



National Gallery of Canada

Marc Mayer – Speaking Notes 2010 Annual Public Meeting September 13, 2010, Calgary, Alberta

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us this afternoon. It is a privilege for us to have this forum to review our recent activities and share with you some of our plans for the future.

In his remarks, Michael Audain spoke briefly to the mandate of the National Gallery of Canada. I would like to start my comments by saying a few words about the values that shape the way we approach it.

- We are focused *on accessibility* to all Canadians. We develop our programming with our visitors in mind– whether they come to Ottawa, see a travelling exhibition or visit us virtually on our website.
- The *Excellence and scholarship* for which the Gallery is internationally renowned – be it for its collection, research, exhibitions, publications or public programs – sets the standard for our activities.
- *Leadership*: the Gallery strives to fulfill its role as a recognized leader in the national and international art museum communities – and I would add, increasingly in engaging Canadians in a national dialogue about art.
- *Collaboration*: as an institution, we collaborate with the network of art museums in all regions of Canada and abroad, and with our government portfolio partners.
- *In terms of corporate citizenship*, the Gallery’s public policy and legal obligations are strictly adhered to at all times.



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- *The Gallery workforce:* The Gallery values its workforce and strives to create a work environment in which people can maximize their potential and contribute fully to the success of the organization.

There are four areas of activity that are central to our mandate:

- *Stewardship of the collection,* which includes acquisitions and the care of the collection;
- *Outreach and Exhibitions,* which focuses on the dissemination of the collection through exhibitions, publications, education, web access, and the loan of exhibitions across the country;
- *Physical plant operations and security* and
- *Administration and governance*

As Michael Audain said earlier, the past year was one marked by exciting accomplishments in our service to Canadians – and by challenges that we simply could not ignore.

Our new acquisitions added great depth to all areas of the National Collection. Both in Ottawa and on tour across the country, our exhibitions connected more than half a million visitors to the finest in historical and contemporary visual art. Our recent partnership with the Art Gallery of Alberta heralded a new way of bringing the National Collection to regional audiences. Virtual visits grew exponentially, giving us an unprecedented opportunity to share the collection in a meaningful way with Canadians and international visitors alike.

At the same time, attendance at the Gallery declined again. This is a situation that is experienced by many fine arts museums in North America as the economy continues to affect discretionary spending and tourism. But it remains a concern for us because we see this trend in our attendance numbers continuing this year. As revenues decreased and costs increased, it became



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clear that our operational model had become too expensive, that it was not necessarily in step with the times; it was in need of an adjustment if we were to continue to deliver our national mandate with excellence and fiscal responsibility.

Following an in-depth review of our programming and operations, we realigned the organization in March 2010, amalgamating divisions to simplify and streamline the way we work. We also re-evaluated our educational and public programs, with a view to placing greater emphasis on enriching the experience for all visitors – be they physical or virtual – and to continue offering a comprehensive program of activities to engage audiences of all ages.

This shift in direction and our financial reality entailed difficult decisions, including staff reductions and cuts to programs. But, combined with other cost containment measures taken earlier in the year, these steps helped us close fiscal 2009-10 with a balanced budget – actually, with a very small surplus – and left us better positioned to tackle the challenges that lie ahead. I will share with you some of our progress, and continuing challenges, later in my presentation.

Let's now look at our financial results as we closed the year. Our operating budget was \$59M, with \$50M coming from parliamentary appropriations. This included an appropriation of \$8 million dedicated solely to the acquisition of works of art. I point this out only because I am often asked why we continue to buy art in difficult economic times. My answer always is this: because building the permanent collection so that it continues to reflect our constantly evolving and vibrant artistic culture is at the very heart of our mission – that is why the National Gallery of Canada was created in 1880 – and it is a necessity that the government wisely recognizes.



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You will note a decrease in the Gallery's capital appropriation. This was expected. Starting in 2007-08, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Government of Canada gave the Gallery special funding for urgent essential repairs to the building. The amount of \$5 million shown for 2009-10 represents the annual capital funding which continues until the end of 2012-13.

The Gallery supplements government appropriations through revenue generating activities. In addition, the National Gallery of Canada Foundation and its patrons provide private funding to support our acquisitions, outreach and programming activities. In 2009-10, these revenues and private funding contribution, combined with investment income, amounted to \$8.4M.

What this chart underscores is a key point in our fiscal reality: the lion's share of our financial resources – government appropriations for operations – has remained relatively fixed through the years, and so have our other sources of revenues.

Our objective is to bring earned revenues, contributions and investment income from 16% to 20% of our overall resources within the next five years.

Earned revenues come from admissions, memberships, sponsorships, the Gallery's Bookstore and publishing, parking, public spaces' rentals, education programs and so on. They are highly dependant on attendance at special exhibitions, which continued to be affected by the economy. The cancellation of our winter exhibition in 2010 – a decision made after we assessed its relative cost-benefit – also had an effect.

The contribution from the National Gallery of Canada Foundation is also included in this chart.



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As you can see, a high percentage of the financial resources available to the Gallery are allocated to non-discretionary costs including, among others, care of the facilities, security and payments in lieu of taxes.

After taking these and other costs into account, only 23% is available for outreach, exhibitions and public programming.

This is why corporate and private philanthropic support is so essential to the Gallery.

This slide offers a different perspective on our expenses, showing salaries, fixed and variable operating costs and exhibitions as a percentage of our operating resources. As you can see, salaries remain the most significant category of the expenditure envelope.

Let me now turn to the activities that are at the very heart of our mission -- stewardship of the Collection as well as our exhibition and outreach programming.

In keeping with our mandate, the National Collection spans Canadian and International, Contemporary and Historical art, with a focus on Canadian contemporary art. Whether it's a gift or a purchase, each new acquisition is a work of the highest quality, condition and historic and aesthetic importance. It is also carefully selected to strengthen the collection and enhance its appeal to an increasingly diverse Canadian public.

Now let's look at some of the most significant acquisitions in the past year.



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- Claude Monet's *Rock Needle seen through the Porte d'Aval*, was an extraordinary gift from NGC Foundation patron Marjorie Bronfman. This innovative painting of the Normandy coastline at Étretat represents a turning point in Monet's career and is a magnificent complement to the Gallery's internationally recognized collection of Impressionist art.
- Joseph Siffred Duplessis' *Monsieur de Buiissy* (c. 1780) is a remarkable work by the 18th century French portraitist who was renowned for the uncanny likeness of his paintings to his sitters. It is a wonderful addition to our historical international art collection.
- David Altmejd's mixed-media sculpture *The Holes* (2008) entered the national collection of contemporary Canadian art. The work reflects the artist's proclivity for exploring such broad questions as identity, self-fiction, isolation, community, sex, survival and death. Now based in New York, the Montreal-born Altmejd represented Canada at the 52nd Venice Biennale and has achieved international acclaim for the formal originality and breadth of creative content of his work.
- Steven Shearer's most ambitious sculptural work to date, *Geometric Mechanotherapy Cell for the Harmonic Alignment of Movements and Relations* (2008) explores the concept of social discord, trying to digest it and turn it into positive vibrations. This work is a necessary companion to the artist's earlier *oeuvre* and is a great complement to the Gallery's holdings of works that revisit Modernist ideals. Like David Altmejd, Vancouver-based Shearer has gained international recognition and was recently selected to be the Canadian representative to the 54th Venice Biennale.



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- Other important works to enter the contemporary Canadian art collection include Althea Thauberger's high-definition video and digital photographic mural *La mort et la miseria* (2008) which the Vancouver-based artist created for the European biennial Manifesta 7, held in Northern Italy, as well as James Carl's sculpture series *jalousie*, in which the Toronto-based artist continues to transform discarded commodities.
- On the International Contemporary Art front, I'd like to highlight Walid Raad's *I was Overcome with a Momentary Panic at the Thought that They Might be Right* (2004). Created under the authorship of the Atlas Group, a fictional organization dedicated to documenting the contemporary history of Lebanon, *I was Overcome* points to the larger truths about how history is created and constructed. It is a seminal work in the artist's innovative and critical production and augments the Gallery's holdings of international contemporary art, as does the acquisition of South Korean artist Lee Bul's sculpture, *Untitled (After Bruno Taut Series)* (2008).
- Tim Pitsiulak is one of the latest artists at the Cape Dorset's Kinngait Studios to gain attention for his prints and drawings, particularly for his large works. Showing the cockpit of First Air's new ATR72-500 as it lands in Cape Dorset, *Untitled (Cockpit)* is his most ambitious and accomplished work to date and we're proud to have it in the Indigenous Art Collection.
- Also acquired for this collection was a major work by Cape Dorset artist Shuvina Ashoona, *Untitled (Eden)*. A strong visual statement that beautifully demonstrates Ashoona's viewpoint and mature style, the resolved, exceptional drawing well represents this innovative and



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intriguing artist in the Gallery's holdings at a crucial stage of her artistic career.

- Other exciting additions to our growing Indigenous Art collection included works by David Ruben Piqtoutkun, Mary Anne Barkhouse, Frederick Alexcee, Rebecca Belmore, Alex Janvier, and Napachie Pootoogook.
- The Walker Cup is the most ambitious and magnificent trophy to have emerged from Canadian silvermaking in the late 19th century-- the golden age of this type of object. The Cup represents a fascinating encounter between two leading historical figures and business competitors whose names still resonate today -- American distiller and philanthropist Hiram Walker, who commissioned the Cup, and Joseph E. Seagram, Canadian distiller and Walker's competitor, who won the Cup in 1894 and then again in 1895 when it became his property. A powerfully expressive work, the Cup is a terrific addition to the Gallery's fine collection of silver.
- Works by Michel Campeau, Robert Polidori, Roy Arden, Geoffrey James, Angela Grauerholz, among others, were added to the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography's collection. We are seeing here a piece by Polidori, whose works have been shown nationally and internationally in museums and art galleries. In *Apartment of Madame Adelaide, painting of Marie-Clotilde-Xavière de France, Château de Versailles*, from his larger project on the restoration of Versailles, Polidori chooses an intimate approach, exploiting the sharp focal capacities of his tool of trade to the utmost degree.

I'm equally proud of our most recent acquisitions, completed since the beginning of the current fiscal year. They include *Cell: The Last Climb* by Louise



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Bourgeois, one of the most significant artists of the 20th century. Visitors to the NGC in Ottawa know the artist as the creator of the large-scale bronze sculpture of a spider, *Maman*, that is an icon on the Plaza of the Gallery. The artist passed away this past May at the age of 98. She worked until the very end and *Cell: The Last Climb* stands as her last monumental sculpture. It's based around a set of custom-made spiral staircases from her longtime Brooklyn studio – the installation is a remarkable ode to a tremendous life lived through art.

Soon to be installed on the majestic Nepean Point right outside the National Gallery and overlooking the Ottawa River is *One Hundred Foot Line*, a significant new sculpture by Roxy Paine, an important American artist and one of few from a younger generation of sculptors involved in creating public outdoor sculptures on a large-scale. *One Hundred Foot Line* is from Paine's ongoing *Dendroid* series in which dramatic representations of trees are fabricated in stainless steel creating a visceral, awe-inspiring confrontation between nature and culture. It will leave no one indifferent.

Much time, thought and research by the Gallery's curators and a significant amount of work by support staff to satisfy the governance requirements of this activity lies behind each of our acquisitions. But the curatorial department is not the only one that contributes to the high level of scholarship found at the NGC.

For example, our Restoration and Conservation Laboratory conducted a technical study of the authorship of three old masterworks that had been widely considered to be production of assistants. The study firmly established that the authors were indeed the masters – Fillipino Lippi, Botticelli, and Titian.

As well, the Library and Archives continues to collect rare books and research materials, and make them available to Gallery staff, researchers and the public.



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In fact, in 2009-10, the Library fielded some 275,000 inquiries and lent close to 1,000 books and documents.

Sharing the national collection and other fine works of art created by Canadian and international artists with people across Canada and fostering a national knowledge and appreciation of the visual arts are also fundamental to the Gallery.

This past year, more than 1,300 works from the national collection were on view in our galleries, and regularly rotated, allowing us to present more treasures from the collection to our visitors and provide new experiences for them.

I am extremely proud of our special exhibition program. In fiscal 2009-10, we presented no less than 15 exhibitions at the Gallery, covering a remarkable variety of art forms, themes, and periods – from 16th century Italian Mannerism to 21st century Canadian installation as well as elaborately constructed digital imagery that challenged photographic conventions.

The list is rich and ranges from the critically acclaimed international exhibition *From Raphael to Carracci: the Art of Papal Rome*, which brought together for the first time over 150 paintings and drawings created by Michelangelo, Titian, El Greco, Annibale Carracci and other masters, to several solo exhibitions of artists such as Thomas Nozkowzky, Nicolas Baier and Daphne Odjig – to name only three. I'm pleased to say that *Raphael* was presented by Sun Life Financial while *Nicolas Baier* and *Daphne Odjig* were presented by Pratt & Whitney Canada.

This year's program is equally outstanding: This summer, and until September 19, *Pop Life: Art in a Material World* explores the complex relationship between contemporary art, commerce, marketing and the mass media that has evolved



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since the 1980s when Andy Warhol uttered his provocative maxim that "good business is the best art". Organized by Tate Modern, the exhibition was presented at the Gallery in a North American exclusive.

In the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography gallery, the exhibition *Angela Grauerholz*, presented by Pratt & Whitney Canada, traced the artist's photographic career over the last 20 years.

And *Central Drawings from the National Gallery of Canada* featured rarely seen prints and drawings by masters like Dürer, Klimt, Kirchner, and Grosz, surveying the period from the early 16th century to the end of the Second World War.

This Fall sees an exciting array of exhibitions. Starting with *Global Citizen: The Architecture of Moshe Safdie* which explores Safdie's structures and the philosophy that shapes them through 175 drawings, sketches, videos, photographs and scale models.

Carl Beam will feature a selection of the artist's most remarkable works spanning his 30-year career, from his monumental-scale paintings and constructions, to his ceramics and video. Beam, who passed away in 2005, is renowned for his powerful combinations of highly charged images from his personal Anishinaabe aesthetic.

And *It Is What It Is. Recent Acquisitions of New Canadian Art*, supported by RBC Foundation, is an exciting exhibition which is a showcase of Canadian contemporary art. It underscores the Gallery's commitment to supporting and promoting Canadian artists who are active today.

Moving on to next Spring, we open *On the Edge of Experience: A Survey of Work by Wanda Koop*, which presents a critique of how modes of technology



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have an impact on nature. This time we are working with the Winnipeg Art Gallery to organize this exhibition.

And things remain as exciting as we look to the more distant future. Next summer, the ambitious exhibition *Caravaggio and his Circle in Rome* will explore the profound impact this 16th century master had on a wide range of European painters who resided in Rome during his lifetime or immediately afterwards. The exhibition is curated by former NGC Chief Curator and Deputy Director David Franklin, and co-organized by the Gallery and the Kimbell Art Museum in Forth Worth, Texas.

Then in the summer of 2012, *Vincent Van Gogh* will see the first major project devoted to the Dutch artist by a Canadian institution for over two decades. Ottawa is the sole Canadian venue for this exhibition presented by Sun Life Financial, which is organized by the National Gallery of Canada in collaboration with the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The exhibition will break new ground in exploring the artist's representation of nature, in particular his innovative use of the close-up.

The original scholarship, publications and education programs that accompany these exhibitions make an invaluable contribution to art historical knowledge among scholars and art appreciation among the public.

On the subject of travelling exhibitions, I would like to note a major point of pride for us, and I think, for all Canadians: the National Gallery of Canada is the largest purveyor of touring art exhibitions in the world.

This map gives you a sense of the Gallery's national reach through its travelling exhibitions since the On Tour program was created.



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In 2009-10, the Gallery developed 11 new exhibitions to be offered through On Tour. A total of 16 exhibitions largely drawn for the national collection opened across the country. Several were organized through partnerships with other Canadian museums and galleries. The exhibitions were presented in 20 venues in 8 provinces from coast to coast and two international venues (*Yousuf Karsh at 100: Portraits of Artists*, in Washington, DC and *The Paintings and Drawings of Daphne Odjig: A Retrospective Exhibition* in Santa Fe, New Mexico), attracting a total of 230,000 visitors. At the same time, our partnership with the Art Gallery of Alberta added an exciting new way of bringing the National Collection to regional audiences.

Let me know turn to our education and public programs, which seek to engage visitors of all ages, interests and abilities in meaningful experiences with works of art. Our programs acknowledge the diversity of the Canadian museum-visiting public – whether they visit in person or online – and reflect our belief in the importance of lifelong learning and the value of the visual arts.

2009 and 2010 have been a time of change and redirection as we focus on enhancing the experience for all visitors – in-gallery and on-line. There is an interesting and telling data point on this front: while approximately one third of visitors to the Gallery participated in an education program in 2009-10, more than 2 million virtual visitors accessed information on the Gallery's educational website during the same period.

Highlights from this year and our plans for the next two years include:

This year to date:

- Enhanced music programming through *Music in the Galleries*, held on Sunday afternoons, and earlier this summer, a partnership of national reach between the Gallery, CBC radio and the *Music and Beyond*



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Festival that culminated in a concert at the Gallery that was broadcasted nationally;

- Self-guided tours for teens on the modern and contemporary collections;
- The rich menu of education activities made available for the summer exhibition *Pop Life: Art in a Material World*. These included 10-minute Pop Talks; an audioguide; an education guide; a visitor talkback area, with discussion extended through Facebook; a Pop Quiz on artists' signature styles; an exhibition timeline and reading area; lectures; films; workshops; a debate organized by The Walrus, and a symposium;

And starting this fall and beyond:

- *So You Want to Be an Artist*, a new contest designed to increase the Gallery's visibility and relevance with youth nationally, by leveraging social media and creativity;
- New thematic art tours, lectures, symposia and films for adults, including a live symposium webcast, as well as *Docent's Choice*, a new program of 10-minute talks on a single artwork, delivered by the Gallery's docents;
- New Bell audioguides, including a children's audioguide on the national collection; an audioguide that I will narrate – it will be the first of a series of personal narratives on the collection by Canadians with different perspectives; and a Mandarin audioguide featuring the internationally-known celebrity Dashan (Mark Rowswell).
- And of course, of paramount importance, improving the usability and usefulness of our website and enhancing the content available on works from the collection.

Staying the course on all these fronts – deepening the national collection, organizing high quality, diverse exhibitions, enhancing the visitor experience for all – is key to engaging and being relevant to a broader, more diverse audience. While the future is not for the faint of heart, we're excited by the potential ahead.



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For their unerring guidance and invaluable contributions in this time of change, I offer my sincerest thanks to both the Chair of the National Gallery of Canada, Michael Audain, as well as our Trustees.

My thanks also go to the National Gallery of Canada Foundation, its Chair – Thomas P. d’Aquino – its Board of Directors and its staff for their precious efforts on our behalf.

To our volunteers who freely give so much of their time each year to the Gallery and to our members, I express our appreciation.

To our patrons and partners whose financial support is so needed, our most sincere gratitude. Our thanks also go to the Honourable James Moore, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages and the Department of Canadian Heritage, and to our government partners, for their support and encouragement.

And to all our past, present and future visitors who come to us from across the country and beyond its borders, in person and online, I say it is with all of you in mind that we grow our collection, organize our exhibitions and seek ways to continuously improve our service. We thank you with utmost sincerity for your keen interest and look forward to your presence in whatever shape it takes.

Mesdames et messieurs, we will now move to the Question & Answer portion of the meeting. I would now like to introduce the Gallery's Senior Management team , who will join me to answer your questions:

- David Baxter, Deputy Director, Administration and Finance
- Karen Colby-Stothart, Deputy Director, Exhibitions and Installations
- Michelle Miner, Director, Human Resources



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- Serge Thériault, Director, Publishing, New Media and Distribution
- Jean-François Bilodeau, Acting Director, Institutional Advancement
- With the very recent departure of our former deputy director and Chief Curator David Franklin, who was just appointed Director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, I will represent our Collection Research and Education department.

If you've not had the opportunity to ask your question by the end of our time together this afternoon, we invite you to write to us at comments@gallery.ca and we will respond to you. Thank you for coming and have a nice evening.