



*CAS Photos by Philip Maglieri

**Arts Together:
 Charting a National Vision
 for Engagement and Action**

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2026 CAS Steering Committee:
From left to right, first row - Simon Mallett, Chris Lorway, Mark Wold,
Paul Larocque, David Maggs, Kondwani Mwase, Marianne Perron.
Second row - John G. Hampton, Robert J. Foster, C.M., Carole Beaulieu
and Aubrey Reeves. Not pictured - Margaret E. Allan, Jean-François Bélisle,
Monica Esteves, Lori Marchand, Alisa Palmer and Mark Williams.

*Photos by Philip Maglieri

2026 Canadian Arts Summit Overview

The Canadian Arts Summit is an annual national conference bringing together artistic directors, executive directors, and board chairs from Canada's largest arts institutions to connect, exchange ideas, and advance the future of the arts in Canada.

The 2026 Summit welcomed more than 150 delegates from across the country to the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity from April 9–11, 2026. Among the delegation were ten participants from Business / Arts' Executive Leadership Program, which supports the next generation of sector leadership through mentorship and participation in Summit programming.

ART+PUBLIC UnLtd returned to lead programming in 2026, with a creative approach that encouraged active engagement from delegates throughout the Summit.

Under the theme *Arts Together: Charting a National Vision for Engagement and Action*, delegates participated in three peer-to-peer sessions, a keynote address, four panels, a workshop, and a series of artistic experiences. Conversations focused on pressing opportunities and challenges facing the arts sector, including supporting artists, responding to digital technologies and AI, and strengthening the infrastructure and investment needed to sustain Canada's creative future.

This report aims to communicate the main takeaways and highlights from the Summit to enable further discussion and inform future programming.



2026-2027 Executive Leadership Program Cohort with Robert J. Foster, C.M.
From left to right, Abby Vincent, Kevin Tanner, Meghan Meisters,
Estelle Shook, Dr. Hayley Andrew, Catherine Doyle, Karen Lalicon,
Joelle Peters, Tak Pham and Keltie Forsyth.



There is Power in Partnership

The Canadian Arts Summit continues to be a collective effort.
Thank you to all of the partners and supporters for making this gathering possible.

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Panel Discussion Partners



Executive Leadership Supporting Partner



Supporting Partners





2026 Steering Committee

The Canadian Arts Summit Steering Committee establishes and oversees the vision, mission, values, programming direction and long-term strategic priorities of the Summit.



Carole Beaulieu
Chair, Board of Trustees,
Canadian Museum of History
& Canadian War Museum
Committee Co-chair



John G. Hampton
Executive Director & CEO,
The MacKenzie Art Gallery
Committee Co-chair



Margaret E. Allan, ICD.D
Chair,
The Rooms
Committee Member



Jean-François Bélisle
Director & CEO,
The National Gallery of Canada
Committee Member



Monica Esteves
Executive Director,
Canadian Stage Company
Committee Member



Robert J. Foster, C.M.
Board Chair,
Business / Arts
Committee Member



Paul Larocque
President & CEO,
Arts Umbrella
Committee Member



Chris Lorway
President & CEO,
Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity
Committee Member



David Maggs
Arts and Society Fellow,
Metcalf Foundation
Committee Member



Simon Mallett
Executive Director,
Rozsa Foundation
Committee Member



Lori Marchand
Managing Director, Indigenous Theatre,
National Arts Centre
Committee Member



Kondwani Mwase
Executive Director,
Audience Engagement,
National Arts Centre
Committee Member



Alisa Palmer
Artistic Producer,
Vita Brevis Arts
Honorary
Committee Member



Marianne Perron
Chief Artistic Officer,
Orchestre symphonique de Montréal
Committee Member



Aubrey Reeves
President & CEO,
Business / Arts
Committee Member



Mark Williams
Chief Executive Officer,
Toronto Symphony Orchestra
Committee Member



Mark Wold
Executive Director, Leadership,
Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity
Committee Member



A Message from the Co-Chairs

Under this year’s theme, *Arts Together / Unis pour les arts*, more than 150 leaders from Canada’s arts and culture sector came together in a moment defined by both complexity and opportunity. As we considered the path forward, the conversations reinforced how much depends on our ability to work together, and on keeping our communities at the heart of that work.

This year’s gathering enabled conversations about centring the arts and artists in our communities, responding to the impacts of digital technologies and AI, and strengthening the infrastructure and supports needed to sustain a thriving cultural sector. We are deeply grateful to our partners, speakers, panellists, facilitators, and delegates for the care, insight, and generosity they brought to these conversations.

Importantly, the learning and connections we built will be carried back into our organizations, continuing to shape our work and the communities we serve. While our term as co-chairs comes to a close, we look forward to the continued momentum of the Summit and to advancing the shared goals it helps move forward across the sector.

With appreciation,

Carole Beaulieu

Chair, Board of Trustees
Canadian Museum of History
& Canadian War Museum
Committee Co-chair

John G. Hampton

Executive Director & CEO
The MacKenzie Art Gallery
Committee Co-chair



Reflections from the 2026 Canadian Arts Summit

Rapporteur's Reflections

Resuming her role as *Rapporteur* for the 2026 Summit, **Vanessa Porteous** captured key themes, ideas, and reflections from the three-day gathering. Her observations helped identify emerging opportunities, recurring tensions, and common priorities that surfaced throughout both formal programming and peer conversations. [View the Rapport here.](#)



“Yesterday around a table, John Hampton shared a story about the time someone from a community in crisis came to them and said, yes, we are receiving all the help, mental health, social supports, and so on. But our people are still dying. And it’s because they have no reason to live. We need you, they said, we need culture. We need the arts. The arts provide a reason to live.”

- Vanessa Porteous

A Collective Vision for Arts and Culture

Throughout the Summit, delegates participated in three peer-to-peer sessions. Designed as closed-door conversations, these sessions brought participants together in different groupings — first by role, then by organization size, and later by role again — creating space for open discussion around shared challenges, priorities, and opportunities.

Centered on imagining a long-term vision for arts and culture in Canada, the 2026 peer-to-peer sessions led participants toward a shared aspiration:

By 2035, all communities across Canada will thrive because the arts and artists are embedded in daily life, and everyone participates in artistic experiences, wherever they are.





We will know we are succeeding when:

- Barriers to arts participation no longer exist and artistic spaces are respected sites of belonging, where different lived experiences are honoured and upheld.
- All children have access to great art; arts education and coaching are ubiquitous; and art is a recognized daily practice for all.
- Artists are thriving sustainably — both inside and outside the traditional granting system — with strong leadership, succession, and a healthy ecosystem that empowers transition.
- Investment in the arts is growing; the arts are advocated for by non-arts sectors; and proactive support is everywhere.
- Canadian arts and artists are recognized internationally as exemplars, and the arts are celebrated as the most inspiring renewable resource.

This vision will be achieved through close collaboration among funders, artistic leaders, and the sector — utilizing co-design strategies that build a resilient and sustainable arts ecosystem.

Summit Communiqué

Board chairs from across the delegation assembled a Summit Communiqué, calling for strategic investment and partnership across the arts and culture sector. [View the Communiqué here.](#)



“Canada must act now to strengthen its arts and culture sector as a cornerstone of civic engagement, social cohesion, national identity, sovereignty, resilience, and global influence.”





Action Wall

Over the course of the Summit, delegates were encouraged to add their thoughts and reflections to an 'action wall', which also showcased material from the peer-to-peer exercises. The wall highlighted five pillars: what we're seeing; what we need; what we're asking for; what we'll do; and what is missing.

Overall, the action wall reflected delegates' joy in collaboration, as well as frustration with fragmentation, short-termism, and invisibility within the arts. There was a strong desire for unity, long-term thinking, and recognition of the arts as essential civic infrastructure, with a hopeful energy for putting artists at the centre of conversation and action.

Key Signals and Opportunities

Arts and culture are already driving civic growth through downtown revitalization, public art, free community events, open rehearsals, and third spaces. Strong examples include Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg (Nuit Blanche), and Ottawa. Delegates noted high energy and "amazing collaboration," but highlighted pressures such as over-saturation of organizations, scarcity mindsets, and competition for public attention.

Major Barriers and Infrastructure Gaps

- Staff and organizational capacity (most frequently cited)
- Lack of affordable, flexible production, rehearsal, storage, and mid-size presentation spaces
- Parking, accessibility, and transportation issues (especially outside downtown cores)
- Red tape, short-term funding cycles, and siloed government departments
- Governance challenges and difficulty communicating the value of the arts to municipalities and other sectors

Critical Questions and Missing Conversations

- Succession planning and organizational life cycles
- Unified advocacy and long-term (20+ year) vision
- Genuine cross-sector partnerships
- Better measurement of intrinsic/human impact alongside economic value
- Cultural infrastructure along transit corridors and in suburbs

Artist Practices as Inspiration

Delegates emphasized human-centric, transformational, and joy-focused practices. Artists can lead by modelling vulnerability, collaboration, collective action, and excellence defined by human impact rather than marketability.



Action Wall Core Asks and Actions

1. Unified advocacy statement speaking to the strength of the arts and culture sector.
2. Multi-year unrestricted operating funding with streamlined reporting.
3. Cultural moonshot – bold, long-term policy comparable to Quebec or South Korea.
4. Cross-sector integration: Treat the arts as essential civic infrastructure (land trusts, transit-linked spaces, blended funding).
5. Emerging funding models: Tax-credit accelerators, endowments, community bonds, social finance, and philanthropic legacy gifts.
6. Reposition arts centrally: Build champions, reduce silos, and centre artists in planning and consultation.





Program Overview with Reflections

Day 1 - Thursday, April 9th, 2026

The following section gives an overview of the 2026 Canadian Arts Summit program, with high level synthesis of the formal sessions.

Opening Remarks

The Summit opened with a welcome from **Chris Lorway, CEO of the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity**, and **Knowledge Keeper Daryl Kootenay**, who grounded the gathering in place. Their remarks emphasized the value of Indigenous knowledge systems, and the importance of approaching learning with intention, reciprocity, and respect.



Chris Lorway
CEO, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity

Daryl Kootenay
Knowledge Keeper

Aubrey Reeves, President and CEO of Business / Arts, and Summit Co-Chairs **Carole Beaulieu** and **John G. Hampton** opened by reinforcing the importance of gathering as a sector and the role of arts leadership in shaping Canada's cultural future.



Aubrey Reeves
President and CEO, Business / Arts

John G. Hampton
Executive Director and CEO,
The MacKenzie Art Gallery

Carole Beaulieu
Chair, Board of Trustees,
Canadian Museum of History
and Canadian War Museum

Building on the momentum of CAS 2025, the co-chairs noted that urgency around national sovereignty and cultural identity remains vital. They emphasized the shared responsibility of arts institutions and leadership to create space for artists to thrive, telling both joyful and difficult stories. Acknowledging the isolation that leadership can bring, they framed the Summit as an opportunity for mutual support, exchange, and collective action.



Keynote Address by Margaret Atwood

In her keynote address, *The Arts in Interesting Times*, **Margaret Atwood** offered a humorous yet critical look at the state of the arts in Canada. While acknowledging the sector’s significant growth over recent decades, she noted that many artists continue to face challenges related to sustainability, visibility, and access to resources.

Atwood identified two major tensions shaping the current cultural landscape: increasing competition for limited funding and growing debates around curation, artistic freedom, and who determines cultural value. She also reflected on the vulnerability of writers within the cultural economy, noting that literary work is often undervalued despite its foundational role in cultural development.

At the same time, Atwood pointed to signs of optimism, including renewed interest in Canadian identity, growing audiences for independent cultural work, and the continued adaptability of artists working within rapidly changing environments. A central message was that while institutions help support culture, artists themselves remain the driving force behind cultural evolution and renewal.



“Let the art happen. Let it be engaging. Let it be accomplished in its craft. Let the audience see it and like it or hate it—opinions will vary.”

- Margaret Atwood

Panel Discussion - The Status of the Artist: AI and Artistic Agency



Philippe Pasquier

Katrina Ingram

Jutta Treviranus

Etienne Grenier



Panel Discussion - The Status of the Artist: AI and Artistic Agency

This panel focused on how creative production intersects with income, rights, recognition, and sustainability in an era increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence.

- **Moderator Philippe Pasquier, Director of the Metacreation Lab for Creative AI, Simon Fraser University**, framed AI as the latest stage in the long co-evolution of humans and tools, while cautioning that its current trajectory is being shaped without sufficient public oversight or democratic participation.
- **Katrina Ingram, Founder and CEO of Ethically Aligned AI**, emphasized the concentration of power among a small number of corporations, raising concerns about copyright, environmental costs, and the exploitation of invisible labour that supports AI systems.
- **Jutta Treviranus, Director of the Inclusive Design Research Centre at OCAD University**, challenged the underlying logic of AI systems built on statistical averages, arguing they systematically exclude marginalized perspectives. She stressed that innovation and cultural progress emerge from the periphery, not the centre.
- **Etienne Grenier, an artist-researcher**, focused on labour and authorship. He noted that many cultural workers today are seeking agency, governance, and shared control over these technologies rather than rejecting them outright.



“It is not too late to push back against the dominant narrative, mostly pushed by the American corporate agenda, and the onslaught of tools presented to us as inevitable, generic, omnipotent. In fact, it is not too late to ask the question: what AI do we want if we want one?”

- Philippe Pasquier

The subsequent discussion identified some key themes:

1. Accessibility and literacy: Low levels of public AI literacy, combined with unresolved ethical questions surrounding data use and consent, remain significant barriers to meaningful participation and informed policymaking.

2. Corporate versus public infrastructure: While dominant AI systems are largely controlled by private corporations, panelists pointed to the emergence of smaller-scale, community-based, and publicly oriented AI infrastructures as promising alternatives capable of supporting more equitable cultural ecosystems.

3. Cultural production and value: The discussion highlighted how AI is reshaping not only the creation of art, but also its circulation, consumption, and valuation, raising concerns about cultural homogenization and the erosion of diverse creative voices.

The panel concluded that the future of AI in the cultural sector is not predetermined. Through stronger public literacy, proactive regulation, and the active involvement of artists and cultural organizations, participants emphasized that AI can still be shaped in ways that support equity, creativity, and the long-term sustainability of cultural work.

Opening Reception and Artistic Programming at the Walter Philips Gallery

In addition to a welcome reception, delegates were invited to attend an after-hours viewing of *Cheryl L'Hirondelle: where the voice touches* (((acts, utterances, transmissions for freedom))), co-curated by Tarah Hogue and Jacqueline Bell.





Day 2 - Friday, April 10th, 2026

Panel Discussion - Resourcing for Creativity Part 1: Building the Future

The day began with the first of a two-part panel on Resourcing for Creativity. Focused on "Building the Future," sector leaders from Calgary and Vancouver shared how their ambitious arts facility projects centre growth, long-term sustainability, and community impact.

- **Moderator Al Chapman, Executive Director of Arts Habitat Edmonton,** guided a discussion on how cultural infrastructure can serve as essential civic anchors.
- **Brian McBay, Executive Director of 221A,** traced 221A's evolution from a student initiative into one of B.C.'s leading non-profit cultural space operators, managing affordable studios, housing, and cultural spaces for artists. He emphasized leveraging shared resources and municipal partnerships to secure property for public benefit, while noting the ongoing struggle to protect arts spaces from urban displacement.
- **Melanie Kjorlien, President and CEO, at Glenbow,** detailed their major renovation focused on modernization and radical accessibility. By introducing free admission and open, visible designs, the museum aims to deepen its community relevance and better showcase diverse programming.
- **Jennifer Cecconi, Vice President of Advancement, Werklund Centre,** described the largest arts infrastructure project in Canada: a massive expansion of Calgary's performing arts hub. The project prioritizes Indigenous collaboration and civic engagement to modernize aging facilities and integrate indoor-outdoor cultural experiences.
- **David Leinster, Chief Executive Officer, Contemporary Calgary,** shared the transformation of a former planetarium into a contemporary art institution. This redevelopment relied on public consultation and multi-organization partnerships to create a community-centered hub that blends architectural history with modern artistic practice.



*"When we come together and work together,
we create capacity and opportunity."*

- David Leinster

The subsequent discussion identified some key themes:

- 1. Accessibility and representation:** The discussion concluded that modern cultural spaces must go beyond physical design to prioritize inclusion. By shifting toward flexible, community-informed programming, these institutions act as vital infrastructure that fosters identity and belonging within rapidly evolving urban landscapes.
- 2. Partnership and abundance:** A central theme of the session was the power of reciprocal partnership. Success was not viewed as a zero-sum competition for limited resources, but as a result of an "abundance mindset" — the belief that collaborative investment in an organization's success actually grows the overall capacity, relevance, and value of the entire sector.

These case studies demonstrated that the future of cultural infrastructure lies in a shift from competition to collective action. By embracing radical partnerships and prioritizing accessibility and representation, these leaders proved that the sector is strongest when it operates as a unified ecosystem. This mindset ensures that arts spaces are more than just physical structures; they are resilient, inclusive landscapes where the success of one institution — and the authentic reflection of the community within it — paves the way for the prosperity of all.



Al Chapman

Brian McBay

Melanie Kjorlien

Jennifer Cecconi

Presentation from TRG ARTS

Jill Robinson, CEO, TRG Arts, presented the Canadian Arts and Culture Benchmark, reporting a three-year growth trend driven by strategic pricing and subscription renewals — though admissions, revenues, and customer retention remain below pre-pandemic levels. Philanthropy has stabilized through a broader base of smaller donors. Robinson welcomed more organizations to participate in the benchmark to strengthen collective strategic planning.

Facilitated Workshops

- **Workshop with TRG Arts - Jill Robinson, CEO, and Andrew Cotler, Client Development Executive**, shared insights from the Canadian Arts & Culture Consumer Benchmark, exploring new audience development, ticketing and visitation models, and shifts in philanthropy. Discussion centred on programming and curatorial decision-making, and how artistic vision connects to long-term financial planning.
- **Workshop with Paul Brain** - Presented in partnership with **National accessArts Centre**, participants explored how disability-led approaches to filmmaking challenge existing cultural structures and advance more authentic, community-responsive representation.
- **Workshop with Carla Salter** - Presented in partnership with **National accessArts Centre**, participants examined how art rooted in disability and mental health experience can foster cultural healing and deepen community conversations about inclusion.
- **Workshop for the Executive Leadership Program** - Presented in partnership with the **Metcalf Foundation**, this workshop explored mindsets, skills, and strategies needed for complex times.



Virtual Tour - The Cardiff Miller Art Warehouse



Internationally celebrated Canadian artists **Janet Cardiff** and **George Bures Miller** gave a virtual tour of the *Cardiff Miller Art Warehouse*, a former furniture store in Enderby, B.C., they have transformed into a 1,800-square-foot museum featuring ten large-scale installations. They described their aim to move audiences emotionally through their work, often using sound and immersive environments to bypass intellect and create deep personal reactions.

They also reflected on their identity as Canadian artists, describing how Canada's perspective outside dominant American cultural influence shaped their work and artistic outlook. The conversation explored how living and working in a rural community like Enderby allowed them to create ambitious projects more affordably while also connecting local audiences to experimental art they might not otherwise encounter.



“As an artist, that's our role: to try and somehow get beyond the intellect and get inside of — and move — people.”

- Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller

Presentation from PAA Advisory | Conseils

Sean Casey, Partner, PAA Advisory, described a shift in Canadian politics toward a more volatile, security-focused landscape. He noted that the sector must frame culture as a strategic asset. He urged leaders to connect the arts to broader national priorities — such as sovereignty, economic value, social cohesion, and combating disinformation — to demonstrate their essential role in reinforcing Canadian identity and trust in institutions.



Panel Discussion - Resourcing for Creativity, Part 2: Funding the Future

This panel brought together funders, policymakers, and sector leaders to explore how strategic partnerships between philanthropy, business, and government can deliver sustainable investment and secure a vibrant cultural future.

- **Moderator Al Chapman, Executive Director of Arts Habitat Edmonton**, guided a discussion on resilient capital pathways amid declining charitable giving, corporate sponsor withdrawals, and lagging philanthropy.
- **Juniper Lociento, CEO of the National Arts Centre Foundation**, framed fundraising as a community-building force, highlighting a challenging landscape: declining charitable giving, an aging donor base, and growing inequality between large and small organizations. She emphasized diversifying donors, leading with impact and storytelling, and investing properly in fundraising infrastructure.
- **Mark Harrison, Founder of MH3 Collective**, made the case for corporate sponsorship as a structured commercial opportunity, outlining a "full stack" model built on equity, activation, storytelling, and measurable results. He argued that while many businesses want to invest in culture, a lack of shared language limits uptake.
- **Aengus Finnan, Cultural Attaché at the Embassy of Ireland**, presented Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts—a government programme providing a guaranteed weekly income to 2,000 artists, now permanent. The pilot demonstrated reduced financial stress, increased creative output, and measurable sector-wide benefits, framing arts funding as a long-term investment in cultural identity and social cohesion.

The subsequent discussion identified key themes:

1. **Values-Based Realignment:** Shifting from transactional fundraising toward shared values, diversified revenue, and a common language that aligns organizational goals with donors, sponsors, and community.
2. **Relationship-Driven Engagement:** Prioritizing storytelling and narrative-driven connections over rigid sponsorship categories to better engage audiences and unlock underused resources.
3. **Culture as a National Priority:** Framing arts funding as a strategic investment in national identity, social cohesion, and an antidote to isolationism.



Al Chapman

Juniper Locilento

Mark Harrison

Aengus Finnan

Open Rehearsal of Performance Piece, *I Dream in Wampum*

Delegates were invited to attend an open rehearsal of *I Dream in Wampum*, featuring a talk by artistic director and choreographer **Barbara Kanerattoni Diabo** of A'no:wara Dance Theatre. Diabo is the Clifford E. Lee Choreographer in Residence at Banff Centre.

Diabo's performance invited the audience to enter into a world of Indigenous Futurism. This is a story inspired by Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) teachings, allowing us to imagine worlds where colonialism never happened. We follow Kahente, an Indigenous youth, on his journey to the stars. After finding seven wampum belts from the constellation we call the Seven Dancers (Tsata Teienonniakhwa), he starts his journey to each of these worlds to discover his ancestors and star-beings. If successful, this path can lead him to Sky World (Karonhiakehson Ohontsa), the place of his people's origins, and bring him a greater understanding of his past, present, and future. *I Dream in Wampum* is a dynamic, powerful science-fiction dance journey where Indigenous people show a future of strength and celebration.



Photo by Elia Barbotin.
Courtesy of Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.



Day 3 - Saturday, April 11th, 2026

Canada Council Director and CEO, **Michelle Chawla** and **Lise Ann Johnson**, Director General of Arts Granting Programs, opened the third day with a breakfast talk-back, discussing how the Council is navigating federal austerity while continuing to invest in and strengthen the arts sector. They outlined a new five-year strategic plan focused on sector resilience, audience connection, and expanding national and international impact, with touring positioned as a key driver of cultural exchange. The discussion addressed sector priorities including financial precarity, capacity-building, improved data tools, and stronger support for touring, partnerships, and philanthropy.



Michelle Chawla Lise Ann Johnson

Performance by Buffalo Boy's Moonshot

Picking up on the themes of the Summit, **Adrian Stimson** gave a performance as his alter ego Buffalo Boy, giving an address to the audience inspired by JFK's "We choose to go to the Moon" speech. This was accompanied by a video of Buffalo Boy as they move through time and space, setting the tone for the final panel with a catalyzing moonshot vision of their own.



“Boldly going where no one has gone before, charting a path where art rules the world! We choose this moonshot now, not because we are soft, but because we are hard, because that shot will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.”

- Buffalo Boy



Panel Discussion - Future Horizons: A National Vision for the Arts

Panelists explored what it takes to align around a national cultural mission — one that inspires cross-sector collaboration, fuels investment, and ensures that creativity and cultural expression are at the heart of Canada’s shared future.

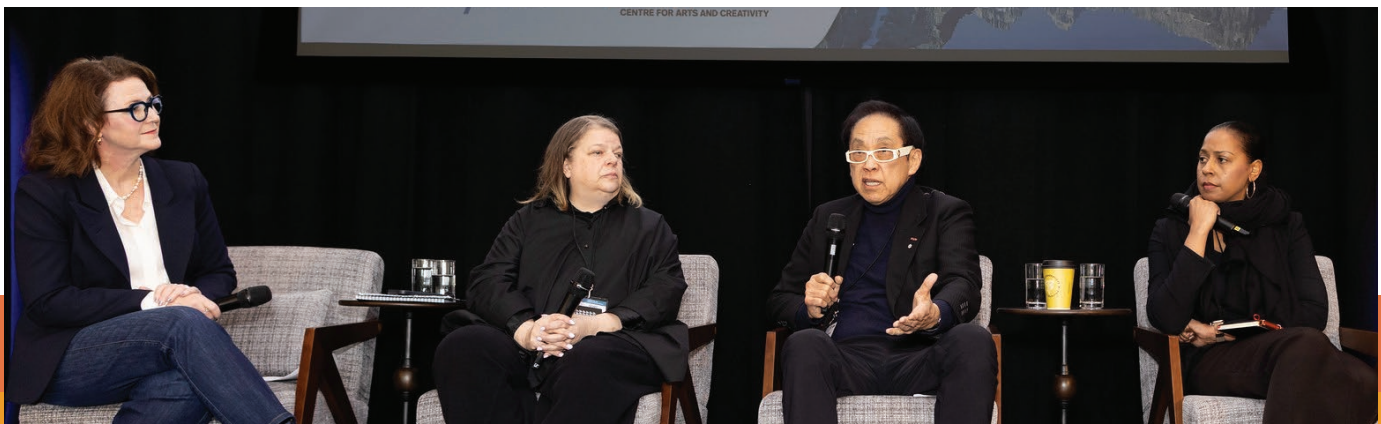
- **Moderator Annabelle Cloutier, President and CEO of the National Arts Centre**, opened the discussion on this period of Canadian identity formation and uncertainty, where arts and culture are becoming central to questions of national cohesion.
- **Kitty Scott, Strategic Director of Shorefast and Fogo Island Arts**, emphasized thinking ambitiously and globally, drawing on experiences like curating large-scale international exhibitions to show how Canadian artists can operate on a world stage. She highlighted pluralism as a defining strength, suggesting that Canadian identity is less about uniformity and more about sustaining difference.
- **Jesse Wente, Storyteller**, pushed the conversation toward structural critique and concrete solutions. He argued that risk aversion in cultural institutions is tied to broader systems like capitalism and colonial frameworks, and that real change requires collective action rather than incremental reform. He also stressed that culture is embodied in people — not institutions — and pointed to Indigenous cultural survival as evidence that culture thrives through everyday practice and community participation rather than centralized structures.
- **Bruce Kuwabara, Founding Partner of KPMB Architects**, focused on how built environments shape cultural life, arguing that accessibility is not just physical but psychological and social. He pointed to major national cultural investments and renovations as opportunities to rethink how institutions invite the public in, emphasizing openness, education, and sustained engagement with communities.
- **Kimberly Rampersad, Associate Artistic Director of Shaw Festival**, highlighted the pressures on artistic leaders and the lack of time and space to focus on creative vision. She argued for re-centering artists and expanding the definition of who participates in art-making, suggesting that everyone can engage as an “artist self,” and that cultural work should extend beyond institutions into everyday relationships.



“We need to invite Canadians to practise and do their culture every single day, where they are all the time.”

- Jesse Wente

Speakers emphasized that culture should be understood not as an accessory, but as essential infrastructure—something that shapes belonging, democracy, and collective identity. The conversation ended on a note of urgency and opportunity, with participants noting that this is a rare moment of heightened public attention toward Canadian culture. The broader message was that meaningful cultural transformation will require both systemic change and a shift in mindset—from managing institutions to activating broad public participation in culture.



Annabelle Cloutier

Kitty Scott

Bruce Kuwabara

Kimberly Rampersad

Sharebacks and Closing Remarks

The final session brought delegates together to reflect on key ideas, shared priorities, and opportunities for collective action that emerged throughout the Summit. **Vanessa Porteous** offered a synthesis of the gathering, highlighting recurring themes, pressing challenges, and opportunities for leadership across the sector. It served as a final moment to reflect on the conversations of the past three days and consider the work ahead. [Read the full remarks here.](#)

In her closing remarks, **Business / Arts CEO Aubrey Reeves** reflected on the collective spirit of the gathering: *“Everybody here has made a work of art together. The Summit has been a reminder of that, and of the resilience we can build when we do this work collectively. Our strength lies in our ability to support one another and move forward together. Thank you all for your engagement, your generosity, and your efforts over these past three days.”*

Final Moments at Banff Centre

Before the Summit's closing events, delegates had time for personal reflection and exploration across the Banff Centre campus. Delegates were invited to explore *Listening Devices*. This collection of audio and score-based works in Banff Centre's Permanent Collection or on long-term loan, are informed by the relationship between sound, listener, and location. Featuring "Forest Walk" by Janet Cardiff as well as works by artists such as Rebecca Belmore, Raven Chacon, Cece Weiss, Anne Riley, and Lou Sheppard, delegates were encouraged to borrow a listening device from the collection and have an audio-based experience amongst the awe-inspiring Banff landscape.

President's Dinner

Hosted by Banff Centre, the President's Dinner opened with a fireside chat between Michelle Chawla, Director and CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts, and Francis Bilodeau, Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage. The evening provided an opportunity to reflect on the conversations and ideas that emerged throughout the Summit, and to consider how delegates might continue carrying that momentum forward throughout the year.





About Business / Arts

Business / Arts is a national charitable organization that shows the power of partnership between business and arts. Our mission is to champion business investment in the arts and build strong, lasting partnerships between the arts, business and government in Canada.

Business / Arts is uniquely positioned to bring together business, private patrons, government and the arts, all in the service of supporting the growth of Canada's arts sector. We focus on three main objectives, which are relevant to the business, arts and government sectors, individually and collectively.

To convene and lead

Business / Arts will source opportunities to bring together organizations and people to support the arts sector, locally and nationally.

To support and facilitate

Business / Arts facilitates the sharing of much-needed information and resources across the arts sector, from our smallest community groups to our largest national organizations, and engages our key audiences across business and government.

To share, amplify and advocate

We recognize and celebrate partnerships between business and the arts, profiling exceptional leadership in the business and arts community, sharing research, and providing a platform for innovative discussion and exchange of ideas.

www.businessandarts.org



About Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity

Founded in 1933, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity is a learning organization built upon an extraordinary legacy of excellence in artistic and creative development. What started as a single course in drama has grown to become the global organization leading in arts, culture, and creativity across dozens of disciplines. From our home in the stunning Canadian Rocky Mountains, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity aims to inspire everyone who attends our campus — artists, leaders, and thinkers — to unleash their creative potential.

About the Canadian Arts Summit

In 1998, The Council for Business and the Arts in Canada (now Business / Arts) and the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity invited the board chairs, executive directors and artistic directors of 20 of Canada's largest arts organizations to a "Summit". That first Summit was predicated upon the belief that these influential leaders — volunteers, artists and managers — could, by working together, better support Canadian artistic aspirations.

The Canadian Arts Summit has since grown to become a national leadership forum that enables nuanced and candid discussions on the complex issues facing the arts and culture sector in Canada. Together, we explore practical solutions, embrace the positive changes currently underway, and consider how we can advance into the future.





Canadian Arts Summit
Banff, Alberta, 2026
The Rapport
By Vanessa Porteous

Bonjour tout le monde. Hello everyone.

Yesterday around a table, John Hampton shared a story about the time someone from a community in crisis came to them and said, yes, we are receiving all the help, mental health, social supports, and so on. But our people are still dying. And it's because they have no reason to live. We need you, they said, we need culture. We need the arts.

The arts provide a reason to live. It's that basic.

"You have to help people to see beauty," said artists Janet Cardiff and George Miller.

"I didn't know what to do with my rage and my anger," Indigenous knowledge-keeper Darrel Kootenay told us on our first day, as he prepared to sing for us. *"I sang songs at those moments of struggle."*

Carla Salter, an artist with the National AccessArts Centre, said to us, *"What's hard is when I feel like I'm just my mental health & disability. Two years ago I couldn't even talk. I just made my art and went home. I've changed. I feel so tall with my art."*

The arts provide a reason to live. We all believe that. That's why we're here. And yet, there's so much noise. Confusing signals. Gale force headwinds. Especially now.

There's AI, for example. Is it a menace, as almost half of you who answered the pre-summit survey believe? Are we, as Jutta Treviranus puts it, *"progressing in an existentially dangerous direction?"* Or is there still time to regulate it, make it sovereign, pluralistic, responsive to the widest possible spread of human needs?

And what role should we play, in the arts? Are we a source of creativity in this space, or are we *"the antidote,"* as Mark Harrison put it, providing presence and human connection in an increasingly digital world. Maybe both, somehow...?

« L'art est humain! » a affirmé le manifeste sur les arts et AI, au Québec, l'été dernier, *« et il faut le protéger. »* Mais alors, que devons-nous faire? Sûrement, revendiquer un cadre réglementaire strict, la transparence totale, les droits d'auteur, par-dessus tout. Étienne Garnier offered to share the suite of policies proposed in Quebec. *"Things are moving fast,"* he said, *"and we can learn from others."* We should take him up on that.

So many forces to contend with. CADA's Patti Pon reminded us that Alberta's Bill 28 is in the provincial legislature. It will ban books from public libraries. *"What does this moment ask of us,"* she challenged?



To tell the story of Canada *“in a way that includes all of us, not just some.”* That is not an abstraction. Not these days.

Even when Sean Casey from PAA told us about the 45-point swing to the generally more arts-friendly Liberals, an extraordinary shift from this time last year when we were together, he reminded us that the underlying turmoil has not gone away. Cost of living, housing, competition for attention, polarization. Fear.

“We’re having dangerous conversations in our province,” Simon Mallett said. Dangerous. There’s that word again.

The arts provide a reason to live.

Certainly, we can always make a better case for that, and this weekend, you shared many thoughts on how.

We need to lead our message about the value of the arts with public purpose, Sean Casey said. We can also speak to cultural sovereignty, and Aengus Finnan put it this way: The arts are a way to *“say that we are different”*. We need to celebrate our role in fostering social cohesion. As Mark Harrison said, *“Unlike sports, in music no one leaves angry.”*

Et donc, à qui devons-nous nous adresser ?

Le gouvernement, certain, et le communiqué fait un beau résumé des arguments.

Les donateurs. Selon Juniper Locilento, ces jours-ci, ils veulent savoir que notre communauté est au centre de nos efforts.

Les sponsors. Si jamais nous trouvons un langage commun et établissons une relation authentique, marché conclu, apparemment.

But here’s what really popped out this weekend: we must turn to our public, above all. Our audience. In other words, our neighbours. If we think our role is to inspire a country, then we have to inspire the country. That’s the only way to make moonshot ideas like Ireland’s basic income for artists possible.

And it’s one thing to talk about why the arts are important, but as we say in theatre, show don’t tell. I heard so many of you say versions of ‘we need to walk the talk’ this weekend. As Jesse Wenthe said this morning, *“Take the risk and do the thing.”* Get out there, cross the threshold.

In fact, crossing thresholds was a motif. *“We got a front door!”* said Melanie Kjørlién from the Glenbow. David Leinster from Contemporary Calgary described his new café slash entrance to his gallery like this: *“Our threshold isn’t an art history degree,”* he said, *“it’s a caffeine fix.”*



The need to deeply reimagine our invitation to our publics permeated the Summit. It's not enough to just keep the door open. That's not really inclusion. Instead, you are exploring new, more meaningful approaches to the idea of welcome. In a world where 50% of single-ticket buyers are new to us, according to TRG's Jill Robinson, and 70% of those do not return within the next year and half, how do we become more sticky? How do we secure that second date?

Can our spaces become more of a meeting-ground, a gathering place for our community, to engage with more than just our programming? Even if we don't own our spaces, can we layer ourselves into our communities somehow, as Brian McBay put it, and "*get involved with big needs?*"

One of the recurring themes of your discussions was the idea of moving from an artist-centred mission to an audience-centred one. That's how David Maggs and Michael Trent described it. What can that look like, in practice, in our day-to-day?

What happens if what we do is free? Free forever, as at Glenbow; free space to rent, like at Contemporary Calgary; hosting free events and celebrations? You shared many creative ideas along these lines.

But still, it isn't easy to create a genuine feeling of belonging, as Melanie Kjorlien pointed out. People need to see themselves, and achieving that can manifest in unexpected ways. For the Glenbow, that meant making their programming model, collection mandates, and even exhibition spaces more flexible and adaptive, so they could include more stories and experiences. Now even the Glenbow's storage will be visible. The audience is invited in to stand in the midst of all that work.

That made me imagine: what if we opened all our storage? What if we found a way to get out all the art we have so carefully stored away, like fancy dishes saved up for special, and put it all up, everywhere, for Canadians to see? Is that a moonshot?

What if we envisioned our culture not primarily as a place you went, but embodied by human beings, by everyone, as Jesse Wenthe proposed? What if our vision for the arts in Canada is that everyone has art available in their lives, every single day?

Maybe, several of you proposed, more active listening is a place to start. Find a personal connection with a politician or a donor. Ask the public to come and write their ideas on your very walls. You're thinking a lot about building authentic relationships in every possible realm of activity. As Kimberley Rampersad suggested, perhaps we can view our interactions with community as our art practice?

And with each other, too. You're moving past the competitive model, based on a scarcity mindset. *You're "racing toward partnership"* as David Leinster put it, and leveraging each other's success.



On the first day, Jutta Trevanius shared the concept of the human starburst. The phrase really stuck with me. 80% of people clustered together in relative sameness, 20% scattering out toward the periphery. Whose point of view do we value, and what can we gain from listening to those outliers, out there on the frontier, picking up the early signals, tuning in to what's to come?

Interestingly, yesterday Michael Trent conjured a similar scale pattern, though he was talking about strategic planning. Would it be more helpful, he suggested, to think in a less linear way, each tactic readily leading to its designated outcome. Isn't it all more constellated, bursting outward in multiple directions at once, like those dancers last night from A'no:wara Dance Theatre, twirling among the stars.

Mind-shifts like these can lead to huge things: a brand-new building, or a whole downtown; a new way to leverage your assets; the launch of a new foundation. Mergers even. Ending beautifully. These all came up, and more, this weekend.

Mais ça pourrait être plus restreint aussi. Plus subtil. Une approche légèrement novatrice au boulot de l'organisation. Une appréciation plus approfondie de la diversité des cultures du bénévolat, come a suggéré Kathy Arney. Une curiosité. Une volonté d'apprendre.

At a table yesterday, Estelle Shook shared the idea of 'pigs and chickens.' It comes from farming. You put most of your energy into your cash crop, of course, but you also keep some pigs and chickens round the place. You don't buy food for them, they live off the leftovers, but they nourish the farm family. Bacon and eggs, a roast chicken every once in a while. They diversify your inputs, shore you up. The table agreed, that when trying to think of unexplored resources, we should ask ourselves, 'What are my pigs and chickens?'

After all, just like back in the 60's and 70's, according to Margaret Atwood, part of this is going to involve finding ever more canny ways to survive. It always does.

Ultimately though, what I've heard from you this weekend is, your vision for the arts in Canada isn't about you. It's about your community, your audience, your neighbours. It's a vision for what their life can be, with art in it, available to all.

It's a vision of nourishing the community, lighting up their joys and sorrows, their stories and contradictions, their dreams and fears. As in Janet Cardiff's work, *Forty-Part Motet*, it's a vision of them standing right in the centre of forty different lines of melody; right at that nexus where all our individualities harmonize and reharmonize, in a fleeting, fluid, ever-changing wholeness. There they are, standing right in the centre, bathed in the beauty and the multiplicity of the song.

Thank you very much for letting me witness your conversations.
Merci à tous.

A New Creative Vision for Canada



Each year, 150 arts leaders, chairs, and chief executives from Canada's foremost institutions join funding partners to be inspired and re-imagine our contribution to the future of Canada. Concluding the 2026 Canadian Arts Summit in Banff, we offer a clear message: **Canada must act now to strengthen its arts and culture sector as a cornerstone of civic engagement, social cohesion, national identity, sovereignty, resilience and global influence.**

What Canada Needs: Identity, Sovereignty and Resilience

In an era of geopolitical uncertainty, economic disruption, and rising pressure on public trust and social cohesion, Canadians are seeking clarity and confidence. In this context, art is not a luxury. It is a basic human need and one of the most powerful tools in which we discover, debate, and celebrate those values.

Our sovereignty is expressed not just through trade or defense, but through our stories, the histories we preserve and the creativity we project to the world. The arts sector is uniquely positioned to meet this moment, reflecting the diverse voices that define us, in both official languages, and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and helping to strengthen the shared civic fabric that underpins a confident and resilient Canada.

The Solution: the Arts are a Critical Resource Sector

Culture is one of our most effective national resources to foster understanding, build trust, and create enduring connections both within our country and on the global stage. Through engagement grounded in artistic collaboration and storytelling, Canada can strengthen both civic engagement within our local communities, reinforce social cohesion, deepen longstanding alliances and build emerging global partnerships. This approach recognizes that our global influence and domestic resilience are rooted in the strength of our character, the clarity of our culture, and the confidence we have in our own voice.

The arts are a powerful tool for key areas of development:

- **Social Cohesion:** Culture strengthens social bonds and enhances civic engagement, providing the social glue necessary for a stable democracy and a more connected society.
- **Economic Vitality:** The sector is a powerhouse, contributing \$65 billion of direct impact to Canada's GDP and employing hundreds of thousands of Canadians while driving innovation and growth.
- **Vital Workforce Skills:** As AI takes over computational and routine tasks, workers will need distinctly human skills: critical thinking, creative problem-solving, empathy, and communication. These are the skills the arts cultivate, and they will determine whether the Canadian workforce thrives in the decades ahead.
- **Global Diplomacy:** Cultural exchange builds trust and creates enduring connections, serving as one of our most effective tools for diversifying international partnerships and projecting Canadian values abroad.



A Call for Strategic Investment

Ambition must be matched by investment. To realize this potential, we must strengthen our foundations:

- **Support for Creators:** Provide sustained support for the artists, performers, and professionals who bring our stories to life beyond the granting systems.
- **Infrastructure Modernization:** Strategically invest in community, by building education and digital technology capacity to ensure access for all Canadians, while modernizing the physical performance venues, theatres, galleries, and museums that serve as the physical foundations for growth, community connection and long-term resilience.
- **Market Reach and Discoverability:** Canada produces world-class content, proven with such hits as *Come From Away* and *Heated Rivalry*, and talent such as Yannick Nezet-Seguin and Kent Monkman. In order to reach domestic and international audiences, we must invest in robust marketing budgets and distribution networks, promoting the discovery of our artistic content by Canadians and around the world.
- **Private-Sector Partnership:** Strong partnerships between businesses of all sizes and the arts build vibrant and safe communities, which in turn leads to the attraction and retention of top talent, workforce well-being and reinforces Canada's competitiveness.

Commitment to the Future:

This is a moment for clarity and commitment.

We call on all levels of government to **commit unequivocally to a thriving, globally competitive Canadian arts and culture sector** and for the Government of Canada to build on recent progress **by increasing funding to the Canada Council for the Arts, and supporting cultural infrastructure projects** by ensuring sustained, long-term investment across the broader cultural sector.

We invite you to engage with us in re-imagining arts at the forefront of nation-building. The world is watching.