our website for updates as they become available.