

University and College Art Galleries Association of Canada (UCAGAC) Survey Report on University Art Galleries June 2006

Executive Summary

Between October 2004 and March 2006, the University and College Art Galleries Association of Canada (UCAGAC), conducted a membership survey to provide a first-ever detailed baseline picture of the structures, circumstances and activities of Canadian university art galleries.¹ Its purpose was to compile and analyse data:

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

More broadly, the UCAGAC survey was conducted to correct the enduring misconception that Canadian university art galleries function differently, or less professionally, than their non-university counterparts.

Initiated by UCAGAC President Susan Gibson Garvey (Director/Curator, Dalhousie Art Gallery), the survey was conducted by means of an emailed questionnaire sent to the 40 UCAGAC member institutions (see appended list); results were analysed and tabulated by her and by Peter Dykhuis (Director, Anna Leonowens Gallery). The final *Survey Report on University Art Galleries* was distributed to UCAGAC members and discussed at their June 2006 meeting in Winnipeg.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the results of the *Survey Report*. A full copy of the *Survey Report* can be obtained from Susan Gibson Garvey at art.gallery@dal.ca

Comprehensiveness:

THE SURVEY SAMPLE WAS REPRESENTATIVE AND WIDE-RANGING.

All UCAGAC member organizations undertake professionally organized exhibition programs that serve the general public as well as the university community. The UCAGAC membership does not include student-run university art galleries, nor those that exhibit only student or faculty work. Respondents totalled 67.5% of UCAGACs overall membership (27 of 40 institutions), including a representative range of small,

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

medium and large galleries, located in every province excluding Prince Edward Island (where there is no active university art gallery).

History and Growth:

THE HISTORY AND GROWTH OF UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES IN CANADA IS SIMILAR TO NON-UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES.

Canada's oldest university art gallery is the Owens Art Gallery at Mount Allison University, Sackville NB, established 1895. Most university art galleries (80%) are less than 50 years old, and 30% were founded in the past 20 years. Many university art galleries were established in the mid-1960s and 70s, in the context of cultural expansion around Canada's centennial in 1967. Many university art galleries have undergone radical change since their establishment, moving for example from volunteer to professionally-run organizations, or from non-specific to purpose-built facilities. A number of university art galleries serve their communities as the only public art gallery in their region.

Governance, Reporting Structures and Freedom to Act:

WHILE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES REPORT TO THEIR UNIVERSITY'S BOARDS, THEY MAINTAIN AUTONOMY IN THEIR MUSEOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS, AND REPRESENT THEIR REGIONAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH ADVISORY BOARDS.

University art galleries are ultimately responsible to their university's Boards. Reporting structures vary considerably: over 50% of respondents report directly to a university President or Vice-President (usually a VP Academic); most others report to a Dean. There is no correlation between reporting structures and the percentage of direct financial support from the university, although galleries with larger overall operating budgets tend to report to VPs rather than Deans.

The majority also have some form of consultative Advisory Board representing the university and regional communities, charged with outreach and, in some cases, fundraising.

All respondents reported full autonomy over programming and acquisitions, guided by their own policies.

Connections with University Departments and Teaching:

UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES UNIQUELY PROVIDE A SIGNIFICANT AND SUBSTANTIAL TRAINING-GROUND FOR FUTURE PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD.

Around two-thirds of respondent galleries are part of a university that also has an Art Department (Fine Arts, Art History, Visual Arts), and one-third of all university gallery directors or curators hold formal cross-appointments to a relevant university department

(usually Fine Arts or Art History). While roughly 50% of respondents deliver university courses, formal teaching accounts for only 5-10% of their time. More importantly, whether cross-appointed or not, the majority of respondents reported devoting considerable time supervising and mentoring graduate and undergraduate students in art history and museum practice through research supervision, internships, and practica.

Staffing:

UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES SUFFER FROM CHRONIC UNDERSTAFFING.

The survey found that just over 50% of university art galleries had two or less full-time staff members; most also have a small number of part-time staff, as well as student assistants and volunteers. The largest full-time university art gallery staff in the survey is 12. The majority (94%) of respondents reported in-kind staffing assistance from their parent institutions in areas such as maintenance, security and development. Typically, salary and benefit costs account for over 50% of respondents' annual operating budgets.

Most respondents commented that severe understaffing at their galleries has led to stress and incapacity to adequately succession-plan. 70% of respondents reported working between 50 and 75 hours per week. They also identified over-dependence on contract, part-time and bursary grant employees as a threat to the continuity of best-practice standards, and long term care of collections and of program development.

80% of university art gallery directors hold a graduate degree, of which 23% hold a doctorate; their median annual compensation is \$73,000.

Programs:

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

Exhibitions: Virtually all respondents offer year-round public exhibition programs of curated exhibitions, including exhibitions of regional, national and international artists; most galleries also present exhibitions of historical work. The median number of exhibitions presented annually per gallery is 11; the total number among respondents in the survey year was 257 (197 organized in-house; 60 borrowed). University art galleries are significant organizers of touring exhibitions: 17 respondents organized a total of 30 touring exhibitions in the survey year, 8 of which toured internationally.

Publishing: As centers of scholarship, university art galleries regularly disseminate their research in the form of catalogues (both print and electronic): in the survey year, respondents published 87 exhibition catalogues. In addition, respondents reported publishing monographs, permanent collection catalogues, newsletters, and articles in academic journals.

Public programs: All respondents reported offering public programming, such as artists' and curators' talks, lectures, round-tables, and symposia; many respondents also reported offering film series, children's programming and public workshops. 77% of galleries sampled reported facilities rental or borrowing programs within their communities for such activities as receptions, lectures, book launchings and readings, concerts, community fundraisers and various society and professional meetings.

Attendance:

ATTENDANCE AT UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT PERCENTAGE OF CANADIAN ART GALLERY VISITATION.

The global annual attendance of the respondent institutions totaled 375,000 in the survey year. Extrapolated to the entire university art gallery community, the survey indicates that these institutions welcome roughly 600,000 visitors annually. Several respondents reported that a higher percentage of their annual visitation comes from outside their campuses. University art galleries typically charge no admission fees; among the handful that do, the fee is nominal, ranging from \$3.00 to \$5.00, with discounts or free admission for seniors and children.

Permanent Collections:

UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES CARE FOR A MAJOR PART OF THE NATION'S PATRIMONY IN THE VISUAL ARTS.

Virtually all university art galleries are responsible for managing and developing a permanent collection. Contemporary and historic works of art, with a significant emphasis on Canadian artists, make up the majority of these collections. Respondents reported combined holdings of about 133,000 objects, with an estimated total value around \$340,000,000. If these results are extrapolated to the full membership, total university art gallery holdings are probably closer to 200,000 objects, with a corresponding total value around \$500,000,000.

Collections management: University art galleries are aware that they hold their collections in trust for future generations of Canadians and take their responsibilities for managing, housing and making their collections available for research and public enjoyment very seriously. As a measure of their professional standards, the survey noted that 74% of the galleries responding have Category A designation as laid out in the Cultural Property Export and Import Act, while another 11% have Category B status. Nonetheless, budgetary pressures and ageing facilities have had an impact on collections management: fewer than half the galleries surveyed have a registrar or collections curator dedicated to managing the collection, and most do not have an in-house conservator, using contract conservators as needed. In addition, survey respondents emphasized the need for funds to upgrade and expand storage systems.

Acquisitions policies: University art galleries have collecting policies and procedures in place to guide acquisitions and prevent inappropriate donations or purchases. Of the survey respondents, 67% reported that all acquisitions were made through some form of External Acquisition Committee. Respondents also indicated that where there is no such committee in place, qualified professional staff (the gallery's Director or Curator) makes the final decision regarding acquisitions.

Permanent collection display: 25% of the sample have an exhibition space dedicated to permanent collection display, and most galleries schedule exhibitions from the permanent collection at least once a year as part of their regular exhibition schedule. A few devote up to half their annual exhibition program to exhibitions drawn from the collection. University galleries also use their collections as a resource to train graduate and undergraduate students in museology. Certain galleries have begun extending access to their collections by placing information and images on their websites where copyright considerations permit.

Facilities:

ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY OF UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES ARE LESS THAN 40 YEARS OLD, FACILITIES NEED UPGRADING TO MEET TODAY'S STRINGENT STANDARDS.

University galleries vary widely in size, from tiny (109 square metres) to substantial (7,533 square metres). The median size is 527 square metres.

74% of university gallery buildings are less than 40 years old, yet one third of respondents commented on the need for facilities' upgrading to meet today's standards of security, lighting and climate control and to provide the new technologies often needed for contemporary art installations. University art galleries face broad and competing pressures and priorities within their parent institutions when arguing for increased infrastructural dollars for upgrades.

Budgets, funding and fundraising:

TOTAL OPERATING BUDGETS (EXCLUDING CAPITAL AND ACQUISITIONS FUNDS AND IN-KIND SERVICES) RANGE FROM A LOW OF \$60,000 TO A HIGH OF \$1,300,000; MEDIAN IS \$300,000. UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES RELY ON A BROAD AND DIVERSIFIED BASE OF SUPPORT.

Budgets reported formed a nearly perfect bell curve: two of the galleries in the sample had very low budgets (under \$100,000) and three had very high budgets (\$1,000,000 and over). Of the remainder, 9 were in the mid-range, with budgets between \$275,000 and \$450,000, 7 were low (\$100,000 to \$250,000) and 6 were high (\$500,000 to \$900,000).

Operating versus Programming: The survey found no significant correlation between overall budgets and programming budgets. Many galleries receive only minimal programming funds from their universities and must apply for program assistance from

a variety of other sources. Program budgets may vary considerably from year to year in such circumstances.

Institutional support: There was a wide range in the amount of support galleries received from their host institutions, and no correlation between the degree of support and the size of the overall budget. 14% received less than 25% of their total budget directly from the university; 22% received between 25% and 50%; 14% received between 50% and 75%; and 48% said they received between 75% and 100%.

Other sources of operational (non-programming) support: 70% said they received some operational support from endowment funds or trusts specifically set up to support the gallery. Relatively few were able to access provincial (18%) or municipal (11%) support. 29% partially supported their operations through retail sales, and 22% generated corporate support. The latter is not always easy to obtain, as university Development offices often control a gallery's access to corporate support in relation to the university's other fundraising priorities.

Federal funding agencies: These play a significant role in supporting the activities of university galleries. 37% reported multi-year Programming and Operations support, while 57% regularly access Canada Council project grants. 25% have received grants from the Museums Assistance Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage. Surprisingly, only 14% mentioned SSHRC grants, which suggests that access to SSHRC monies is not as easy for university galleries as is sometimes assumed. Curators without PhDs are in competition with university faculty PhDs, who often have more direct support from the university's Research Office in applying for grants. Galleries may be obliged to seek partnerships to obtain SSHRC grants, and contemporary visual art projects have not in the past been high on the agenda of SSHRC peer review committees, although this may change now that the new SSHRC program specifically includes arts/cultural research.

Other sources of project funds: 78% of our sample access provincial project grants, and 34% have access to municipal project grants.

Fundraising: The obligation to spend long hours raising funds is a new development for most university galleries. Over 80% of the respondents said they were actively engaged in fundraising, not just for special projects or acquisitions but also, increasingly, for programming and general gallery operations. Survey participants commented on the amount of professional curatorial time that is being channeled into non-professional activities such as these for which they have little or no training. The support of volunteers, Advisory Committee members and university Development Officers becomes crucial under such circumstances.

Future directions:***LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY IS A SIGNIFICANT CONCERN.***

While most galleries consider themselves financially secure for now, recent budget cuts, threats of closure, and rising costs make long-term sustainability a significant concern.

Of equal concern is the question posed by one of the survey's respondents: "What is the place of the art gallery in the host institution's mission?" University art galleries cannot rely solely on the liberal arts tenet that art galleries and art collections are necessary resources in a university setting. Inevitably, if they have not already done so, galleries will find themselves examining their missions and mandates and forming strategic plans for survival and evolution in the changing cultural environment, both within the university and in their extended communities.