



# CURATORIAL MANDATE 2021

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The GPAG Board of Directors delegated a sub-committee to research and review how the Gallery curates art.

This committee recommended a series of incremental changes and experiments to improve administration efficiency and enhance the curatorial value and quality of Gallery programming.

The briefing below surveys the background, rationale and the suggested steps for following a clear and forward **CURATORIAL ACTION PLAN**.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2015 the GPAG Board of Directors performed a governance and strategic planning exercise to address the challenge of how to organize finite volunteer and capital resources in the face of infinite lines of business to manage.

To reduce the chaos of administration, simplify the Board's agenda, and bring some balance to the eternal conflict between business and art, the Board unanimously agreed to shift to a governance model that would delegate all art management – the decision making over all of the Gallery's "creative" side of Gallery administration - to a specialized sub-committee.

Complementing this plan was an initiative to expand the Gallery organization by embracing diversity (in all its forms), improve how we engage and communicate with the community, broaden our organization's network and skillset through volunteer and board recruitment, and support a clear delegation of authority for the Gallery Manager to run the day-to-day operations of the Gallery.

The Gallery recruited Board members Giorgio Magnanensi (artistic director of Vancouver New Music and Laboratorio), Greg Bellerby (retired curator for the public art gallery at Emily Carr University of Art & Design), and Kristjanna Gunnars (University of Alberta professor emeritus) to advise the Gallery on how to enhance the selection and presentation of art exhibitions and attract funding from provincial and federal art councils. A "curatorial task force" was formed to review Gallery practices and make suggestions for improving the curation of exhibitions. This task force worked on drafting a number of suggested improvements to expand the scope and impact of the Gallery's presentation of art.

In the midst of a number of subsequent administration challenges, some of these ideas were presented and adopted by the Board and others that were in earlier phases of development were not.

In the fall of 2020 a new "Creative Committee" formed (with Board members Larry Popowich & Carol Doyle, past president Stewart Stinson, volunteer curator Matthew Talbot-Kelly and Gallery Manager Christina Symons).

This Committee has now reviewed the collected material on this subject, drafted Committee Terms of Reference, and prepared this review and recommendations for further action and approval.

## A BRIEF SURVEY OF CURATION

The history of art, and its curation in the broadest sense, has many specific determinants. The economic and political context, environmental circumstances, the date, the place, the dominant media, and much more, all contribute to the varied faceting of this human activity of making art and showing it.

The Curation of art strives to achieve the following:

- presentation, demonstration and communication of art
- preservation of art pieces, documentation of exhibitions
- selection of new work to be exhibited and/ or acquired
- connection to and critique of art history
- study of art and its practices
- research of the methods of curation
- consideration of the public experience of art
- articulation of the connections between art works
- emphasis of the non-commercial dimension of art
- validation of the intellectual and cultural necessity of art
- enabling, catalyzing and facilitation of artists' work
- sponsoring contemporary art practices
- advocacy of marginalized "voices"
- foregrounding the contribution to an art historical discourse
- creating an environment conducive of a public dialogue
- maintain the benefit of art to the community in its diversity
- develop a dialogue between the visual and other modalities; between art and other discourses
- foster a connection to other galleries, museums, and arts organizations
- function in an activist role regarding the social, political, environmental and economic context of the Gallery as an institution

The use of the title of "curator" or "curatorial committee" implies a high level of expertise and professionalism.

Sometimes a curator conceives of, produces and mounts an exhibition by him/herself. Other times a curator is like a manager; someone who oversees the process of acquiring and mounting an exhibit by liaising with artists, Gallery management and other curators. Proper curation work can be an intensive task involving a lot of research, interactivity with others, and production management.

## **PAST/PRESENT CURATION AT GPAG**

GPAG currently presents art exhibitions selected from an annual open submission call, along with select invitational exhibitions that are discussed and approved by the Board of Directors. Exhibitions selected from the submission call are determined by a curatorial jury of six members (two Board members, two artist members, and two regular members). Jury formation is intended to capture a wide representation of community perspectives. A Board of Director jury member then volunteers to draft a schedule, in consultation with the Gallery Manager. A final schedule of exhibitions is then approved by the Board.

Curatorial presentation work for most GPAG presentations is performed by the exhibiting artist or group. Installation quality and community engagement is dependent on the curatorial and community engagement of the artists involved. The wording of the Gallery's existing Exhibition Policy restricts the development of the complete curatorial process as described above.

While GPAG exhibition schedules selected by the current method are generally received with positive reviews, it's become apparent that the diversity of exhibitions is restricted to the diversity of submissions. GPAG's programs have served the community well so far and have produced many excellent exhibits. Many people are happy with things as they are. Efforts in promoting the Gallery as a welcoming place that embraces all perspectives has been particularly well received by the community. GPAG's programs in support of Indigenous artists have proven to be particularly impactful.

A noted disadvantage of the current annual intake of submissions is the restriction this causes to the Gallery's ability to respond to new ideas, opportunities and other developments that may come up throughout a year. The work of preparing an entire year's schedule, along with getting all of the sponsorships at once, is an enormous administrative undertaking. The current curatorial system often involves mixed communications over responsibilities and recognition.

A review of the curatorial programs of other public art galleries suggests that GPAG's method of annual scheduling and promotion is not standard for galleries. Governing board of directors usually do not play an active part in the art selection/curation process. The research indicates that there are numerous other effective models for collecting submissions from artists and community members, along with alternative strategies for planning impactful exhibition schedules.

The Gallery's recent achievements in expanding the exhibition calendar to include as many artists as possible has now created a rather large and cumbersome schedule to implement with the Gallery's limited resources. The Gallery is now confronted with an alternative option of adjusting the organization's focus from the highest quantity of exhibitions to the highest quality of exhibitions.

## **FUTURE CURATION AT GPAG**

All evidence suggests that exploring the wider world of art curation - beyond our local viewpoint and community input - will greatly enrich and complement a broader Gallery plan for taking an active leadership role in researching and presenting exhibitions of contemporary art that engage and educate the public and raise the professional profile of the Gallery.

The committee recommends the adoption of an ambitious **CURATORIAL ACTION PLAN** as a steady series of incremental steps and changes that the Gallery can take - immediate, medium and long term action points - to enhance art curation at GPAG and inform and complement future Gallery strategic planning.

**ACTION: With the approved motion of support from the Board of Directors, the GPAG Curatorial Committee can be delegated the authority to proceed with implementing this plan.**

In addition to regular reporting to the Board, the Curatorial Committee and the Board of Directors will work together to review the effectiveness of plan implementation after one year.

Action point timing may vary and will likely be dependent on the progress of grant applications and partnership opportunities that unfold during implementation.

# CURATORIAL ACTION PLAN

## 1. IMMEDIATE ACTION

- Eliminate the policy and contract requirement that specifies that artists must pay a membership fee. This requirement makes the Gallery ineligible for provincial and federal art council grant funding. **Accomplished in 2019.**
- Cancel GPAG's automatic 30% commission fee on sales of exhibition art, and replace it with an invitation for exhibiting artists to consider a donation to GPAG in support of public art. Charging artists a commission makes the Gallery ineligible for provincial and federal art council grant funding. **Accomplished in 2019.**
- Pay a fee to exhibiting artists. Paying artists an exhibition fee is an eligibility requirement to apply for provincial and federal art council grant funding. **Accomplished in 2019.**
- Form and delegate a sub-committee to oversee the development and presentation of exhibitions and public programs.
- Establish a Curator Position (Draft job description attached here for reference as appendix A). **Concept draft established in 2020 with further development work required.**
- Develop Curatorial Committee Terms of Reference for Board Approval. **Attached here for Board approval as Appendix B.**
- Revise and adopt the Gallery's Exhibition Policy to articulate a curatorial mandate for promoting diversity, local & extrinsic exhibition opportunities, Indigenous representation, and innovative high quality contemporary art curation. **A new Exhibition Policy is drafted and attached as Appendix C.**
- Include a member with a perspective from outside of the local community in the curatorial jury selecting 2022 exhibitions.
- Create a 2022 exhibition planning calendar that features the best of both artist submissions received with select curatorial experiments designed to explore alternative scheduling options and methods of exhibition presentation.
- Recruit and approve additional members to complement the skillset and diversity of the Curatorial Committee (as directed by the attached Curatorial Committee Terms of Reference).
- Draft and implement detailed guidelines to ensure consistency of exhibition installation and graphic design standards.

Investigate the advantages of GPAG membership in the Canadian Museums Association (a professional organization founded to support institutions presenting curatorial programs). **Now in process.**

## **2. MEDIUM TERM ACTION (1 - 2 YEARS)**

Apply and receive provincial and federal art council funding for grant projects that support the Gallery's strategic planning objectives. **The first BC Arts Council project has been awarded and a second project application is now pending.**

Research, find and propose to the Board high quality, important and engaging exhibitions for future invitational exhibitions.

Find funding for a permanent paid Gallery Curator position and clarify process and terms of hiring.

Create an annual ongoing program that is specific to supporting contemporary expressions of Indigenous art.

Develop an acquisitions/collections policy to manage the existing permanent collection and future donations of works of art.

Develop stronger creative relationships with exhibiting artists by:

Delegating the Gallery Curator role of liaising and soliciting participation from artists from inside and outside of the community to present at the Gallery;

Reducing the dependency of Gallery programming on the results of open submission calls by encouraging artists in the local community to inform the Gallery of their art-practice activities;

Interacting with artists, guest curators, and institutions in a systematized way to ensure that the selection and presentation of art works is of the highest quality and complements the Gallery's curatorial mandate; and

Encouraging prospective exhibition artists to use off-site venues to create GPAG partnered satellite exhibitions.

Develop the creative relationship between the Gallery and other art institutions (museum/galleries/schools/etc) both on and off the Sunshine Coast, supporting local offsite exhibition development, touring exhibitions or other programs and events to complement the Gallery's curatorial mandate. **GPAG is partnering with the Audain Art Museum/Audain Foundation for an exhibition in July 2021.**

Develop innovative contemporary modes of exhibiting art works and practices including sound, digital arts, performance art and other media.

- Formulate a process for the digital documentation of exhibitions to allow for enhanced on-line presentation and archiving of exhibition work.
- Develop a method of critique for the Gallery to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the annual exhibition program.

### **3. LONG TERM ACTION (3 + years)**

- Establish an “Events Committee” to facilitate on-going public engagements of the highest quality.
- Explore the development of an artist residency program.
- Explore the long term need and development for specialized delegated curatorial sub-roles, such as:
  - Curator of Content: A specialist curator tasked with the research, selection and interpretation of art and artists’ works (including verifying the accuracy of information included in presented in exhibits), creating/mounting specific exhibitions and preparing a professional exhibition catalogue.
  - Curator of Collections: A specialist curator tasked to preserve and protect the Gallery’s permanent collection, maintain a detailed catalogue of the collection, oversee any conservation issues and (in conjunction with other Gallery exhibition planning) mount an exhibit of the Gallery collection.
  - Curator of Technology: A specialist curator to oversee GPAG’s move toward a more digital and technological environment and facilitate interdisciplinary possibilities emerging through technology (including video, virtual reality, augmented reality, sound, digitally interactive art installations, and other initiatives involving technological specialization) and other art forms and broader engagements outside of art (such as politics, economics, religion, society).
- Use funding opportunities to sponsor artists to create specific works to complement the Gallery’s curatorial mandate.

## APPENDIX A

# CURATOR JOB DESCRIPTION (DRAFT)

- Initiate, conceive of, research, design and plan exhibitions, as directed by the GPAG Curatorial Committee;
- Apply for exhibition and/or gallery public funding;
- Work with the Gallery Manager to coordinate art exhibitions & events, including calls for artists submissions, artist contracts, marketing, and installation;
- Lead selection juries;
- Prepare texts on exhibitions, works and artists;
- Plan gallery lectures and artist talks;
- Develop collection policies; and
- Research and interpret artworks and/or exhibitions.

# GPAG CURATORIAL COMMITTEE

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### ROLE

The role of the Curatorial Committee is to work together to advise the Board on all matters relating to the presentation of art, including art exhibition, curation, collection and art related grant projects & program planning.

### RESPONSIBILITIES

The Creative Committee is responsible for:

- Developing and directing a curatorial vision & mandate;
- Planning calls for artist submissions;
- Selection of an annual curatorial jury;
- Preparation of an annual exhibition schedule for Board approval;
- Working with exhibiting artists, Curator and Gallery Manager to ensure that each exhibition maintains presentation standards;
- Developing ideas and implementing plans for invitational exhibitions;
- Developing a collections policy to preserve the existing permanent collection and advise/inform future acquisitions;
- Advising the organization on other curatorial matters, as requested by the Board and Gallery Manager; and
- Acting as representatives of the Gallery, communicating the Gallery's mission, vision and values.

**The Board of Directors is responsible for:** supporting Curatorial Committee decisions and recommendations and, when necessary, raise any potential concerns or conflicts in relation to the delivery of the GPAG strategic plan and organizational vision, mandate and values.

## **MEMBERSHIP & DECISION MAKING**

The Committee will consist of one or two board members (appointed by the GPAG Board), the Gallery Curator, and two to three members selected for their perspectives on developing the curatorial action plan. The Committee will nominate members and, as per GPAG bylaws, sub-committee membership is to be approved by the Board of Directors.

The Gallery Manager will be included in all committee correspondence and is invited to participate at each meeting as a non-voting member as scheduling and hours allow.

It is the objective of the Committee to reach all decisions by consensus. In the event that consensus cannot be reached, at least a  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority vote is required to pass a proposal.

The committee will make some decisions through moderated discussion by e-mail.

## **CHAIR**

Meetings will be chaired by a Curatorial Committee Board of Director member.

## **FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS & MANNER OF CALL**

The committee will meet around 8 – 10 times a year, with additional meetings as required (as determined by the Curator, Gallery Manager and Board of Directors).

## **QUORUM**

Committee decisions require a quorum of  $\frac{2}{3}$  of Committee voting members to be present.

## **REPORTING**

The Committee reports to the GPAG Board of Directors. The committee will prepare a summary of decisions and action items following each meeting. Committee board members will present oral updates at regular board meetings and written reports when available. The committee will prepare a written report for the Gallery's Annual Report to membership.

## APPENDIX C

# GPAG EXHIBITION POLICY (REVISION 2021 DRAFT)

The **Curatorial Mandate** of the Gibsons Public Art Gallery is to present art that is:

### A.) DIVERSE

GPAG is committed to exhibiting a diversity of art forms, genres, subjects and artist backgrounds.

### B.) LOCAL & EXTRINSIC

GPAG programming endeavours to balance the exhibition needs of the local creative community with select exhibitions designed to challenge, engage and inspire Gallery visitors.

### C.) PRO-INDIGENOUS

GPAG supports Indigenous art with an annual ongoing program that is specific to supporting the contemporary creative work of Indigenous people.

### D.) HIGH QUALITY

GPAG aims to present the leading edge of art production and art curation, prioritizing quality & innovation, public engagement, experimental art practices, and programs that educate and enlighten the public's experiences with contemporary art.

**Contemporary art** is understood to be art that:

- investigates the artist's and viewer's conception of the world;
- investigates fundamental aspects of our condition in and knowledge of the world;
- investigates cultural institutions, social and political systems and economic factors that give shape and character to art's existence;
- examines the cultural contexts and conditions in which art achieves meaning;
- probes into the structure of perception, thought and psychic process; destabilizes accepted and traditional meaning;
- reveals the fundamental nature of its medium; and
- requires self-awareness, judgment and imagination from both the artist and the viewer.

(from Walter Klepac in SIGHTLINES)

## **The GALLERY policies are:**

### **I. EXHIBITIONS**

1. The intent of all Gallery exhibition planning is to enhance public engagement with art and support the Gallery's role as a community asset. The Gallery will offer a minimum of 8 exhibitions annually that engage the entire exhibition space in suitable ways and to complement exhibitions with educational programming, as applicable.
2. Gallery exhibition scheduling is determined by the GPAG Curatorial Committee, a sub-committee delegated by the GPAG Board of Directors. Programming includes invitational exhibitions developed by the Gallery Curator and Curatorial Committee, in conjunction with open submission calls.
3. Open submission calls are reviewed and evaluated by a curatorial jury of six members: two Board members, two artist members, and two specialists from within or outside the community selected to enhance Gallery curation with a diversity of perspectives. The jury process is facilitated by the Gallery Curator.
4. GPAG exhibitions are presented through a varied use of gallery spaces including the full Gallery, different configurations of the Main Gallery and Eve Smart Gallery spaces, Multi-purpose/Board Room, and exterior spaces of the Gallery building and property.
5. As financing allows, the Gallery will offer an honorarium exhibition fee to exhibiting artists in solo and select group exhibitions.

### **II. APPLICATION PROCESS**

1. Artists are invited to inform the Gallery about their artistic practice and respond to the Gallery's open submission calls.
2. All artists are eligible to apply to exhibit at GPAG. The Gallery may restrict applications from artists who have participated in a recent GPAG solo or group exhibition. Artists who have participated in a GPAG solo or group exhibition in the past 5 years are advised to contact the Gallery to determine eligibility.
3. Submissions are welcomed from contemporary artists at large and are not limited to Sunshine Coast artists.
4. Materials submitted by the artist must conform to the Gallery's submission guidelines and application form in current use.

### **III. INSTALLATION**

The installation, dismantling, and promotion of exhibitions will be carried out under the supervision of a representative of the Gallery.

1. Travel costs for artists and shipping costs of art to and from the Gallery are the responsibility of the artist.
2. A representative of the Gallery will coordinate installation and curation details with exhibiting artists to ensure presentations meet Gallery standards. Installation instructions, if applicable, will be provided by the artist to the Gallery. Any changes to the space by an artist must be approved by the Gallery. All work must be delivered to the Gallery ready to hang/display. The Gallery may require the artist to be present at the mounting of the exhibition.
3. Any electronic equipment required for the display of the exhibition, which exceeds what the Gallery is able to offer at that time, will be the responsibility of the artist.
4. The artist will provide the Gallery with a biography, a CV, an artist statement and a list of the works to be displayed, indicating those offered for sale with prices and those listed not for sale.
5. The Gallery will provide and assist with the preparation of exhibition labels.
6. To facilitate the setup of the Gallery's next exhibition, artists must arrange for the removal and pickup of their works from the Gallery at the immediate closing of their exhibition.

### **IV. EXHIBITION PROMOTION**

1. The artist will provide high resolution print quality digital photos for the Gallery's promotional use.
2. The Gallery will produce promotional graphics and distribute an exhibition announcement to media and throughout the local community.
3. Exhibition invitations and any related promotional material will be emailed to the Gallery's membership and mailing list.
4. The Gallery encourages the artist to participate in exhibition programming, such as an opening reception, artist talk, curatorial tour or workshop.
5. The Gallery welcomes collaborations with artists who are able to use their own social and marketing networks to boost exhibition attendance.

## **V. EXHIBITION SALES**

1. GPAG exhibitions are selected based on artistic quality, not commercial value.
2. GPAG will accept payment on behalf of the artist for any artworks sold during an exhibition. The gallery does not take a commission on exhibition sales. In lieu of a sales commission, the Gallery invites all artists to donate a portion of any sales revenue towards the Gallery's non-profit charitable work for public art.
3. Artworks sold may not be removed before the end of an exhibition unless agreed upon by the artist and the Gallery.

## **VI. EXHIBITION SECURITY**

1. The gallery is secured by a monitored alarm system when the premises are vacated.
2. Insurance for art will be the responsibility of the artist while works are on gallery premises.