



**Speaking Notes
Marc Mayer
Director & CEO**

**National Gallery of Canada
2018 Annual Public Meeting and Reception**

Monday, September 17, 2018 at 6:00 p.m.
Seaspan Pavilion, The Polygon Gallery
North Vancouver, B.C.

Thank you, Françoise, and good evening to all. It's a great pleasure to be here for our Annual Public Meeting. Vancouver is a special place in the world and in our hearts at the National Gallery.

We've been enjoying our time here tremendously so far. Yesterday, we toured the fantastic Audain Art Museum in Whistler, where we saw marvellous works by so many artists who are also represented in the national collection.

I would like to thank Jim Moody and Curtis Collins for generously hosting us and for giving us a tour of this beautiful museum, and for lending us their Boardroom for part of our meeting. It's safe to say that we prefer the view from that room than from our own.

Before I begin, let me introduce our senior management team:

- Jean-François Bilodeau, Deputy Director, Advancement and Public Engagement;
- Sylvain Bordeleau, Interim Director, Human Resources;
- Anne Eschapassee, Deputy Director, Exhibitions and Outreach;
- Julie Peckham, Deputy Director of Administration and Chief Financial Officer;
- Matthew Symonds, Director, Corporate Secretariat and Ministerial Liaison;
- Ann Thomas, Interim Chief Curator;
- Karen Colby-Stothart, Chief Executive Officer of the National Gallery of Canada Foundation; and
- Thomas d'Aquino, Chair, Board of Directors and of the National Gallery of Canada Foundation.

As Françoise mentioned, 2017 was a transformative year in more ways than one at the National Gallery of Canada.

While the most recent annual report is available on our website, I would like to share some highlights with you this evening.

We just wrapped up a very successful summer season at the Gallery where more than 130,000 people visited *Impressionist Treasures: The Ordrupgaard Collection* – making it the most attended summer exhibition in six years.

The show presented 76 paintings from the renowned Ordrupgaard Collection, assembled by Wilhelm and Henny Hansen in the early 20th century, featuring masters such as Corot, Pissarro, Manet, Monet, Delacroix, and especially Gauguin, as well as Hammershøi and Matisse, to name but a few.

The exhibition closed September 9th before travelling to Italy, Switzerland and the Czech Republic. We were pleased to host the only presentation of this spectacular collection in North America.

I would also like to mention that our former Chief Curator, Paul Lang, who left the Gallery earlier this year to work as Director of the Museums of the City of Strasbourg in his native Alsace, contributed immensely to the *Impressionist Treasures* exhibition. We are pleased to report that his catalogue for the show sold out in the last week of the show, almost like stopping on a dime!

Other exhibitions presented this year included an exploration of the relationship between collector A. K. Prakash and artist James Wilson Morrice. It follows the gift of 50 works created by Morrice and collected by Mr. Prakash; an exhibition of works by the 18th century Canadian silversmith Laurent Amiot, accompanied by one of the most beautiful catalogues we've ever produced; and, in our Masterpiece in Focus series, an exhibition dedicated to the work of Calgary painter Ron Moppett and his son, Vancouver's Damian Moppett. That show was made possible thanks to gifts from Calgary collector Ken Bradley and Vancouver's Bob Rennie who donated a work that we had tried to acquire when it was first shown, so that gift was particularly felicitous.

The Gallery was also pleased to lend a large number of works by Canadian artist David Milne to a travelling exhibition that wrapped up at the Vancouver Art Gallery just last week. *David Milne: Modern Painting* premiered at the Dulwich Picture Gallery in the U.K. earlier this year, and continues its travels to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, this October.

A rather busy season awaits us with a retrospective exhibition devoted to the father of artistic photography, Oscar Rejlander, a presentation of the works of the shortlisted artists for the 2018 Sobey Art Award, and the first exhibition devoted to the exceptional work of Paul Klee in almost 40 years.

Our first exhibition of the season opens next week. *Anthropocene* will bring together photographs, film installations and augmented reality components by one of Canada's most celebrated artists Edward Burtynsky, and equally celebrated filmmakers Jennifer Baichwal and Nicholas de Pencier, created during their travels around the world. The exhibition documents our human-altered planet, and provides solid evidence, which supports the position of many geologists that the Holocene is over and that we now live in the epoch of the Anthropocene.

The exhibition is generously supported by Scotiabank in partnership with Telus.

Our Canadian and Indigenous Galleries opened in June 2017. After years of planning and nine months of construction, the new Galleries mark the first major transformation at the National Gallery since the building's inauguration in 1988.

We are proud to report that this major capital project was completed using unrestricted net assets, i.e. our savings account, as well as annual appropriations and funding from the NGC Foundation, there were no additional government funds for this major renovation and re-articulation of art making in Canada.

We worked closely with Indigenous communities and partner institutions – such as the Canadian Museum of History, National Film Board of Canada, and Bata Shoe Museum – to create a meaningful display that speaks to Canada’s unique diversity and heritage.

Today, the new Galleries feature close to 800 Canadian and Indigenous works of art, almost double the number previously displayed, from paintings and sculptures to decorative arts, photographs and videos.

In this context, I am also pleased to report that the Gallery hired its first Associate Curator of Historical Indigenous Art this year. Alexandra Nahwegahbow is Anishinaabe and Kanien'kehá:ka, and a member of Whitefish River First Nation.

The Gallery also established an Indigenous Advisory Committee to help guide our activities. This group of curators, academics, community leaders, elders, knowledge-keepers, artists and other authorities have helped to create key content and offer meaningful advice on how best to integrate Indigenous works of art into our Galleries. This was a profoundly enriching experience for NGC staff who participated, including myself.

As many of you know, the Gallery has a mandate to collect and maintain works of art, both Canadian and International, historic and contemporary, for the enjoyment of all Canadians. I’m quoting from the Museums Act.

As such, we acquired 229 works of art as of March 31, 2018. Among these acquisitions are notable works from British Columbia, such as:

- Beau Dick’s *Tsonoqua*;
- Emily Carr’s *Bird Totem*;
- Joan Balzar’s *Spinner #1*;
- Roy Arden’s *Against the Day*;
- Geoffrey Farmer’s *Praying Mantis*;
- Landon Mackenzie’s *Neurocity*; and
- Ian Wallace’s *Hotel Room* and *Intersection Paris*.

Among the other remarkable acquisitions, we have an extraordinary 17th century painting by the French artist, Simon Vouet, and an impressive pastel series by emerging artist, Zachari Logan. These works are featured in the slideshow that will be presented in this room tonight.

This past year was also a transformative one thanks to the exceptional generosity of our patrons – some of whom have joined us this evening.

The Gallery received a total of 817 works of art as gifts from thirty-seven donors, worth close to \$8 million. Ninety of these are classified as rare historical treasures.

Vancouver is known widely for its large number of world famous artists, but in the art world, it is also known for its equally famous collector of contemporary art. Bob Rennie’s donation was one of the largest ever made to Canada’s national collection – and in recognition for his

transformative gift to the people of Canada on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Confederation, our upper contemporary gallery will henceforth be known as the RENNIE Gallery. Transformative because it makes us the collection of record for a number of artists, Ian Wallace, Rodney Graham, Geoffrey Farmer and others. Warm thanks to Bob and the whole team at the Rennie Collection, Carey Fouks and Wendy Chang, Director of the collection.

A remarkable 635 works by a major figure of 20th century photography, Paul Strand, were presented to the Canadian Photography Institute of the National Gallery of Canada by three anonymous Canadian donors, making CPI the collection of record of Strand photographs in the country.

A \$2-million gift was made in celebration of the sesquicentennial of Confederation by Distinguished Patrons Fred and Elizabeth Fountain of Halifax in support of our National Outreach Program and the National Gallery of Canada Foundation's Art for the Nation 150th initiatives. We now have the beautiful Fred & Elizabeth Fountain Garden Court in our Canadian and Indigenous Galleries, entirely redesigned by Cornelia Oberlander and Enns Gauthier, which was named in recognition of their incredible gift.

Finally, an artist that you know very well here in Vancouver, Tak Tanabe, has made a gift that will allow us to continue adding to our contemporary collection while helping to advance the careers of young Canadian artists.

To date, the Takao Tanabe Purchase Prize in Painting for Young Artists has gifted \$30,000 to the Gallery, leading to the acquisition of works by Coast Salish artist lessLIE and Montreal-based visual artist and poet Cynthia Girard-Renard.

The Gallery's commitment to fostering young talent and supporting Canadian contemporary art was equally demonstrated through the RBC Painting Competition exhibition.

Scotiabank's inaugural New Generation Photography Award exhibition, presented in partnership with the Canadian Photography Institute, recognized three young Canadians working in lens-based art. A fine new prize to distinguish young Canadian creators.

We were also very proud to continue our partnership with the Sobey Art Foundation through the presentation of the *Sobey Art Award Exhibition*.

The Foundation has done some truly extraordinary work in support of young Canadian artists through the Sobey Art Award, one of the most prestigious and generous art prizes in Canada. Stunningly, the Sobey Family have doubled the value of all the prizes this year with the grand prize now set at \$100K. And, in answer to a burning need, they have also announced international residencies program for Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, Delfina and the ISCP in Brooklyn. They are also working on another residency, so stay tuned.

Another significant achievement sparked by a generous donor was the restoration of the Canada Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Distinguished Patron of the National Gallery of Canada Foundation and an advisor to our Acquisitions Committee, art historian Reesa Greenberg, funded the project through a \$3-million gift, which allowed for the complete restoration of the walls, roof, and façade, as well as HVAC and lighting system upgrades.

The project was led by Milanese architect Alberico di Belgiojoso of the storied BBPR studio, the original 1958 architects of the Canada Pavilion.

The landscape surrounding the Canada Pavilion has also been redesigned under the leadership of La Biennale di Venezia, in collaboration with the award-winning landscape architect and Vancouver resident Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, Vancouver-based Bryce Gauthier of Enns Gauthier Landscape Architects and the Venice Superintendent for Architectural Heritage. I want to thank Karen Colby-Stothart of the NGC Foundation for many years of stewardship on this complex file. Also, warm thanks to Anne Eschapasse, our Deputy Director, Exhibitions and Outreach, for her team's fine work on this and Canada's representation in Venice generally.

The restoration was unveiled at the 16th Architecture Biennale to positive reception, and was accompanied by a special exhibition titled *Canada Builds/Rebuilds a Pavilion*, which offers an unprecedented analysis of the building's commission by the Gallery some 60 years ago and a history of Canada at the Venice Biennale since the earliest days.

It's been an inspiring year, to say the least, and I would like to thank the many people who have contributed to our success.

Many thanks to our extraordinary personnel for their hard work and their devotion.

To the members of our Board of Trustees for their guidance and priceless contributions to the Gallery's continued success.

To our sponsors and donors whose support allows us to remain the premier art-collecting institution in Canada.

To our members, visitors and volunteers for their passion.

To the Canadian Government that makes our activities possible, and to the Canadian Heritage Department under the leadership of our former Minister Mélanie Joly and our new Minister Pablo Rodriguez.

And finally, to all of you for joining us here this evening. We hope to see you at the Gallery on your next visit to Ottawa.

Thank you.