

## Survey Report on University Art Galleries November 2013

### **Executive Summary**

The 2013 Survey Report on University Art Galleries<sup>1</sup> represents an update and expansion of the 2005/6 UCAGAC membership survey (which provided a first-ever detailed baseline picture of the structures, circumstances and activities of Canadian university art galleries.) As with the initial survey, its purpose is to compile and analyse data:

- to better understand the strengths and challenges in this sector of the Canadian community of art galleries;
- to lobby effectively for appropriate support; and
- to address issues of mutual concern.

In addition, this survey tracks developments from the original baseline, offering longitudinal comparisons that have the potential for increasing accuracy through future surveys.

This survey update was proposed in 2011 by then UCAGAC President Diana Nemiroff and Vice-President Peter Dykhuis, who worked with university art gallery Directors Janet Brooke, Vicky Chainey Gagnon and Ingrid Jenkner to expand the original survey questionnaire. The new questionnaire was approved for electronic distribution to the membership at the November 2011 UCAGAC meeting in Ottawa, and distributed early in 2012. Completed surveys were tabulated by Peter Dykhuis and his office staff. Susan Gibson Garvey was commissioned to analyse and interpret the data, to make comparisons with the 2005/6 survey results, and to present the draft *Survey Report on University Art Galleries 2013* for discussion at their November 2013 meeting in Ottawa. She was then asked to provide an Executive Summary for public release and was assisted in this task by Ingrid Jenkner.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the *Survey Report on University Art Galleries, November 2013*. Further details of the report may be requested by contacting the current UCAGAC President, Peter Dykhuis, at <peter.dykhuis@dal.ca>

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the UCAGAC survey, the terms *university art gallery* and *university art museum* are considered synonymous.

## **Comprehensiveness**

*THE SURVEY SAMPLE WAS REPRESENTATIVE AND WIDE-RANGING.  
OF THE 29 GALLERIES RESPONDING, 23 ALSO RESPONDED TO THE 2005/6 SURVEY.*

All UCAGAC member organizations undertake professionally organized exhibition programs that serve the general public as well as the university community. The membership does not include student-run university art galleries, nor those that exhibit only student or faculty work. Respondents totaled 70% of UCAGAC's overall membership (29 out of a potential 41), including a representative range of small, medium and large galleries, located in every province except PEI, where there is no active university art gallery.

## **History, Growth and Mission**

*THE HISTORY AND GROWTH OF UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES IN CANADA IS SIMILAR TO NON-UNIVERSITY PUBLIC ART GALLERIES.  
UNIQUELY AMONG PUBLIC ART GALLERIES, UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES SERVE BOTH CAMPUS AND OFF-CAMPUS COMMUNITIES.*

The oldest university art gallery in Canada is the Owens Art Gallery (Mount Allison University) established in 1895 (The National Gallery of Canada was established in 1882). However, the majority (76%) of university art galleries are less than 50 years old. Some of these galleries serve their communities as the only public art gallery in their region. Although established or adopted under the aegis of a university or art college, all the galleries in this survey conduct museum-standard programs designed to serve the general public as well as the university community. This dual mandate often requires the gallery to offer a year-round program of exhibitions (to qualify for external funding), which 70% do. Several respondents commented on the challenges of balancing the needs of campus and off-campus publics, and of clarifying the role of the gallery in the university's mission.

## **Governance, Reporting Structures and Freedom to Act**

*WHILE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES ARE ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE TO THEIR UNIVERSITY'S BOARDS, REPORTING THROUGH UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS, THEY MAINTAIN AUTONOMY IN THEIR MUSEOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS.*

83% of university art galleries have their own Advisory Committees comprising representatives from both campus and off-campus communities. Fewer than 38% have been the subjects of external, administrative or departmental reviews. Over 50% now have a publicly available strategic plan, occasionally integrated with the university's but more often independent of it. More than half of university galleries report to Vice-Presidents, and most others report to Deans. Occasionally, directors who are cross-appointed to a Fine Arts Faculty report to a Dean/Chair of Fine Arts with regard to teaching and to senior administration with regard to the gallery. The current survey shows no pattern of advantages in one reporting structure over another, and also shows considerable variation in the reporting relationships between galleries and their host universities.

## **Programs**

*UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES CONTRIBUTE SUBSTANTIALLY TO THE EXPERIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING OF VISUAL ARTS IN CANADA THROUGH EXHIBITIONS, PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLIC OUTREACH/EDUCATION PROGRAMS.*

## **Exhibitions**

***UNIVERSITY GALLERIES GIVE PRIORITY TO THE WORK OF CONTEMPORARY PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS. IN THE SURVEY YEAR 18 UNIVERSITY GALLERIES GENERATED 30 TOURING EXHIBITIONS – A SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTION.***

All survey respondents present exhibitions of contemporary art in their annual programming; 59% also include at least one historical exhibition (compared to 81% in the previous survey); 83% also include exhibitions drawn from their permanent collections. Annual student, faculty and/or university community exhibitions may also be presented. At 254 (29 galleries reporting) the total average number of exhibitions is slightly less than that of six years ago (257, 27 galleries reporting), and the median for individual galleries has dropped from 11 to 9 exhibitions annually. In general, the presentation of borrowed (as opposed to organized in-house) exhibitions has declined from an annual total of 60 to 45. However, the number of touring exhibitions generated remains constant. Many of these involved collaborations with other institutions. The reduction in borrowed exhibitions and exhibitions of historical art merits further study. Comments from survey respondents suggest that reductions in national funding programs and national transport services may have contributed. Comments also suggest that university galleries are dedicating significant program resources to exploring alternative and innovative ways of involving their communities in the experience of contemporary art, such as artists' residencies, off-site installations, performance art, satellite exhibition spaces, web-works, and inter-departmental or community collaborations. Further study is needed to track and assess these developments.

## **Publications**

***AS CENTRES OF SCHOLARSHIP, UNIVERSITY GALLERIES DISSEMINATE THEIR RESEARCH PRIMARILY IN THE FORM OF PRINT AND ELECTRONIC EXHIBITION CATALOGUES. 64% OF RESPONDENTS ALSO COLLABORATED ON AT LEAST ONE PUBLICATION IN 2012/13.***

95% of respondents reported that they publish exhibition catalogues with scholarly essays, lists of works and illustrations. 80% also produce brochures containing informed commentary and/or interpretive guides. 45% also periodically publish permanent collection catalogues. In 2013 the median production of exhibition catalogues per gallery was 2 (66 in total); the median production of brochures was 3 (69 in total). This represents an overall increase in publishing activity of about 35% compared to six years ago. From time to time, galleries also publish monographs and essay collections, and contribute scholarly papers to academic journals. Many galleries reported increasing the efficacy of their publication programs through electronic publishing, collaborative ventures, and multiple distribution strategies.

## **Public Programming**

***THROUGH THEIR PUBLIC PROGRAMMING UNIVERSITY GALLERIES ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE OF VISUAL ART AND PROVIDE AN IMPORTANT INTERFACE BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES.***

All respondents report that they contextualize, promote and animate their exhibitions by offering opening receptions and artists' and curators' talks or tours. Most also offer educational tours to student and school groups, as well as lectures, panel discussions, occasional symposia, workshops and film programs. Most of these are offered free of charge to the entire community. Gallery spaces often also provide a venue for musical and literary presentations and other community cultural events. 50% of respondents say they promote their events and programs through mail-outs -- newsletters, calendars, invitations and posters -- but all respondents commented that they increasingly use their websites and social media for promotion, public engagement and feedback.

## **Size Does Not Matter**

*THE SURVEY FINDS NO CORRELATION BETWEEN A GALLERY'S FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES AND THE NUMBER OF EXHIBITIONS, PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS OFFERED.*

This finding substantiates the result of the previous survey. Obviously, no gallery can offer a viable program below a critical threshold of funding and staff. It is likely that university galleries' programming productivity varies according to the size and complexity of their facilities, permanent collection operations and staff teaching commitments, which can absorb significant human and financial resources.

## **Facilities**

*ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY OF UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES ARE LESS THAN 50 YEARS OLD, MANY FACILITIES NEED UPGRADING TO MEET CURRENT STANDARDS OF SECURITY, LIGHTING, CLIMATE CONTROL AND ACCESSIBLY, AS WELL AS KEEPING ELECTRONIC CAPABILITIES UPDATED.*

University gallery facilities vary widely in size and sophistication, from repurposed units in existing buildings to purpose-built structures with up-to-date technology. An individual gallery's available secure exhibition space ranges from 120 sq. m. to 725 sq. m., median: 325 sq. m. (similar to the last survey). Some galleries reported extending display options through satellite spaces and exterior screens and vitrines. Galleries face competing pressures and priorities within their universities when arguing for facilities upgrades. Only 31% of respondents reported that their gallery was included in their university's facilities renewal program, yet 51% reported a pressing need for upgrades.

## **Permanent Collections**

*UNIVERSITY GALLERIES CARE FOR A MAJOR PART OF THE NATION'S PATRIMONY IN THE VISUAL ARTS. IT IS INCREASINGLY CHALLENGING FOR GALLERIES TO STAFF AND MAINTAIN THEIR COLLECTIONS. DESPITE THE CHALLENGES, THE VAST MAJORITY OF GALLERIES CONTINUE TO BUILD, LEND AND EXHIBIT THEIR COLLECTIONS.*

Like all public art collections, university art gallery collections are held in trust for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations and are not considered to be disposable assets. 96.5% of respondents are responsible for managing and developing one or more permanent collections, and 83% are actively collecting. Reported collections range in size from a few hundred to more than 29,500 objects. With 26 galleries reporting, their combined permanent collection holdings total 142,214 objects valued conservatively at \$350 million. (Not all galleries disclose their collection's value; many collections have not recently been evaluated, and extrapolation to include all UCAGAC member holdings would put the total number of objects and their overall value considerably higher.) 72% of respondents manage an art gallery permanent collection that is separate from the university collection(s); the remainder provide varying custodial services for university collections.

## **Acquisitions and other policies**

Collecting policies and procedures guide acquisitions and prevent inappropriate accessions and de-accessions. 72% of respondents say all acquisitions are decided through some form of Acquisition Committee (compared to 67% in the previous survey). Where there is no committee, qualified professional staff (usually the gallery Director or Curator) make the final decision regarding acquisitions. In 2012/13, 65.5% of galleries reported Category "A" status under the Moveable Cultural Property Directorate (down from 74% in 2004/6 – the figure is subject to change due to an ongoing multi-year review of Category "A" galleries).

### ***Collections management and storage***

In a slight improvement over the last survey, half the galleries now employ at least one staff member (Collections Manager, Collections Curator, Registrar or equivalent) dedicated to managing the collection. Not all are full-time or permanent positions, however. In smaller galleries the Director/Curator and/or Technician are responsible for the collection in addition to their other duties. In the past and present surveys many respondents expressed the need for funds to hire qualified permanent staff to manage the collection and its associated programs. Most collections are stored in vaults in the art gallery complex or nearby in on-campus facilities; a few of the larger collections are also stored in facilities off-campus. Respondents continue to cite inadequate and/or overcrowded permanent collection storage facilities among their more prominent concerns.

### ***Collection use and display***

Only 17.5% of respondents have dedicated exhibition space for permanent collection display. However, 86% claim collection research and display as part of their mission, and 83% include temporary exhibitions curated from the collection in their regular programs. 86% of respondents place works from the collection in secure locations across the campus and 21% of respondents collect rental fees from such placements. Galleries also use their collections to train students in museology and to provide valuable primary sources for students of art history and other researchers. In addition to lending works to other institutions for temporary exhibition, many galleries also provide access to the collection electronically. More research is needed to assess these aspects of collection use, and to track innovative projects that enhance the use of this important resource.

## **Human Resources**

***UNIVERSITY GALLERIES REMAIN CHRONICALLY UNDER-STAFFED DESPITE MODEST IMPROVEMENTS IN STAFF COMPLEMENTS AND SALARIES.***

The 2005/6 survey found that over 50% of university art galleries employed two or fewer full-time staff members. Six years later, 39% employ two or fewer full-time staff members – a modest improvement. In addition, 52% of galleries employ between 1 and 3 part-time permanent staff. Galleries also rely on contract, casual and temporary staff, as well as students and volunteers. Citing ever-increasing workloads, several respondents commented on the need to convert temporary or contract professional staff to permanent salaried status with benefits. 72% of university galleries are led by someone with the formal title of Director/Curator (or a close variant), indicating their dual administrative and intellectual roles. 79% hold graduate degrees, of which 43% are PhDs. Compared to a median of \$73,000 in the 2005/6 survey, senior administrators now earn a median of \$87,000. The relatively higher salaries tend to be earned by senior administrators with some form of faculty equivalence and/or formal teaching requirement in addition to their other duties. As in the previous survey, only 24% report access to paid study leave. Many reported that such research time as they do have is increasingly squeezed by administrative and fund-raising pressures.

## **Teaching and Pedagogy**

***UNIVERSITY GALLERIES PROVIDE A RANGE OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS AND ALSO TRAIN FUTURE PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD OF GALLERY WORK. BALANCING THE CURATORIAL MISSION OF THE GALLERY WITH THE ACADEMIC MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY IS A CONTINUING CHALLENGE.***

More than two-thirds of respondent galleries are part of a university that offers Fine Art, Visual Arts and/or Art Historical and Critical Studies. 41% of Directors teach formal courses

(most often in Museum and Curatorial Studies, but also in Art History and Criticism, and Cultural Studies) either as part of their terms of employment, or as teaching faculty members. Directors who teach reported spending, at the median, 10% of their time on teaching and 2-20% in activities supporting their teaching roles. Other specialist gallery staff may also teach. While university galleries have always emphasized public education and opportunities for extra-curricular learning as a component of their mandates, their role in offering formal curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities for students shows signs of increasing in significance from the standpoint of university administrators. Besides formal teaching, Directors, and in some galleries senior staff, devote considerable effort to supervising and mentoring students, through thesis supervision/evaluation, internships and practica.

### **Entrance Fees and Attendance**

***FREE ADMISSION POLICIES MAXIMIZE ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES.***

Only one gallery in the survey charges entrance fees (from which students and faculty are exempted). In the other galleries, free admission makes it difficult to obtain accurate attendance figures, so most of the figures provided were guesstimates. Given this proviso, the average attendance of 18,000 was significantly higher than the 15,000 reported six years ago. University galleries generally value attendance numbers less than their municipal or provincial counterparts and defend their free admissions policy as a matter of principle.

### **Budgets, Funding and Fundraising**

***UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES RELY ON A BROAD AND DIVERSIFIED BASE OF SUPPORT.***

***MANY GALLERIES HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED THEIR FUND-RAISING AND GRANT-WRITING ACTIVITIES IN THE FACE OF INCREASING COSTS AND DECLINING SUPPORT FROM THEIR INSTITUTIONS.***

In the 2012/13 survey, total operating budgets (excluding capital, acquisition funds and in-kind services) range from under \$100,000 to \$1,550,000, with a median of \$470,000, as compared to the 2005/6 survey, which reported a range of under \$100,000 to \$1,300,000 and a median of \$300,000. A gallery-by-gallery comparison of those galleries that participated in both surveys showed budget increases in all but one.

#### ***Operating versus Programming***

As with the previous survey, this survey found no significant correlation between overall budgets and program budgets. Larger galleries tend to have larger salary and operational costs, but not necessarily larger program costs. Many galleries apply to a variety of funding sources for program assistance, so program budgets vary considerably from year to year.

#### ***Institutional support***

There was a wide range in the amount of support that galleries received from their host institutions, and no correlation between the degree of support and the size of the gallery's overall budget. Compared to the 2005/6 responses, more galleries are receiving support in the 25% - 75% range, but fewer in the 75% - 100% range. Most universities cover facilities costs, operating costs and full-time salaries, plus various in-kind services (e.g. security, cleaning, financial); few cover significant portions of program expenses, gallery permanent collection insurance or temporary, casual or contract staff specialists. Some respondents commented that institutional support has not kept pace with operating costs and salary increases, and periodic across-the-board cuts also affect the gallery, as universities struggle with ongoing deficits. Where institutional support stagnates or diminishes, galleries have had to become even more active in fund raising and grant writing.



### ***Other sources of operational (non-programming) support***

65.5% of respondents say they receive a portion of operational support from endowments or trusts specifically set up to support the gallery. 60% say they have been directly involved in fund-raising activities for the gallery and 48% work with the university Development offices (or equivalent) in planning fund-raising ventures, with varying degrees of success. Relatively few were able to access provincial (28%) or municipal (14%) operating funds. Although corporate support is not always easy to obtain, as university Development offices often control a gallery's access to corporations, five galleries reported success in this area. Many galleries also raise some income through memberships, donation boxes, retail sales and rentals.

### ***Grant-writing***

A notable development in gallery finances since the 2005/6 survey is the amount of income raised through federal, provincial and municipal grants. Over half the respondents stated they generated significantly more grant income than five years ago. 55% of university galleries now qualify for multi-year programming and operating grants from the Canada Council for the Arts (up from 37% in 2005/6). Those that do not have multi-year funding can still access individual Canada Council project grants. 90% of respondents receive some form of support from the Canada Council. Other Federal funding programs include Department of Canadian Heritage (DOCH) grants, especially the Museum Assistance Program (MAP), to which 48% of respondents apply (up from 25% in 2005/6); however, some have commented that the DOCH application process is discouraging and that MAP funding programs in particular have undergone a considerable narrowing of purpose and availability. On the other hand, 24% of respondents (up from 14% six years ago) say they can now access Social Sciences and Humanities (SSHRC) grants, as these grants have been expanded to include arts/cultural research. Respondents also apply for provincial and municipal project grants (not available in all jurisdictions), as well as federal, provincial and university funds to hire students and other temporary gallery workers. An important aspect of grant-writing is that, according to 72% of respondents, many grant funds remain under the control and discretion of the gallery rather than the university finance office and can sometimes roll over from year to year, adding much-needed flexibility to the gallery budget.

### ***Fund-raising comes at a cost***

Fund-raising and grant-writing activities take increasingly larger bites out of the professional time of gallery workers, particularly senior staff (the decrease in research time has already been noted under Human Resources). The support of volunteers, Advisory Committee members, donors and, most importantly, the university Development Office becomes crucial - yet also consumes staff time.

## **Future Directions**

***UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES RECOGNIZE THAT THEY WORK IN AN ERA OF RAPID CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY IN BOTH THE ACADEMIC AND ART WORLDS, AND MUST FACE THE CHALLENGES WITH COMMITMENT AND CREATIVITY.***

While most university art galleries consider themselves reasonably financially secure for now, 37% of Directors (52% in 2005/6) qualified their answers with anxieties over upcoming across-the-board cuts, potential staff burn-out, and lack of succession-planning. Long-term sustainability remains a major concern. In addition to their fundamental mission of curatorial research and display, university art galleries increasingly find they must balance many new demands arising from their complex mandates. As one Director puts it: "Our challenge is to fully position [our gallery] as an asset and one integrated with the university's goals, while maintaining our vital service to the wider public."