

REPORT

20TH ANNIVERSARY

ON THE CANADIAN ARTS SUMMIT

CHARLOTTETOWN, PEI, MAY 12-14

2017

A Gathering of Canada's Cultural Leaders

The Canadian Arts Summit is a national forum that brings together the Chairs, Executive Directors and Artistic Directors of Canada's largest arts organizations to share best practices, innovative ideas and initiatives to advance the arts in Canada.



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Many thanks to the generous corporations & individuals who are supporting the important work we are doing this weekend.

#CdnArtsSummit



20th ANNIVERSARY CANADIAN ARTS SUMMIT

A Gathering of Leaders in the Cultural Sphere

Presented by Business for the Arts in partnership with the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, the Canadian Arts Summit is an annual gathering of influential leaders—volunteers, artists and managers—in the cultural sphere to advance the cause of the arts community. Since the first session was held in 1998, when [Business for the Arts and The Banff Centre](#) invited the chairs, executive directors and artistic directors from Canada’s largest arts organizations, the Canadian Arts Summit has developed into a unique cultural leadership forum.

Over the course of the weekend, an overarching theme is explored by keynote speakers, presentations by artists, case studies by participants, and formal and informal discussions. Throughout, there are opportunities for exchanges with people from across the country in every artistic discipline.

The work of the summit continues throughout the year under a program director from the Business for the

Arts team, with an active volunteer Steering Committee nominated from amongst those who have been invited to participate. To date, it has brought together the leadership of Canada’s top 50+ not-for-profit cultural institutions with operating budgets of over \$5 million: symphony orchestras, theatres, opera and ballet companies, as well as heritage and art museums, and film festivals.

At the core of the Canadian Arts Summit are the following strategic intentions:

- » To achieve a common understanding of the state and value of the arts in Canada
- » To enhance the awareness and resourcing of the arts in Canada
- » To collaborate for the development of strategies and best practices to strengthen the sector and its constituents

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Summary of 2017 Summit Discussions

The 20th anniversary of the Canadian Arts Summit attracted a record attendance of 180 invited arts leaders to Charlottetown, PEI from May 12-15. Hosted by Business for the Arts in partnership with Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity and Confederation Centre of the Arts, [CultureNEXT](#) convened a pan-Canadian delegation of influential creative leaders to engage in a timely conversation about Canada's future.

Speakers from within and outside of Canada's borders charged the discussions with forward thinking perspectives around key themes including the relationship between art and digital technologies, the cross-pollination of art forms and cultural perspectives, the evolving relationship between Canada and

Indigenous Nations and the creation of an inclusive society.

Internationally acclaimed theatre artist and keynote speaker Robert Lepage offered advice and strategies for exploring the intersection of art and technology in order to create powerful shared experiences (see article



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on pages 6-7). LA-based Ed Lantz of Vortex Media impressed us with his 360-degree performing arts ‘domes’ that use technology to create fully immersive, interactive experiences “without the need for headsets”. UK National Theatre’s Dominic Bilkey spoke of the ways Virtual and Augmented Reality technology can enhance dramatic storytelling – allowing the audience to stand in the shoes of the artist. He highlighted the need to equip our current arts institutions’ buildings to adapt to tech opportunities for arts production. Kevin Cunningham of 3LD invited us to imagine VR as a prosthetic extension of the nervous system. To innovate, he pointed to the need for better translation between modes of expression. How do artists understand the potential applications of a particular technology and how do technology

developers understand artistic creation practice? David Maggs, artist and researcher at UBC, asked us to consider decoupling content development from tech development. “Can we stabilize a tech platform long enough to fully exploit its imaginative opportunity before the technology evolves?”

In an interview with CBC Spark Host Nora Young, Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly reminded us of the important role that the arts and culture sector plays in an evolving digital world. “In a context of automation and mass creation, there’s no machine that can replace creative thinking.” She went on to advocate the important role of the cultural sector in promoting Canada’s inclusive social contract in the context of a growing immigrant population – the highest in the OECD.

Videos of presentations and panels can be found at <http://www.canadianartsummit.com/media>



Robert Lepage: Highlights of Keynote Address

BREAKING NEW GROUND:

At the Intersection of Art and Technology

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THE LIBRARY AT NIGHT

Known for his high tech productions in opera, theatre, circus and large scale projections, Robert Lepage prefaces his comments by insisting he knows nothing about how technology works. This, he says, is fine as it allows for a more poetic point of view. “Artistically, I don’t get involved in the technical aspects ... it’s another language and I trust the people who do it, and they do it well.” For the next hour, as he expands upon the intersection of art and technology, it becomes very clear that what makes his work so powerful is that technology is in the service of art. So much so, that it has to race to catch up with the artistic vision.

“Artists have to be very disciplined to not forget the artistic project: the idea is to see what poetry is within the new tool that you’re working with.” He emphasizes that he doesn’t start with the intention to use a particular technology, as “these developments just show up as we’re working on the different projects ... but I try to make space for these things to happen, for these tools to be brought in.”

He says three things are needed for technology to be used successfully in an artistic project: physical space,

mental space, and time. A repurposed 19th century fire hall in Quebec City, La Caserne, serves his company Ex Machina as a laboratory for their projects in development. “It’s not so much the room itself, but how it’s operated and who’s there – who the technicians and the collaborators are. It’s like a matrix, an incubator. If you have an idea, you bring it, and there are people and resources around to try to turn your idea in every which way and see if it needs to bring in special technologies or make prototypes.”

As for mental space, large projects are usually commissioned two or three years in advance, so the “guillotine of opening night” is not always looming as you try something new. Also, six or seven projects are in development concurrently, with cycles of intensive two week periods focused on a particular production. An idea or solution that was developed and rejected in one context may prove useful in another.

Having enough time to let ideas develop, along with the creation or evolution of the technology that will bring them to life, is crucial. Robert contrasts having eight consecutive weeks scheduled for a project to

having those eight weeks spread over two years. When you have worked intensively on a project for a week and go back to it four months later, you're not recommencing at week two but much further along in the process. Their projects are interrelated and "something in the back of your brain has been rendering all of the information of the first week."

Technology also needs time to evolve, and the artist's challenge "is to find projects that are bold enough and crazy enough and visionary enough to force the technology to catch up with you. If you do that, chances are that you'll be creating a new language and broadening the spectrum of the narrative vocabulary."

In talking about productions such as his *The Night at the Library* which use virtual reality, he notes, "One of the problems with these technologies is that they isolate you. Performing arts is about communion, about gathering people in a room, about sharing as an audience the same message, the same story, the same artistic or poetic experience."

He talks about how important it is to get feedback from a live audience during the creative process when you are trying to marry vocabularies and disciplines that haven't been joined before. Robert observes that performing arts audiences are incredibly well-trained narratively (by television, cinema, MTV, etc.) and they can find theatre, for example, boring if they reach the end of the scene before the performance does. Because the technological tools used in the performing arts world are starting to resemble those used in the film or video world, audiences are starting to expect the occasional close-up or view of what is actually happening.

"I'm not saying that we have to do what the audience wants. We also have to educate the audience. But you have to have an ear for them: you have to understand how the audience perceives the stagecraft, the

storytelling. We have to adapt, we have to be aware that it's not just technology that is changing: it's the language that technology brings with it that is changing."

"I think that over time we've developed a way at Ex Machina of trying to make the audience feel more intelligent, more creative, not giving all of the answers, not acting as people who know it all."



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Summary of summit discussions continued from page 5...

Conversations about advancing recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) begun with Banff Centre's Indigenous Leadership Director Brian Calliou who invited delegates to think about the TRC as "another chance to get the relationship between Indigenous Nations and Canada right."

Founder and Executive Director of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation Mike DeGagné's resonant keynote address garnered a standing ovation from Summit delegates. He provided context about the evolution of Canada's relationship with Indigenous Nations including the intent of treaty agreements and the eventual oppression, abuse and loss of identity of Indigenous people. Through the Residential Schools System, new language, religious practice and cultural traditions were introduced and enforced. He invited us to understand how these first acts of violence created ripples of family and community violence, resulting in the over representation of Aboriginal people in Canada's prisons, social systems and youth suicide rates.

Summit delegates were invited to read the 94 TRC Calls to Action – 92 of which are about systemic change. DeGagné asked us to consider these calls to action

through the lens of the artist – "to pretend the TRC commissioners were a sculptor, a poet and a painter." To achieve systemic change, DeGagné advocates for a creative interpretation of the commission – "If we can inspire people, we can change hearts and minds." He invited delegates to make commitments to action that are "concrete, walking alongside Indigenous colleagues for mutual benefit."

In a moment of extraordinary leadership, over 100 commitments to action were made and recorded by Summit delegates, signaling an intention to actively and personally steward reconciliation from among a group of influential change-makers within the cultural sector.

- » "I will prioritize the hiring of Indigenous curators/programmers in sustainable, long-term positions."
- » "I will ensure representation on governance bodies. I will include Indigenous artists in leadership and advisory roles. I will program Indigenous led work."
- » "I will share more info on truth and reconciliation process on social media. I will find online the book 'Speaking the Truth'. I will engage more with First Nations artists in my artistic curation."
- » "I will invite Indigenous artists, thinkers, knowledge



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keepers and others to tell us what they want how they want to tell their stories, engage with the audiences. And provide the means and the stage/forum on which to express/performance those.”

- » “I will visit an Aboriginal community.”
- » “I will commit to leaning into the very difficult conversations and strengthening my ability to engage in hard conversations.”

Strategies for meaningful inclusion at the artistic, organizational and board levels of our cultural institutions were highlighted by Jenny Koons, Co-Curator, ThisGen (US), Madani Younis, Artistic Director, Bush Theatre (UK) and Tom Finkelpearl, NYC Culture Commissioner (US). Finkelpearl shared American data that reveals significant representational gaps at all levels of the institution, highlighting trends of entrenched privilege and inequity. He shared strategies for leadership development that focus on targeting resources where high levels of diversity are already present. He also advocates revising hiring practices to ensure a diverse group of candidates are present in final selection processes. Reconstituting our institutional leadership by strategically embracing perspectives, expertise and experiences that differ from that of current and

typical leaders will have a tremendous impact on how we relate to our communities and audiences. Koons advocates, “focusing on ‘next gen’ defers responsibility for equity in arts leadership and reinforces power structures. We need to give today’s diverse leadership opportunities to take action. They will bring new ideas, new audiences and new expertise.”

The event closed with a symbolic democratization of the space and conversation, where we shifted our orientation toward the centre, in order to sit together around the “dinner table” and talk candidly about our challenges and strategies for change. As one delegate remarked: “This facilitation format taps into the immense knowledge in the room, rather than only from expertise on stage.”

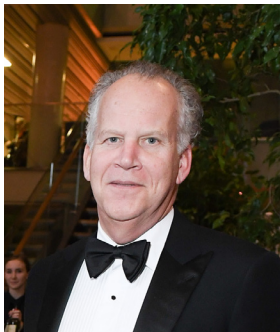
Final reflections were offered jointly by Saskatchewan’s Wanuskewin Heritage Park Curator Felicia Gay-McCallum, and incoming Director of Indigenous Arts at Banff Centre, Renelta Arluk who reminded us that we are all gatekeepers within a sphere of influence that impacts our organization and our community. They ask us, “To achieve the change we all want, what are you willing to sacrifice?”



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Culture Track Canada Launches at the Summit!

We are delighted to announce the launch of Canada's first Culture Track study! We are able to launch the project this year in large part thanks to our 2015 Chair, David Binet, under whose leadership the project became a reality. We would like



to express our gratitude to so many of you who attended the Summit this year. The financial contributions of your organizations, in addition to research funds contributed by Business for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the Canadian Arts

Summit reserves, made the 2017 launch possible. Many thanks to all those who championed the project and made it a reality. This project was truly driven by the cultural sector, with voices of support from large institutions and small.

The Culture Track Canada study will provide an unparalleled opportunity to understand what Canadian audiences want and need. It will also arm businesses, government agencies and cultural institutions with

specific, actionable data that will accelerate and inform strategic decision-making.

Culture Track Canada arrives at a pivotal moment for cultural organizations in Canada. Audience behaviours and expectations are changing rapidly, driven by ever-multiplying and diversifying options for spending leisure time, and by technological developments that are fundamentally altering the way we interface with our world. With this study we will be able to better understand how audiences interact with the arts, how they would like to engage with the arts, and what the barriers are. This will allow us to strategically position ourselves for the future and ensure the vitality and enduring growth of cultural institutions.

The project is being led by Business for the Arts, with research conducted by Canada's Nanos Research, and analysis by New York based La Placa Cohen. The La Placa Cohen team and Nik Nanos attended this year's Summit to present how the study will roll out in Canada over the next year. They also wanted to seek your input into the development of the survey instrument itself, to ensure that it is reflective of the Canadian context.



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