

TORONTO
ARTS
COUNCIL

CONCENTRATION OF ARTISTS IN CANADA



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The group of funders involved in this project operate on lands that cross Indigenous territories and regions. Several online resource provide information and maps about the diversity of Indigenous lands, including [Native Land Digital](#), [Historic Treaties](#) and [Treaty First Nations in Canada Infographic](#), and [Maps of Treaty-Making in Canada](#).

The Canada Council for the Arts, the City of Vancouver, Calgary Arts Development, Toronto Arts Council, and the Conseil des arts de Montréal respect and affirm the inherent and Treaty Rights of all Indigenous Peoples across this land. We acknowledge the historical oppression of lands, cultures, and the original Peoples in what we now know as Canada, and the role that the arts have played in settler colonialism. We fervently believe that the arts also contribute to the healing and decolonizing journey we all share together.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Concentration of Artists in Canada is a multi-funder research project that identifies issues that impact where artists live and work in Canada's four largest cities. A short survey was distributed by municipal funders in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal to their respective networks to inform discussions in small groups in each city. Across these four cities we learned that there are shared issues, such as cost of living, barriers to accessing creative space, "renoviction," continued forms of systemic discrimination, and more. However, there are also unique nuances in each local context. By gathering and documenting individual experiences through qualitative methods, the arts sector can better demonstrate the complexities that artists encounter, begin to understand how various issues intersect, and devise multi-faceted approaches to addressing the issues.

The project was a partnership between the municipal funders and the Canada Council for the Arts. We received 664 responses to the survey and held two discussion groups in each city that gathered a total of 33 participants. The information we, the funders, present here is not intended to be conclusive but rather points to area for further research and provides greater context for issues such as housing, access to creative space, sources and levels of income for artists, and more. Shawn Newman (Toronto Arts Council) was the lead author, with support from Cheryl Masters (City of Vancouver), Gregory Burbidge (Calgary Arts Development), Julien Valmary (Conseil des arts de Montréal), and Daniela Navia, Jacinthe Soulliere, and Jorge Espinosa (Canada Council for the Arts). Survey data visualizations were created by Kevin Chang and his team at Kai Analytics.



CONTEXT

In Spring 2022, municipal funders in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal began to collaborate on a research project to identify some of the forces in their communities that impact where artists live and work. In partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts, Toronto Arts Council led the development of this project in collaboration with the City of Vancouver, Calgary Arts Development, and Conseil des arts de Montréal as a first step towards better understanding how funders can better support artists and arts organizations. The guiding question for this phase of the work was:

What are some factors that impact where artists live and work in Canada’s four largest cities, and how might funders address them?

METHODS

The project has three components: a survey, discussion groups, and this report. The survey included 12 questions to gather demographic information from respondents and identify some of the issues affecting where artists in our cities are able to live and work (the survey is available as a separate, downloadable Appendix A). Each municipal partner shared the survey in June 2022 through their respective channels. While the survey was targeted specifically to artists, we also encouraged people to share it with their own networks. Because of this strategy, the number of invitations is potentially under-reported as we cannot track sharing beyond those we reached out to directly.

The survey was open to professional artists from any discipline who at the time of completing the survey:

- ▶ had, or previously had within the last three years, a creative practice
- ▶ lived, or had lived within the last three years, in one of the municipalities partnered on the project.

No definition of “professional artist” was provided.



In each city, the number of direct recipients invited to participate in the survey, and the number of completed responses, were:

City	No. of Invitations	No. of Completed Responses	Response Rate
Vancouver	3,125	168	5.4%
Calgary	1,653	286	17.3%
Toronto	915	97	10.6%
Montreal	1,537	113	7.4%
TOTAL	7,230	664	9.2%

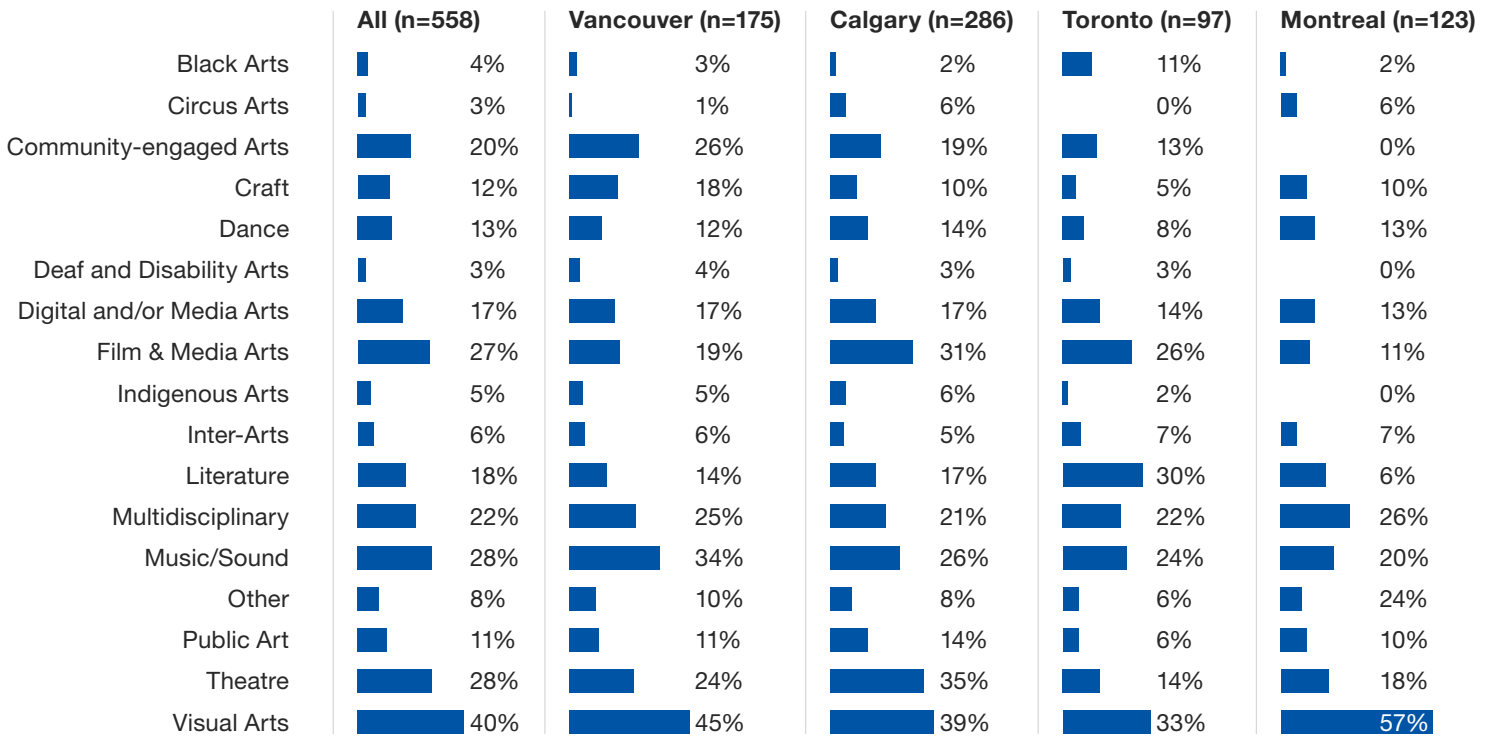
We asked respondents to provide the first three digits of their current postal code and, if they had moved in the last three years, where they moved from. The response was open-ended, allowing respondents to enter a variety of information (e.g., postal code, name of neighbourhood or another municipality, etc.). This allows us to better understand what movement, if any, is happening on a more localized level. We can also look more discretely at population movement by identity group, which can help us to understand possible systemic barriers that specific groups might experience more acutely than others.

The information gathered through the survey enabled us to convene two discussion groups in each city led by a local facilitator (see Appendix A for Discussion Lead biographies available as a separate, downloadable document). The conversations were organized around the top three issues in each city that respondents identified as impacting where they are able to live and work. And while there was some similarity in these topics across the four cities, there was also some local nuance. Through this process, we were able to capture experiences and stories that describe some of the complex issues that artists are facing.

We aimed to have a diversity of both artistic disciplines and identities in each group and invited those who signaled a desire to participate with such diversity in mind. The discussions were 90 minutes and held via Zoom, and participants were financially compensated for their time. The specifics to each city are described in subsequent chapters of this report. After the discussion groups, we sent participants a link to a form as an opportunity to share any additional thoughts or feedback anonymously.

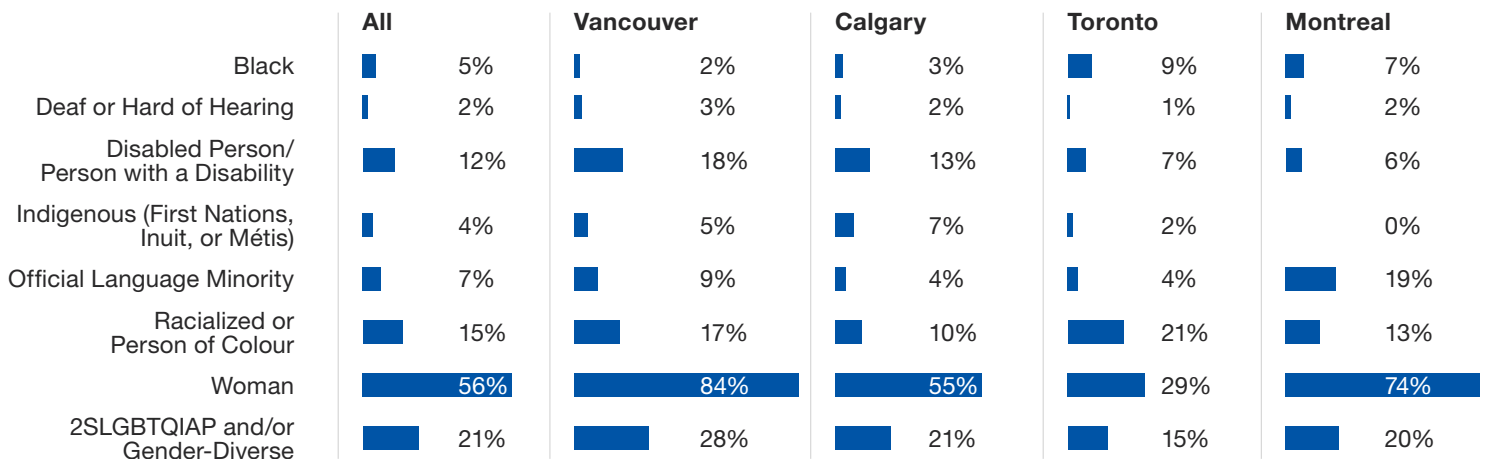
Respondent Profile

Many respondents indicated more than one discipline, which suggests multidisciplinary artist could be a larger percentage of respondents than reported. The results below segment the results by city. The most common discipline was visual arts. This was followed by theatre, music/sound, and film & media arts.



Percentages add to more than 100% as respondents could choose more than one artistic discipline.

56% of respondents self-identified as women, comprising the largest group.



Percentages add to more than 100% as respondents could choose more than one identity.

NATIONAL



NATIONAL

This section provides a general overview of what we heard through the discussion groups across the four cities. We draw together the common threads while at times providing local examples to illustrate the various ways an issue may manifest. It is important to note that while examples of each issue may not be described here in each city, this does not mean that the issue does not appear in each city. Rather, the examples offered throughout the entirety of this report offer points reflection as to how an issue may be present in a particular location even when not specifically mentioned in that city.



KEY LEARNINGS

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the top three reasons in each city for why artists have left the city, or were thinking of leaving, was that the cost of living is/was too high. From the discussions with artists exploring costs of living and other related issues, we learned some key insights:

- ▶ Access to both affordable housing and creative space is a struggle. It was pointed out to us that concepts like “affordable housing” refer to the “bare minimum [of] a roof over your head.” Some experiences show that just because something is “affordable” does not mean it is adequate, clean, or safe.
- ▶ Renoviction—when a tenant is evicted so the owner can renovate the space—is not a housing-only issue—it also applies to creative space.
- ▶ Allowable subsistence levels in grants are inadequate and do not reflect increases in cost of living or inflation. This means that artists are not saving for retirement, and many are turning to other work to earn a living. While some of this work is arts-related (e.g., teaching) it is nonetheless diverting time away from making art. In the pandemic context, receiving the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) showed many artists what a livable income is and revealed just how strongly they have been struggling financially. This reality is prompting them to strongly consider leaving their artistic practice altogether.

- ▶ Artists look to funders to provide resources and training on many things beyond grant writing. Much more education is needed within the sector on issues like tenant rights (for both housing and creative space) and CRA rules around receiving grants.
- ▶ The kind of art that is created is in part determined by forces beyond artists’ control. Corporate cultures in cities impact the overall aesthetics of the kinds of art that are considered valuable. Another major impact to the kinds of work that can be created are the size and quality of the spaces available to artists.
- ▶ Racism and other intersecting forms of discrimination persist within the sector. These issues play out in several different ways, including overt discrimination in public space, certain artistic practices or individual works being seen as not marketable to a broad audience, artists being tokenized in the commissioning of works, and more.

The above issues make clear that living and working in Canada’s four largest urban centres is difficult for artists. Because of this, they are struggling to rationalize why they continue to live in major cities.



IN DISCUSSION

Cities, Communities, and Creative Practice

For some artists, particularly those who are or were at one time newcomers to Canada, urban centres are where they find and are able to build community. And these cities are often the only place newcomers have lived in this country. One artist in Vancouver told us that, “it’s very scary to think of immigrating again, starting in a completely new place.” But even for artists born in Canada—whether it’s the cost of living, the general aesthetic of the city, or not spending time actually making art—they all encounter issues that negatively impact their ability to maintain an artistic career. A writer living and working in Vancouver described it like this:

‘even when I’m lucky enough to get [grants] ... I still find myself having to spend more and more time doing side projects and freelance work rather than my own creative practice ... And the reason why I wanted to try freelancing is because I wanted more time and flexibility for my art, but I’m not sure I’m getting that because of the cost of living. And because my work is freelance and flexible enough to be done from anywhere, it makes me question ‘why am I in Vancouver?’

Where artists can work—be it in a city or not—impacts where they can live. From distances between home and rehearsal studios to storing work and tools for their practice, issues of housing and of creative space can frequently be intertwined. For example, artists who cannot afford creative space outside their home may use their home as a creative space. This can mean they need larger (and consequently more expensive) space,

their creative practice can be disruptive to those they live with, and even that the kinds of work they can create are limited by how much space they have to create and store work. And with housing, it is not just about availability but also the quality and safety of the available housing options. One artist in Toronto spoke very directly about this: “we’re often thinking about the bare minimum. It’s just a roof over your head, which is a starting point, but you also have to think about working in the space [and even the] housing conditions. Is it a clean space?” Seen from this perspective, the housing conversation becomes one of not just affordable housing or the number of available units, but housing that is structurally secure, safe, and able to sustain its inhabitants. Moreover, it is easy to see how poor living conditions might potentially impact artists’ mental health and thus their capacity to be creative.

Finding adequate housing is compounded by “renoviction,” or being evicted so that the property owner can make renovations. One Montreal artist described the impacts from renoviction to their mental health and feeling of belonging in a community:

“renovictions [I’ve experienced have taken] up so much space in my brain, and they are not just a [notification] letter. They are a process that develops over months and months and months. And then you get a second notice ... It is something that eats away at the mind. And that makes you feel like a little ant in the background that can be moved. When I’m in my old neighbourhood, I feel bad. I feel like I don’t belong. And I wonder how it is that the new owner, who is a company, managed to make me feel like this.”

Being forced to move is even more difficult as in many jurisdictions, there is no legislation to prevent major rent increases between tenants. While there may be limits to year-to-year increases within a tenant agreement,¹ landlords are able to greatly increase the cost of rent between occupancy. And, as one artist in Vancouver pointed out, renoviction is not an issue unique to housing—it also applies to creative space. In reference to a shared jam space that is rented for roughly \$1,100 per month, “the moment that we leave that jam space, they will cut it in half, and rent both sides of it for \$1,000 [per month].” It is easy to imagine how this kind of renoviction also impacts where artists feel welcome and included.

While the financial costs of living and working are one dimension of whether or not artists are valued and welcomed in particular parts of the four cities, inclusion is a much more complex and ongoing process. In each city, we heard different accounts of racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination that artists experience in the communities where they live and work. While the pandemic years have prompted a wave of discussion about systemic racism in the arts in particular, the sector continues to grapple with its many manifestations. Discrimination—systemic or otherwise—also persists in other aspects of artists’ lives in ways that impact where they want to (or can) live and work. In the Toronto chapter of this report, two artists talk about their experiences of discrimination, even violent encounters, from neighbours and their local communities and the ways this has affected where they have decided to live. In Calgary, one artist hears regularly from friends that the racism and transphobia in Calgary is “a big thing ... and it’s become violent, and if you’re at the intersection of those, it’s even worse ... people I know have been shot with BB guns just standing outside a queer bar.” They also described how people in their community will message each other to “stay away from this bar on this day because it’s been targeted by whatever group.” They also talked about how, during the pandemic, racism and anti-queerness intensified from anti-vax and anti-mask groups: “certainly walking with racialized folks down Steven Avenue, we would have to turn around because we felt like we would come into a confrontation. And it’s so visible on our bodies, race and queerness. Even just wearing a mask becomes contentious in some parts of the city.” And while the arts sector has focused much attention on trying to better support Black artists in particular, and artists of colour more broadly, this “hasn’t come without its own sense of resentment that’s been fostered from established artists in the community.”

Clearly, the context in which artists live and work is complex and deeply nuanced. By broadening the ways that funders look at artistic practice towards a more holistic account of artists’ lives—including not only their artistic output but living and working conditions, costs of living, sustainability of their practice, and more—we will be better situated to support artists in their careers and practice, and advocate for better living and working conditions.

COVID-19, Arts’ Value, and Greener Pastures

It is no surprise that the pandemic deeply impacted artists and their creative practice. And perhaps also not surprising that for many, the financial support received through the CERB was a much-needed intervention. For some, CERB was even an increase in the amount of money they were making from their work as artists pre-pandemic. One of the artists in Calgary commented that “it was the first time that I could focus on just being an artist ... [I] was so productive during COVID. I wrote a full play, I started composing for other theatre companies, and I never would have had the opportunity to focus on that work if I had to worry about however many jobs that I had at the time to pay the bills.” As well, a photographer we spoke with expressed that “[the pandemic] ended up allowing me to regroup, refocus, and restructure my business to mostly focus on the arts. It gave me the time to really reflect on the most important parts of what I was doing as an artist and as a businessperson.”

On the flip side, some artists noted that for the general public, the pandemic also prompted reflection on their viewing and engagement practices. One theatre practitioner expressed concerns about lasting impact on audience behaviour from shifting to virtual modes of content delivery: “part of the discovery in that process was that if it’s not free, people aren’t going to watch it ... it started to align digital theatre more with Netflix in the sense that it’s not an active purchase every time you’re going to consume something.” This reflection connects to the Calgary conversations, where one artist brought up what it means to value the arts in a couple of different ways. From demonstrating the contributions the arts make to community- and city-building, to the ways the arts are discussed (or not) in news media, and to notions of what constitutes “professional” work, the pandemic has exacerbated the perennial struggles of the sector to articulate value. As one artist in Montreal put it, art helps to make sense of the world and shows us how “everything is connected.”

With a lack of public understanding of the arts’ value, artists can begin to question why they are artists in the first place. With the experience of earning a basic livable income through CERB, and artists not having enough income to invest towards retirement, artists are starting to think about leaving the sector altogether and are even building strategies for moving into other professions. In some ways, such a move comes down to health and wellbeing—artists typically do not have health benefits, and the stress and anxiety of precarious work and low incomes are major impacts on mental health. As one artist in Toronto described, “my healthcare needs fall into discretionary expenses. I’m not able to meet my health needs with my income. It means making choices [about my health].” As well, in the broader context of this research project, where artists are able to live and work sometimes comes into conflict with what are considered safe and healthy environments. From experiences of violence to questioning what constitutes the “bare minimum”

¹ In Ontario, “New buildings, additions to existing buildings and most new basement apartments that are occupied for the first time for residential purposes after November 15, 2018 are exempt from rent control.” From “Residential rent increases.” Government of Ontario. Accessed November 2, 2022. See the Toronto chapter of this report.

in housing, there are many ways that health and wellbeing are negatively impacted by where artists can afford to live and work. As a result, in the discussion groups there seemed to be a general impression that the higher incomes and other employee benefits often more greatly available in other sectors are key to a more healthy and sustainable way of life.

Organizations: Accountability and Career Advancement

Many artists, of course, also work in administrative roles or leave their practice to become full-time arts workers. Several discussion group participants thus brought a dual insider/outsider perspective on arts organizations. As major players in the arts sector, organizations employ and/or provide services to/for artists, and work to advocate on behalf of artistic communities, among other responsibilities. Yet in each city there were different themes raised that push for more accountability, in a variety of ways, from organizations and organizational cultures. The discussions raised some potential ways that funders can help to shift conventional structures and practices while also attending to our own transparency and accountability.

One major thread is that artists would like to see more accountability from organizations reporting on their grants and how much they pay artists. Music festivals were given as an example of organizations that often pay musicians a performance fee, but not rehearsal fees. This focus on art-as-product ignores the amount of labour that artists invest in the creation of their work and reinforces the precarity of gig work versus contract work. One musician talked about this issue in relation to festivals paying internationally acclaimed artists very large sums of money while paying local artists very little. While it was understood that securing “headliners” for an event is an integral piece for drawing audiences and gaining media coverage, such discrepancies in artist fees convey a lack of appreciation and value for local talent and contribute to unsustainable careers.

Beyond pointing to issues with incomes and music festivals, the example above also points to the ways that organizational cultures can normalize harmful practices that prevent people from becoming financially secure and even advance in their careers. In Calgary, one artist talked about the ways that organizational cultures prevent emerging and mid-career artists and arts workers from advancing in their careers:

“the bigger companies that have all had changeover in their artistic director’s position, [the new leaders have] all come from outside Calgary in the past five years or so. As an arts administrator, or as an artistic director, right now, I kind of look at that and wonder ‘how do I move up in the theatre world when people are being brought in to fill these big positions?’ It makes me feel like I need to go somewhere else to get those opportunities.”

The feeling expressed here was that organizations—larger companies in particular—have an opportunity to mentor people at smaller companies or even independent artists in career development. This is also something that has come up throughout the pandemic, particularly in relation to diversity within organizations. The Toronto and Montreal chapters of this report speak more to the ways that organizations continue to struggle with diversity and how some organizational processes reinforce discrimination.



GOING LOCAL

The subsequent chapters of this report provide city-specific documentation of our discussions with artists. The narratives that follow are a tapestry of experiences, ideas, and issues shared with us by artists. There are, of course, similarities with those of the other cities. For example, one Vancouver artist talked about their practice being “highly experimental [and so] I don’t get gigs in smaller communities.” This means that cities also represent important access to audiences and networks perhaps not available in smaller communities. But there are also unique attributes to being an artist in each city. What we have gathered is that even when there is a shared problem with another city, the local context brings forth particularities that allow us to look at these shared issues from multiple perspectives. In each chapter, we have made efforts to draw points of connection to other cities. This helps to reveal the depth of some of the issues artists face across the country while also demonstrating where funders may consider further collaboration on particular issues.

VANCOUVER

*"Subsistence should be something
you can actually subsist on."*



Respondent Profile

We received 175 responses to the survey from Vancouver’s arts community. To better understand the perspectives and situations of respondents, we asked if they had moved to where they are currently located within the last three years. Roughly 28% of respondents indicated that they had and includes those who moved within the city, into the city, and away from the city. Respondents who had not moved in the last three years were then asked if they were considering moving from where they currently reside. About 29% of respondents said yes, with another 23% saying they are not sure.

We organized the Vancouver discussion groups, with ten participants, around these top three responses as to why people have moved or are thinking of moving:

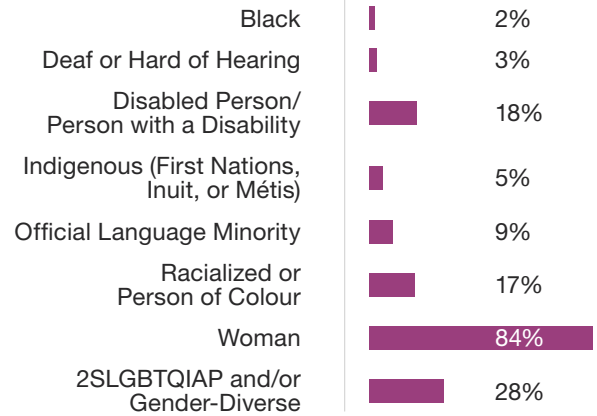
- ▶ The cost of living was/is too high
- ▶ Better access to affordable housing
- ▶ Better access to affordable creative/rehearsal space

KEY LEARNINGS

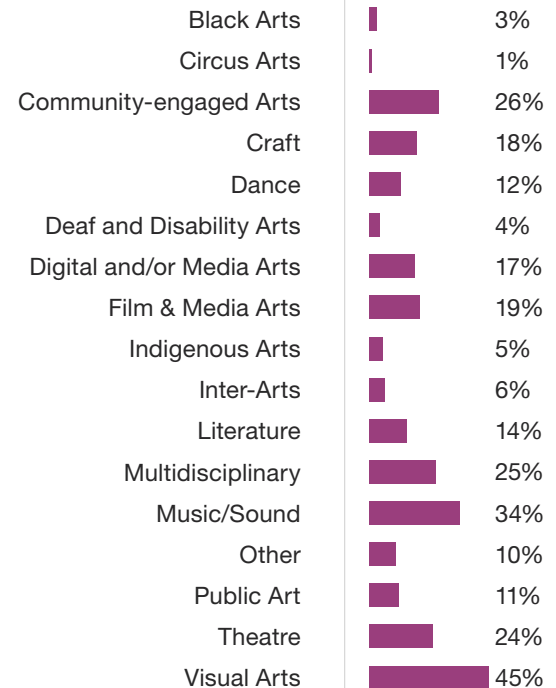
The Vancouver discussion groups were led by Kenji Maeda, the Executive Director of the Greater Vancouver Professional Theatre Alliance and an arts and culture consultant. From these discussions, we learned three key things about what artists are experiencing in the city:

- ▶ The city’s overall aesthetic negatively impacts the kinds of artistic exploration than artists feel can happen in their communities. The corporate culture overpowers community-building in artistic circles.
- ▶ Artists are concerned about having families because of the cost of living. This is making them look to other communities in which to raise children.
- ▶ Perceptions exist that increasing artist salaries in grant application budgets will negatively impact their assessment. This has meant that fees for artists are not increasing.

Vancouver



Vancouver (n=175)





IN DISCUSSION

No Room to Grow: Housing and Creative Space

In Vancouver, housing was top of mind for every artist we spoke with. As with Toronto, zoning came up as an important topic. The Vancouver artists talked about how spaces zoned as live-work enables them to write off larger percentages of their rent. They also talked about buildings that had studios as part of their original construction but were later removed. The sense is that corporate interests, and property management firms that might not even be located in Canada—let alone Vancouver—are making decisions based on strict return-on-investment data or over liability concerns. The artists' perception was that such decisions are made without considering how creative spaces contribute to both the quality of life for residents and the ability for artists to earn a living. As an alternative, we heard that having these decisions made by people living in the building would help to secure creative space and ensure that quality of life in the local community is the central focus.

Two of the artists we spoke with were also in a relationship and lived together. They told us that even when they look at places like Burnaby and Surrey, they don't really see it being that much cheaper. Moreover, if they moved away from the city, they would become disconnected from the Vancouver arts scene, their networks, and places where they can do their work. As well, it would be much less convenient for getting to and from work—and Vancouver's arts scene—for about the same amount of money. And when thinking about the future, one of them said, "I don't know how much longer we can stay in Vancouver or even on the peripherals of Vancouver because if we want to

start a family, if we want to own property one day, we pretty much understand that that's not going to happen here." Similar sentiments emerged in Toronto, where one artist and his family left the city altogether, as well as in Montreal, where concerns over continually relocating for residencies or for more affordable housing is seen as a disruption to children's lives. In particular for visual artists, a Vancouver artist noted that a nomadic lifestyle can be quite common given the ways that residencies work. However, with the outputs of a visual arts practice, moving large-scale works such as paintings or sculptures can prohibit moving. And, as in Montreal, there also potentially comes the additional cost of having to rent storage space for larger works.

When it comes to creative space in Vancouver outside the home, we heard similar perspectives as in other cities. A major concern for artists was losing spaces that they currently use, even if those spaces no longer suit their needs. One musician talked about being kicked out of a rehearsal space that they had rented for 10 years so that the landlord could move to hourly rentals as more money is generated with hourly than monthly. Thus, as we discussed in the Montreal section of this report, renovation is not unique to only housing. It also affects creative spaces.

Vancouver artists also raised concerns over the aesthetics within the city and the quality of creative spaces. One of the groups in particular drew connections between the corporate, "polished" aesthetic of the city to the lack of a "bohemian, artist vibe." For them, this meant that there is very little opportunity to connect with other artists in ways that provide community and also serve to inspire and create opportunities for collaboration. Even the types of creative spaces available were described as a problem.

One artist talked about attending a festival where artists open their studios to the public. When attending this festival, they noted that the spaces that many artists are working in are sub-standard: “there’s no light. It’s depressing. It’s gross ... this is how people are trying to get by can we not have an equal quality of life?” As a result, the group talked about how the over-arching aesthetics of Vancouver “metes out creative flair.”

One possible way to address some of the problems facing creative spaces in Vancouver was brought up by another artist who described leasing buildings from the City as “the only way” for people running creative spaces to do their work. For one organization, their lease with the City is 17 years. This provides them long-term stability in knowing what their costs will be. This model was described the City actually helping out in some way,” which is a strong indicator of one way that municipal governments can better support the arts—by not leaving property management to either for-profit enterprises (whose priority is increasing revenues) or not-for-profit organizations (who may lack the resources to manage space and provide upkeep and improvements). Instead, City-owned spaces being rented to organizations might help ensure longevity and permanence of the arts in various community.

In terms of availability of live-work spaces in Vancouver, artists noted that while some have encountered artist-specific spaces at reduced rental fees, these typically have an income cap that forces poverty and “de-incentivizes success.” They talked about needing to re-think the parameters for subsidized or reduced-rent housing. An interesting way of approaching some of the impacts on housing and creative space came up when discussion participants began talking about how the City has stipulations for property developers where a portion of the development has to be for public art (which also exists in other municipalities). However, they also described this as a misdirected focus. Instead, they suggested that a portion of space for public art actually be for studios and/or housing units specifically for artists. This could then lead to ongoing residencies in buildings that would have these artists’ works integrated into the space and even the broader local community. Following this line of thought, we can see how policy can simultaneously support housing for artists, creative space, and the creation of work for the public.

Not Enough Hours in a Day: Time Spent as an Artist

Artists in Vancouver spoke most strongly than artists in the other cities about time spent actually making, or not making, art. One musician we spoke to talked about a band they recorded and toured with ultimately falling apart as personal expenses increased. In order to meet these increased financial demands, they moved into the film industry. This artist noted that they have stayed in both Vancouver and the film industry because, despite the struggle, they try to put their earnings into “getting

creative stuff off the ground.” And, as many artists in these discussions echoed, being in Vancouver means being around other creatives—larger networks and communities exist in the city than in smaller regions and so staying in the city is important to career sustainability.

This artist also talked about the toll that the film industry is taking on their mental health. They noted having to often work 15- to 18-hour days with no breaks—a tremendous amount of labour day after day. To compensate, they take breaks between long contracts to work on music, which helps with their mental health. These unpaid breaks are financed by the artist’s own savings from film contracts. However, these periods of creativity—that are integral to their mental health—are not always possible as burnout renders them “completely idle ... I don’t write any songs, I don’t work on my lyrics, I don’t have any creative ideas. I don’t want that to happen I don’t want to wake up some day and be like, ‘oh, I don’t create art anymore. I just work for people who do.’” And yet, they noted, “I guess that’s kind of where I’m at.” To add another framing to this issue, one emerging artist, who had recently moved to Vancouver from the Greater Toronto Area, expressed skepticism about the security of their career choice: “I graduated [from post-secondary] last year ... I don’t really have a lot of energy to work on my own writing these days [and] I haven’t felt comfortable taking the risk of staking my livelihood on being an artist.”

Another musician we spoke with came to Canada nine years ago. They first lived in Toronto where they started their Canadian musical career by busking and performing in festivals. They moved to Vancouver to study music and earn a degree. In order to finance their education, they started teaching. As studying and teaching increased, playing, and performing decreased. As they said, “my goal was to become someone who lives as a singer, that can make a living with his music, but I ended up becoming a student and a teacher.” As with many artists we spoke with who also teach, they find teaching to be “very rewarding and is something beautiful, and I love to inspire my students and see them grow.” Yet, in the end this means they are not working as an artist. One way of dealing with this was to turn their attention to a smaller city where living and working as an artist seems more feasible. Living in Vancouver, they felt that they cannot continue to work as an artist while also pursuing advanced education.

Before moving into the section directly related to income, we want to highlight one artist’s comment that brings together issues of housing, time spent not creating art, and income: “more of my time and attention is going towards just making money [that is] more predictable and regular like teaching as opposed to concerts, which are more erratic and less predictable I have seriously considered just pausing my practice for a while and getting a day job with a decent salary so that I can qualify for a mortgage.”

Money Talks: Income and the Value of Work

The theme underlying all the issues discussed in all four cities was insufficient income levels to work full-time as an artist. One musician noted that they started their career by busking. They spoke more about their level of income from this line of work, and perceptions in Vancouver about who buskers are, throughout their career: “I was lucky to spend a year living in New Orleans living as an artist. It was tough, but you could easily go down to a street corner with a friend and make \$100, \$150 in a day each. Just because the city appreciated music, appreciated artists. And in Vancouver, if you think of doing that, you are treated like a panhandler. No matter how good you are, you’re treated like a panhandler.” This experience points to larger, ongoing concerns within the sector around public perception of artists, the ways artists make a living, and the value of arts to community. As well, this musician pointed to stagnant performance fees: “when I started playing in bands in the 1990s, typically I got paid between \$100 and \$150 per gig. Now we’re in 2022, and I’m getting paid between \$100 and \$150 per gig. The income has not changed. Back then, it was tight, but it was easier to afford to live. You could earn a living as a musician, *barely*. Now you just can’t.”

Artists also talked about working for the same organizations year after year on various projects but that what they are paid has not increased: “we make the same amount that we did 10 years ago.” By their calculations, they are not even making minimum wage on these projects. However, the organizations they’ve spoken with have cited concerns over not getting grants if their salaries and fees for artists are a large portion of the project budget. To address this, artists told us that more public discussion/education about what does or does not impact grant assessment, particularly around artist fees, is needed in Vancouver. Arguably, such conversations are important to have in any city.

One of the limitations of current grant structures for individuals is that grant amounts do not adjust for inflation or other increases in expenses. Subsistence rates in granting, like we heard in Calgary, do not reflect the reality of what it costs to live, particularly in large urban centers like Vancouver. And like artists in Calgary that we spoke with, Vancouver artists would like to see options for how grants are paid out (e.g., as monthly paycheques). Of course, time spent grant-writing is also something that adds to not only the amount of time not creating art, but actually reinforces precarity. One artist quoted prominent arts worker and advocate Kathleen Speakman “who once told me that if the amount of time that artists spend on writing grants was spent on actually making art, we would have a completely transformed society.” Indeed, this speaks to other reflections we heard about needing to provide more training on grant writing, which might be interpreted as a call to simplify the granting process. If we consider that in many instances, funding amounts do not cover the entirety of a project or an organization’s operating costs (either because the grant amount is small or

there are restrictions on how much of a project a grant will cover), this directly—and negatively—impacts the amount of time artists spend creating art. This ties into an idea we heard about the desire for some kind of operating program for individual artists. And, of course, all agreed that continued advocacy for basic income is needed.

For organizations, budgetary concerns revolve around expectations for how much of an organization’s budget should go towards administration. As mentioned earlier, some perceptions (whether based on current funder requirements or assumptions carried forward from past experiences) exist that if administrative costs are high (e.g., paying higher wages) for a project this will negatively impact the grant assessment if looked at as a percentage of the overall budget going to administration. Whether it is project funding or operational funding, we heard that funders should not focus on percentages of budgets going to administration but rather if the fees and salaries artists and arts workers being paid are in line with a living wage. At the same time, the artist referencing Speakman brought her up again to describe her thoughts around granting, specifically that “it would be better for grants to be administered by lottery because who’s on your jury is a lottery anyway. And that would at least mean that the time that we’re spending is making art as opposed to grantsmanship.” This idea is indeed interesting and not without merit, as it potentially alleviates some possible issues with granting assessment such as bias.

THE TAKEAWAY

Overall, the Vancouver artists we spoke with struggle to rationalize why they stay in the city. For some, Vancouver is where their community is. We heard this from two artists who moved to Vancouver from outside Canada. The city is the only place they’ve lived in this country. One of them told us that “it’s very scary to think of kind of immigrating again, starting in a completely new place.” But even for artists born in Canada, and in Vancouver itself, whether it’s the cost of living or the aesthetic of the city or not spending time actually making art, they all encounter several issues that negatively impact their experience of Vancouver and ability to maintain an artistic career. And while some artistic forms perhaps require that artists be in the city—one artist talked about their practice being “highly experimental [and so] I don’t get gigs in smaller communities”—some artistic forms don’t have this same obligation.

CALGARY

"[Calgary Arts Development's] work is heroic but doesn't overcome the cultural barriers that Calgary experiences."



Respondent Profile

We received 286 responses to the survey from Calgary’s arts community. To better understand the perspectives and situations of respondents, we asked if they had moved to where they are currently located within the last three years. Roughly 18% of respondents indicated that they had and includes those who moved within the city, into the city, and away from the city. Respondents who had not moved in the last three years were then asked if they were considering moving from where they currently reside. About 21% of respondents said yes, with another 22% saying they were not sure.

We organized the two Calgary discussion groups, with six participants, around these three responses as to why people have moved or are thinking of moving:

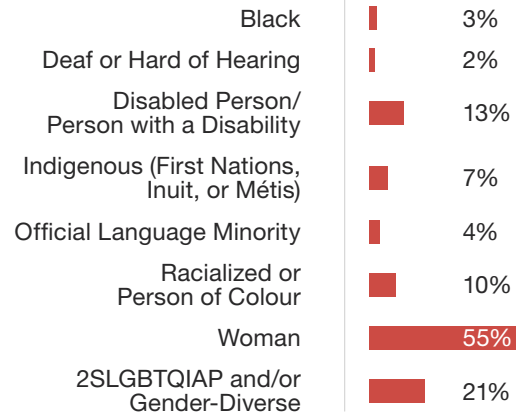
- ▶ There is/was more demand for my work/better artistic opportunities elsewhere
- ▶ The cost of living is/was too high
- ▶ I am/was not able to generate enough income through my artistic work

KEY LEARNINGS

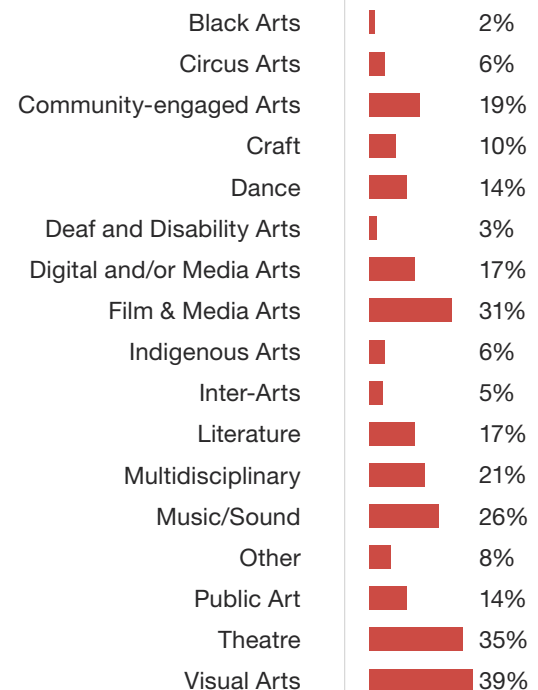
The Calgary discussion groups were led by Jenna Rodgers, the founding Artistic Director of Chromatic Theatre. From these discussions, we learned three key things about what artists are experiencing in the city:

- ▶ Calgary’s corporate culture leads to artists feeling extremely undervalued. This indicates to them that they don’t belong in the city.
- ▶ Perceptions remain that local leadership opportunities in the arts are being given to people from outside Calgary, which adds to perceptions of not belonging. Mentoring people within the city not only supports local artists and arts professionals but helps to counter feelings of exclusion.
- ▶ Intersections of racism, transphobia, and other gender- and sexuality-based forms of discrimination continue to be keenly felt, which also contributes to feelings of not belonging. Violence is also a major concern.

Calgary



Calgary (n=286)





IN DISCUSSION

Strange Bedfellows: Corporate Culture and Artistic Practice

In each of the cities, artists talked in various ways about how the culture of the region shapes arts communities. Like artists in Vancouver, artists in Calgary talked about the overall aesthetic and corporate culture of the city impacting a variety of aspects within the arts. The groups talked about the “white collar presence” in the city, with one artist wondering if the corporate culture in Calgary negatively impacts career growth and longevity: “do that arts thing for a while and then go get a job in an office.” The groups also talked about Calgary’s “crass culture that values money and access to things above everything else.” The artists all agreed that they felt pressure to “keep up with the Joneses” while working in/with corporate spaces. One artist, who does a lot of corporate architectural photography, told us about the classist commentary they would hear from corporate clients: “the offhand comments that would be made about other parts of the city while on tours with brokers and owners. It was enough that it made me want to step out of that industry entirely.”

We also heard how the corporate culture of the city affects decision-making, particularly when it comes to leadership within arts organizations. A theater artist from one discussion group talked about feeling “the burn” of organizations looking outside Calgary to fill vacant positions: “I think if we can’t learn to see the artists in our own city, that’s going to take people who are solidly mid-career, who are exciting, and force them out.” And while they noted that this is a board governance issue and that they are not sure if funders have a role to play, this artist also

noted that the outgoing leaders from these organizations “didn’t necessarily prepare their boards of directors for what transition might need to look like for community. They prepared their board of directors for success in a city that has a corporate culture.” The impact, they feel, is that the corporate culture within Calgary has become entrenched in board governance, so much so that “[directors’] idea of success is unilateral, homogenous, and disconnected from the change-making work that ... the [City of Calgary] is investing in.”

What these observations and experiences coalesce around is the value of the arts to society. Discussing the tension between corporate-style decision-making and governance in the arts sector led us into a discussion about a perceived lack of understanding within Calgary about such value. The general consensus amongst the discussion group participants was that Calgary’s culture does not recognize the value that the breadth of art and artists in Calgary bring to the city. One of the results is artists feeling that they are more valued, and that there are better opportunities, elsewhere. This disjuncture between Calgary’s corporate and artistic communities was believed to stem from a lack of awareness about how the arts contribute to community- and city-building. For one artist, they felt that there is a missed opportunity to start talking about the arts’ value in schools. This artist talked about the lack of education on the value of the arts and went on to talk about the general lack of understanding about the arts’ value at a provincial level. They wondered if there was a link between this lack of understanding and artists not experiencing a sense of belonging in Calgary. Another artist talked about the “newness” of Calgary. They felt that because Calgary as a city is just over 100 years old, it has not yet

developed an “understanding of how civil society and a mature community work to look at the health of its citizens, particularly the contribution of the arts.” There are, thus, many different angles from which to view the ways that artists understand what their work brings to the city, and perhaps opportunities for the sector to better articulate the arts’ civic impact.

Another possible reason for such a lack of understanding of the arts’ value that we heard in Calgary was that the sector has a poor relationship with the media. It was felt that the ways that the arts are presented in Calgary’s news media do not adequately reflect the reality of what the arts are, thereby contributing to the perception that the arts are not valuable to society. They noted that there is “one main person that covers theatre in Calgary” and that, “recognition of independent theatre in the city is really lacking.” Given the corporate culture in the city that the artists described, it is perhaps not a stretch to understand how forms like independent theatre might then be perceived to be less valuable to society. To that end, they also spoke about how the concept of “professional” theatre has emerged, marginalizing independent theatre in divisive and exclusionary ways. They cited a history of local awards ceremonies that prompted the creation of specific criteria—such as minimum fees paid to artists—to be deemed professional. Their perceptions are that this created a class structure, with more fringe or experimental artists and works being viewed pejoratively. Narrating this history exposed some of the ways that artists feel excluded, not only from Calgary itself because of the corporate culture mentioned above, but also excluded from some sections of the arts community.

No Room to Grow: Housing and Creative Space

As in the other three cities, artists in Calgary talked about the increasing cost of living and working in the city. While some felt that the city is still quite affordable when compared with the other cities, it is nonetheless still a concern. One artist told us about two members of their collective who left Calgary because they could not afford to live in the city and did not feel like they belonged—and both were from the 2SLGBTQIAP community. This artist also told us about conversations they’re having with other artists in Calgary about feeling marginalized and unwelcome, and that the ability to move is a privilege not available to all. However, we heard that other artists are tied to staying put and do not want to leave Calgary—although some of the reasons why they are staying are perhaps not ideal: moving costs more money than they can afford, and their professional contacts and networks are in the city. Living in more rural areas presents a risk of not being hired or commissioned to create work, and commuting into Calgary for work may end up either costing the same or even more as living in the city. Artists did identify a need for more affordable housing, as a lack of affordable housing tied to the city’s low vacancy rate means that there are very few options. A [CBC News story](#) dated June 15,

2022 (approximately one month before we held these discussion groups), points out that “the city has an average vacancy rate of just one per cent for all property types, while there’s been a nearly 29 per cent increase in rental prices since the beginning of 2022.”

As well, we were told that some landlords do not want to rent to artists. One artist described that when they are a reference for friends and colleagues applying to rent housing, they get asked about “how much [they] pay the person, if [they] will be paying that much consistently, and if [they] foresee that [the person] will stay in [their] employ for the next year.” In thinking about possible ways to address housing, one artist cited the Arts Commons—western Canada’s largest performing arts centre and a federally registered charity—and the number of renovations it has been through. They spoke about how continually “pouring” money into the same space from the organization’s various sources diverts potential support away from artists, particularly for housing. The issue for this artist is that granting systems do not support purchasing structures or other capital investments, particularly for individuals, yet much money is put into capital investments for large organizations. From their perspective, such money would be better spent by “providing artists with one apartment building, even in Ogden, and buying it and running it. And letting people live there for a year rent-free.” Such a scenario might also help to address issues of landlords not wanting to rent to artists.

Similar to their concerns about the cost and availability of housing, creative space for Calgary’s artists is also an issue. Artists felt that commercial property rental costs are ballooning. One artist using a photography studio has found that the space no longer serves their needs. However, because their rental rate was grandfathered into their lease, moving somewhere new would mean spending between two and four times the amount of money for even just a little bit more space. Similar issues were presented in a slightly different context by performing artists. They talked about the ways that a lack of different sized spaces negatively impacts an organization’s growth. For small theatre companies, the costs to rent larger venues are prohibitive. One artist noted that a two-week run costs about \$3,000 to rent whereas the next step up for a larger venue increases to roughly \$7,000. This jump in costs negatively impacts the kinds of productions they are able to stage by forcing them to present smaller work in smaller venues. It is also not just the cost of the space itself. As companies try to stage works in larger venues, they also need to hire additional technicians and other staff. This then negatively impacts employment: being forced into smaller venues means fewer roles to be filled, both on stage and backstage. So, a lack of capacity in the city for organizational growth can negatively impact growth in employment.

Where Does the Time Go?: Accessing Grants

The artists that we spoke with in Calgary remain excited and grateful for the major budget increase to CADA several years ago. This has opened up not only more granting opportunities, but also prompted new ways of administering granting programs. However, we heard that intertwined with this experimentation is the need for applicants to be learning these new systems and expectations. Grant writing already takes up a lot of administrative time, and so having to then conform to new, unfamiliar processes is an added burden. And while it was felt that some of these new systems were efforts at broadening accessibility, we heard that greater attention is needed from funders to the labour involved with accessing new systems and programs.

One of the visual artists we spoke with quit their non-arts job to be able to devote more time to their artistic practice. With an increased presence on social media, they saw an uptake in purchases of their work. And with encouragement from CADA, they applied for a grant that same year and were successful. However, this year they were not, noting that there was a tripling of applicants to the program. And while they “didn’t feel bad about that because you have to give a chance to others,” it does point to tension that arts funders face in promoting their granting programs and trying to reach new artists when not having enough money to support everyone.

THE TAKEAWAY

As we can see, Calgary has some similar narratives as other cities like housing issues, the size of creative spaces impacting the production of artistic works, and the overall culture of the city and its impacts on the arts community. Unique to the Calgary discussions was an overall impression that the city’s residents at large do not understand the value that the arts bring (or can bring) to their city. As well, the theatre scene was more represented among discussion participants than in other cities, which revealed particular barriers regarding theatre spaces and the ways that the size of venues can prevent organizations from growing. Lastly, as noted in the national learning section, racism and other intersecting forms of oppression are still very much felt for some artists in Calgary.

While much of the discussions were focused on identifying some of the negative aspects to living and working as an artist in Calgary, we did also hear some positives. As the guide quote that opens this chapter illustrated, the artists we spoke to hold Calgary Arts Development in high regard. Several artists talked about the support that they’ve received from Calgary Arts Development, not just in financial terms but even in being guided through the granting process and feeling generally seen by the local funder. We did receive some feedback that granting outreach activities, like grant writing workshops, can be a bit dry, but this is not unique to Calgary. And, certainly, the virtual environment of the last several years has presented particular challenges to outreach and education for any organization.

We want to end this chapter with a bit of hope and some possible insight into how the Calgary arts community might position itself towards attracting artists, particularly emerging artists, from elsewhere. One person we spoke with recently graduated from a college in Ontario. They moved to Calgary for opportunity and have found much success so far. Whereas in Ontario they were “always getting rejected” when applying for grants or exhibitions, in Calgary they were successful with their first grant application. Because of this, they are encouraging other emerging artists to re-locate to Calgary. This same sentiment was noted by a mid-career artist, also originally from Ontario, who felt that Calgary “felt like such a good place to get started.”

TORONTO

"I can't fathom a way to be an artist full-time and live in a way that my art is my primary source of income."

Respondent Profile

We received 97 responses to the survey from Toronto’s arts community. To better understand the perspectives and situations of respondents, we asked if they had moved to where they are currently located within the last three years. Roughly 16% of respondents indicated that they had and includes those who moved within the city, into the city, and away from the city. Respondents who had not moved in the last three years were then asked if they were considering moving from where they currently reside. About 26% of respondents said yes, with another 20% saying they are not sure.

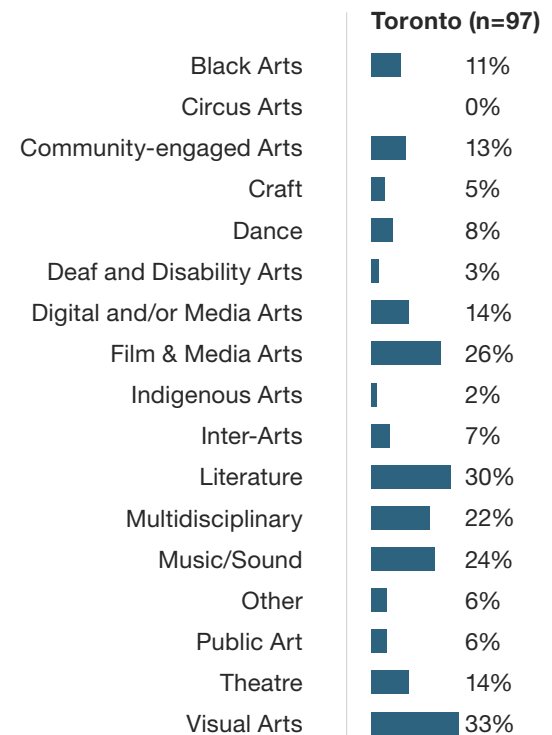
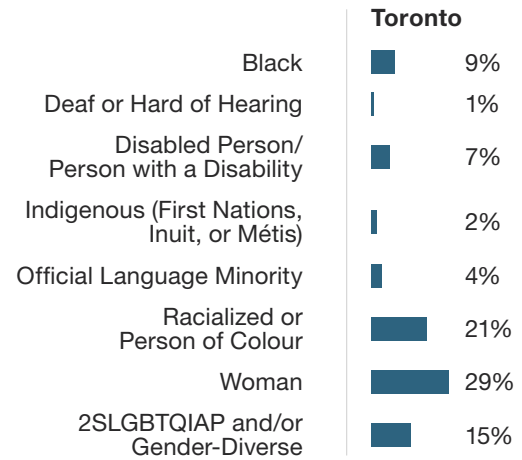
We organized two Toronto discussion groups, with nine participants, around these top three responses as to why people have moved or are thinking of moving:

- ▶ The cost of living was/is too high
- ▶ Better access to affordable housing
- ▶ Living in this city was/is negatively affecting my mental health

KEY LEARNINGS

The Toronto discussion groups were led by Sean Lee, Director of Programming at Tangled Art + Disability. From these discussions, we learned three key things about what artists are experiencing in the city:

- ▶ Racism and homophobia remain very prevalent in particular neighbourhoods. This is forcing artists to leave the city or, at least, strongly consider it.
- ▶ Racism is also felt by artists when their work is considered unmarketable.
- ▶ While many artists have not yet left Toronto, they are moving further and further away from the core and may eventually end up leaving the city.





IN DISCUSSION

No Room to Grow: Housing and Creative Space

Cost of housing was a major topic of discussion in both groups. This is not surprising given that rental the average price for a 1-bedroom dwelling in Toronto in 2022 was \$2,551.² There were several stories of artists being unable to find suitable housing that has forced them to move, either to cheaper areas of the city or out of the city altogether. However, a performing arts professional in one group expressed how valuable it had been for them to be able to access housing through a co-operative: “I lived in cooperative housing for [many] years in Toronto. I feel like a unicorn in that way because it really did help me build an art practice to be able to pay for my housing based on income.” That paying for housing based on income is described as a unicorn is revealing about the state of housing in the city. Another participant from a different group, a writer, says they were “lucky” to get into a housing co-op when they did. And while it is not in an area they would have chosen, “it’s been amazing.” These feelings point to the rarity of cooperative housing while simultaneously suggesting that if more of this kind of housing was available, it would have positive impacts on the emotional well-being of residents. It is also clear that the co-operative model is one way that artists are able to continue to work as artists while remaining in the city. Obviously, a geared-to-income model has a myriad of benefits, particularly for artists who are often in a low-income bracket.

However, for a writer, living in a co-op meant living in a neighbourhood that they would not have chosen, “we just don’t have the option to move somewhere else that would feel more creative or interesting. [It’s a] 25-minute walk to a coffee shop that isn’t just a sports bar. It’s not terrible, and lots of people

live much further away from things, but I would love to live somewhere that I could just work somewhere, go in and write for a few hours and come back.” Yet, the co-op model offers stability in that “we’re not going to get turfed out, the place is not going to get sold.” Nonetheless, since the area they lives in is not “particularly creatively inspiring,” and moving from co-op housing to a standard rental in Toronto is financially impossible for them, they are considering leaving the city altogether, possibly to another province, or to they country they originally immigrated from.

When it comes to creative space, it is not surprising that the artists we spoke with had different experiences largely as a result of different creative practices. One musician felt that there was plenty of good creative space and that it is reasonably priced. A multimedia artist felt similarly with their practice. This was surprising to hear, as we have heard from others throughout the sector about the difficulty of finding affordable—and available—creative space. This is also because the cost of creative space outside the home is yet another expense. One artist told us that,

just the idea of having to think about needing those two spaces is daunting. I’m already just thinking about housing, period. And that in itself is barely something I can afford. And so having to think about rehearsal on top of that, or even a co-working space, is not something I can afford. And so we often use our own homes as working spaces. That has some benefits, for sure. [But working on your creative practice at home] has a negative impact on your life because you don’t really have a separation from work and family and social life.

² Jordan Fleguel, “Rent in Toronto continues to rise as the average rental price in Canada hits record high,” CP24. December 14, 2022.

This artist also made the point that when housing comes up as an issue, “we’re often thinking about the bare minimum. It’s just a roof over your head, which is a starting point, but you also have to think about working in the space [and even the] housing conditions. Is it a clean space?” Seen from this perspective, the housing conversation thus becomes one of not just affordable housing, or the number of available units, but housing that is structurally secure, safe, and able to sustain its inhabitants.

Even in housing zoned for workspaces for artists, musicians have a difficult time rehearsing. One couple that lives in this type of space, who are both musicians, said “it feels like [we’re being] harassed by our neighbours ... there seems to be a misunderstanding of the spaces that we need in order to do our art, and that isn’t provided in a place ... which is supposed to be there for artists. It’s a pretty big failure on their end.” And any alternative, such as separate rehearsal spaces, they indicated that they “just would never be able to afford to have that.” This is a recurring theme for musicians. One of the other musicians in the same discussion group has heard similar issues with regard to musicians finding adequate space to live and work. Even though they have looked at getting into a space for artists, they are confronted with the reality that their artistic discipline might not actually be welcome. They described their experience, on behalf of musicians, like this: “often, because we live [with our rehearsal space], we get a lot of complaints because we can’t work within our [living] space. And a lot of us do have two jobs, so that means we’re working in the morning. And then when we come [home] there are going to be noise complains because we might be [rehearsing] late.”

Visual artists we spoke with added an additional perspective to the creative space issue. As we also heard in Montreal, the size and kind of available creative space risks negatively impacting creative practice. In Toronto, there is insufficient studio space, and it is often expensive. As a result, visual artists may use their own home instead of a studio. One such artist talked about the scale of their work and their creative space. Having been in the same home for many years, they use a spare bedroom as a studio—a veritable boon as they cannot afford to rent a studio for their painting and sculptural works. However, the space is not large enough to be able to photograph work. They also spoke about their experience renting space from a property development company and the poor treatment they received: “I was treated as though I was an employee. I had to remind them that I was paying for the space.” And for renting in gallery spaces, we heard that, “I don’t have \$300 a month to [be a member of] a gallery and maybe get a chance to show once a year.” The current alternative is to pay a rental fee for a short-term exhibition: “I’m renting a gallery for two weeks. It’s more than one month rent in my apartment. \$1,500 for two weeks.”

Shifting gears towards creative space for organizations, one artist, who is part of an organization, told us that they and their team “didn’t want to get into even thinking about trying to support the operational expenses of having a physical space.”

And while this was partly a cost-saving strategy, this has meant that they rely heavily on other not-for-profit community organizations. Yet, “it’s important to us to build resources into our budgets so that we’re not relying on in-kind contributions ... because that, to me, feels like we’re taking resources away from communities, and therefore arts practices [are] being subsidized by not-for-profit [community] partners ... that are already under resourced.” The kind of networked support that this artist spoke to—not-for-profits supporting other not-for-profits—suggests opportunities for funders, and perhaps governments in particular, to create more scaffolded supports that relieve some of the burden of having to search for various kinds of resources (both cash and in-kind). One question that was asked was, “what services do organizations need in order to carry out their artistic programming that they are unable to have in-house given various constraints such as limited funding, no permanent space, and small staff teams, among others?”

The Toronto discussions were the only time that we heard about accessibility and creative space specifically in reference to disability. With any building, older spaces are unlikely to be built accessibly. And for any kind of business or organization operating spaces, the costs of retrofitting can be completely prohibitive. Yet, it is older buildings that are often cheaper to rent. In some ways, this forces not-for-profit arts organizations, and even independent artists, into using inaccessible spaces. As well, we heard that “a lot of spaces are listed as being accessible, but then the bathrooms aren’t accessible. Or there’s difficulty with sound or with overhead lighting, or there are lots of needs that aren’t met.” And in other contexts, we have heard from performing arts professionals that often performance venues might be accessible for audiences and patrons, but not for performers, technicians, and other staff. The ramifications of inaccessible spaces for staff and artists means that those already marginalized by ableist building construction have even fewer options for creative space in which to work.

Not Welcome: Racism and Homophobia

In each city, racism came to the fore in distinct ways. Black artists in Montreal talked about feeling tokenized and pressured into creating art that fit a particular kind of blackness not defined by them. In Calgary, racialized artists talked about being targeted on the street with the threat of violence. In Toronto, we heard all of these things, particularly with regard to being targeted in public and also how racism appears in professional settings. For example, one artist described the kinds of creative practices that are not valued or even allowed by venue owners: “we look around for places to rent ... they really don’t want hip hop, soca ... They don’t want black music in particular. There’s so much racism within the system.” This points to the ways that artistic forms become racialized and, subsequently, marginalized. While there has been strong recognition of inequity in the arts sector writ large, artists continue to encounter issues related to the reception of their work. One of the visual artists we spoke

with told us that, “as a Black artist, creating images related to my culture, I don’t have a huge market for selling paintings or sculptures. Most are looked at as being unmarketable. But I find it [to be] something important that I need to do. So I keep doing it.” Artists of colour described “having to be extremely relentless” in pursuing opportunities and pushing back against the various manifestations of racism in the arts as noted above.

In one discussion group, one artist had left the city altogether in-part because of the racism and intersecting homophobia they experienced. The quote below reveals how the arts sector, and arts funders in particular, need to work harder to understand that supporting artists does not only mean providing grants to create art. Artists not being welcome in their communities, and facing intense and even violent forms of discrimination, are strong reasons to leave the city:

“I had a crazy neighbour. He would really put me through hell. Between yelling, blaring music, and just invading my personal space. This went on for four years. Several police phone calls, verbal abuse, you name it. And because I was a female living on my own, I was really victimized in that way. The last straw for me was when COVID hit, [one time when I said hello] he actually filled his mouth with water and spat at me. So that was the last straw. I called the police and they said ‘there’s nothing we can do. It’s not regarded as an assault.’ So I said, “okay, there might be some racial factors playing here.”

This event prompted her to re-evaluate where she was living, but with housing being so costly in Toronto she and her partner left to an area in which her partner grew up. With these pre-existing familial and artistic networks, she “was able to really integrate into the community.” She did tell us, however, that she has also felt that she is seen as different: “[I] had to get used to people staring at me here. Even though it’s ... relatively diverse.” Racism and homophobia continue to be factors that determine, in part, where artists live and work, and these compound other reasons why artists have left, or are considering leaving, Toronto.

Artists Leaving the City

We asked the artists if they felt that artists were leaving or considering leaving more than in other times, and the general impression was that yes, artists are looking to leave Toronto more than ever before. For one artist who has moved their family to a much smaller city, they said “I do think that’s happening to a greater degree than any time I can remember in the last 20 years.” While they recognize that this could be “partly because that’s where I’m at in life but people that I know who have families, they’re constantly looking at moving out.” Their own move was greatly spurred forward by growing a family and the lack of affordable two- and three-bedroom rental apartments

in the city. Indeed, a February 2022 CMHC report notes that affordable rental units (e.g., 30% of household income) “to low- and middle-income renter households decreased from the previous year.”³

As well, artists talked about the difficulties of increasing rents and also of moving out of the renter’s market and into ownership. In terms of rentals, while some protections are in place for increases while a unit is occupied, there are no rent increase caps between tenants. Moreover, given legislation introduced by the Ford government, in Ontario “new buildings, additions to existing buildings and most new basement apartments that are occupied for the first time for residential purposes after November 15, 2018, are exempt from rent control.”⁴ This means that in order to not be faced with skyrocketing rental rates during tenancy, renters need to find older housing protected by rent increase caps. This potentially introduces access issues for disabled people and people with disabilities, as noted in the discussion above about access and creative space, older buildings are less likely to be accessible. Furthermore, it also funnels artists into a narrowing type of available housing.

Yet, discussion participants felt that leaving the renters market into home ownership is also often unachievable in Toronto. There remains a near impossibility of being approved for a mortgage despite, in some cases, being more than able to pass all of the calculations that banks make to determine if someone is capable of carrying a mortgage. But without permanent employment, banks are extremely hesitant to approve lending money. As one artist put it, “artists don’t fit into [the banks’] mortgage rules.”

Of course, artists are not the only self-employed gig workers, but most artists (65%) are self-employed.⁵ One related issue that came up in a different part of our conversations with artists in Toronto was zoning for housing. One participant talked about different zoning laws in London and Dublin where you can purchase an apartment within a house as opposed to needing to buy the entire building. While not within the scope of this study to survey zoning laws in Canada or elsewhere, it is nonetheless a worthwhile consideration for funders to reflect on in terms of their advocacy work.

While few artists that we spoke with had left the city altogether, discussion participants agreed that moving further and further out from the core is a pattern they have not only seen but experienced first-hand. Through this, they noted that, “there’s a sense the community is dissipating.” One artist talked about the importance of community to artmaking and artists’ lives. They described the general sense that artists are “community-oriented people,” with many artistic forms requiring the gathering of people in order to create and/or experience the work. Therefore, artists being pushed out of neighborhoods and cities can negatively impact artist’s sense of belonging and community.

³ “Rental Market Report: Canada and Selected Markets.” Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, February 2022.

⁴ “Residential rent increases.” Government of Ontario. Accessed November 2, 2022.

⁵ Kelly Hill, “Artists in the Pandemic: Recent and Long-Term Labour Force Trends.” Hill Strategies, February 2022.

Time Spent as an Artist

Every artist that we spoke with across the country spoke in some way about not being able to spend as much time as they wanted as an artist. For some, this has meant working in arts-related work (like teaching) or even working in entirely different sectors (like hospitality). Across the board, the amount of money available in grants for subsistence was consistently an issue. In Toronto, a writer we spoke with talked about receiving a grant and the ways that low subsistence levels determine how much time they can spend on their project: “there’s no way that you can live in Toronto [on] approximately \$2,000 per month.” This meant having to “frontload” their work—rushing to try to finish the novel before the grant ran out. After that, they returned to their non-arts job. For many artists we spoke with, this story represents their reality—having to work most of their time at non-arts jobs and compress their creative time into a very short window.

For other artists whose practice is collaborative (whether with other creatives or with audiences/participants), another factor that has impacted the amount of time they can spend creating art is the forced shift to virtual modes of creation and delivery during the pandemic. Working digitally, when not experienced in this realm, means lots of time is spent learning new skills. From one perspective, this was seen as increasing capacity to make money—more skills means more ability to engage in different kinds of work. Yet, in many instances additional skills training requires money. While some professional development grants exist in various jurisdictions, granting programs were not able to adequately support the sudden need. And having to change course in one’s creative practice means having to pause, sometimes completely, time spent creating art.

Concerns over time spent as an artist were not limited to the here and now. Artists wondered about the longevity of their current levels of work. One artist has been growing their art practice for 30 years. And yet, they told us that:

“it is difficult to imagine myself as a practicing artist at 60 and 65 and 70. Some of the questions of sustainability are amplified, are more increased ... it is very hard to imagine a future self where I am healthy. And I have a healthy arts practice ... It’s very difficult to be an artist with this many years and still be asking, “is this a path that I want to end on, and am actually able to stay on?” If the answer to that question is no, it’s very scary. It’s been a deep investment over many, many years, and I’m not sure what else my life would look like. And I know that I’m not alone.”

That looming future does not, however, diminish her commitment to artmaking: “I love the work that I do. The work that I do is important. I’m committed to it.” Nonetheless, “I feel exhausted.” This does, however, point to a recurring issue in artistic practice—artists’ devotion to their craft at their own expense.

THE TAKEAWAY

The narrative in this chapter describes how artists are navigating some very serious issues and the ways that funders, and the sector more broadly, needs to think differently about what support and advocacy look like. For housing, it is not just about there being more available but also the quality that is out there. This is also related to creative space, as some artists work from home, which potentially has negative impacts on their work. As well, racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination impact where artists choose to live. Such experiences are not separate from personal life, as they also emerge in professional practice. And, more and more, artists and their networks discuss moving not only further from the core but leaving Toronto altogether—sometimes even leaving the province or the country.

MONTREAL

*"We're always in a state of constant compromise ...
personal life versus artistic development versus
everyday expenses."*



Respondent Profile

We received 123 responses to the survey from Montreal's arts community. To better understand the perspectives and situations of respondents, we asked if they had moved to where they are currently located within the last three years. Roughly 16% of respondents indicated that they had and includes those who moved within the city, into the city, and away from the city. Respondents who had not moved in the last three years where then asked if they were considering moving from where they currently reside. About 13% of respondents said yes, with another 25% saying they are not sure.

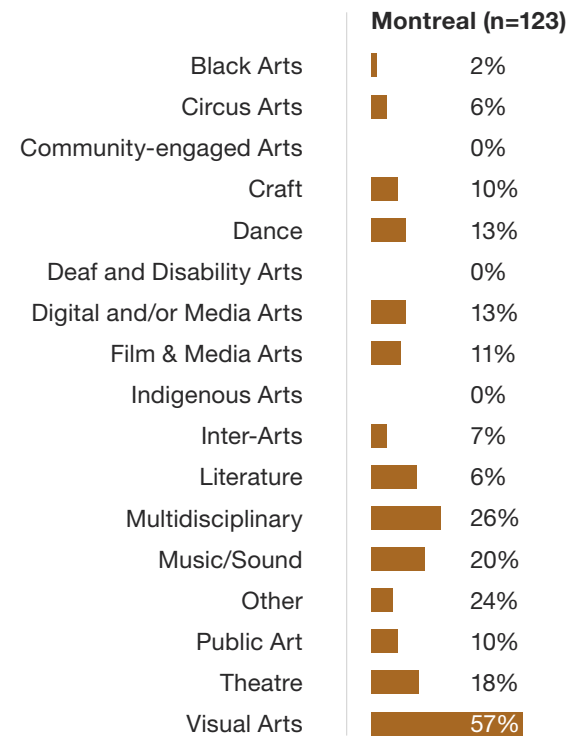
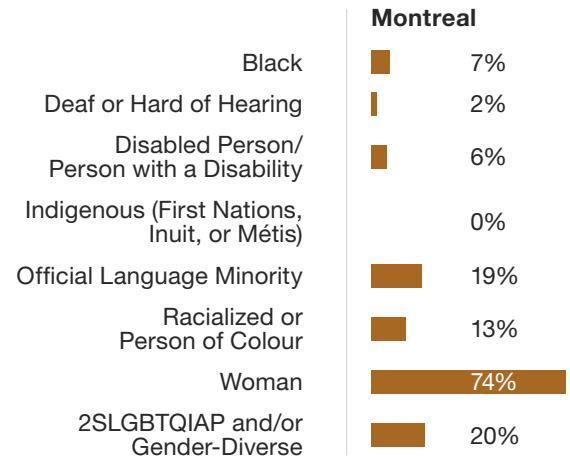
We organized the two Montreal discussion groups around these top three responses as to why people have moved or are thinking of moving:

- ▶ The cost of living was too high
- ▶ I did not receive adequate granting support
- ▶ Better access to affordable creative/rehearsal spaces

KEY LEARNINGS

These discussions were led by Laurence Dubuc, a Mitacs Postdoctoral Fellow with Mass Culture. From these discussions, we learned three key things about what artists are experiencing in the city:

- ▶ Some artists are choosing to focus more on commercializing their practice in order to earn more from their work. However, this means that often they are engaged in work that is not important or interesting to them and so risks causing them to re-evaluate their desire to be an artist.
- ▶ There are several ways that different types of space for art pose potentially negative impacts on its creation. From the size of creative space (in-home or elsewhere) to storage to presentation space, the scale of these spaces can dictate the size of the work.
- ▶ Artists from equity-deserving communities, particularly Black artists, continue to encounter racist tokenization. This results in feeling used and disconnected, and they also end up turning down work.





IN DISCUSSION

Precarious Work: To Stay or to Go?

The artists who participated in discussions talked about how the arts are important for society, particularly in the ongoing pandemic years. Art helps to make sense of the world and shows us how “everything is connected.” It also brings people together and offers opportunities for personal interaction, which has been severely lacking during the pandemic. Because of this, artists are feeling that art “should be considered a priority for society” and that “government has a responsibility to support artists and other people who are doing everything to offset all this negativity.” However, precariousness is the hallmark feature of a career in the arts. And for some, it feels like “we’re [being kept] in this precariousness, and that’s a choice” that those with the power and influence to affect change are making.

One of the impacts that artists talked about was being “forced” to engage in non-arts work or, at best, arts-related work (like teaching) that is not about making art. And while arts-related work is certainly understood to be valuable and important, it is nonetheless taking up more and more time. Like we heard in the other cities, what is considered subsistence in most granting programs is nowhere near what is needed in reality to even just “get by.” The resulting compromise—to spend less time as an artist—is also prompting some to re-evaluate their career. Exacerbating this, with CERB support many artists were given a completely new perspective on what is possible with a higher, stable income. While not new information for us, it was still important to hear how pandemic supports like CERB gave artists stability. For many that we spoke with across the country, the up to \$24,000 available in a year was more money than they

made before the pandemic. Some were even able to pay off some debts with this money. While this freed artists from a lot of concern and anxiety about survival, which consequently opened time and mental space to be creative, it also prompted reflection on how that same sense of security is not possible for them as artists. What this seems to be creating is a realization that perhaps careers outside of the arts are healthier and more viable options.

Another avenue that several artists we spoke with have been exploring is commercialization of their practice, particularly in the last few years. As a result, one artist said this means that “I’ve put off the more personal projects that are dear to me.” One major factor that seemed to be pushing these artists towards more commercial endeavours come from the granting system itself. Grant writing is time consuming and has no guarantee of being successful. The uncertainty that comes with applying for grants is a further deterrent: should artists spend time writing grants or spend time making art for commercial purposes, which may end up being more financially rewarding than being awarded a grant?

Additional limitations to maintaining a non-commercial artistic practice include various ongoing costs that are not always covered either by project grants or gig contracts. In Montreal, transportation was described as too expensive to use regularly. Several artists thus travel by bicycle, which means that work opportunities need to be closer to where they live. As well, computer software programs have largely turned to subscription-based models instead of single-purchase. This requires artists to pay monthly or annual fees to use what might be considered

basic tools to not only create work but also to market and promote it. One artist pointed out that “maybe you don’t need it every month—only once every two years.” While hacking software used to be a means of avoiding high software purchase prices (albeit an illegal one), this is becoming increasingly more difficult and impossible. This leaves artists to shoulder these ongoing costs without continual support.

Throughout discussions across the four cities involved in this project, we repeatedly heard about the struggles to maintain an income merely to cover current costs like housing, creative space, and even food. And as largely self-employed artists without any access to benefits, health-related expenses are an additional burden. The immediacy of these realities also points to an inability for many to invest in retirement planning, and indeed the artists nearing retirement all expressed concerns about what their retirement future looks like. Part of the inability to develop a retirement fund is because of subsistence amount limits in many granting programs. Because artists have little or no retirement savings, we heard about the pressure that some feel about being behind with their savings, particularly when looking at people their own age in different careers. This, too, makes commercialization, or a completely different career outside of the arts, more appealing.

Making Space: Size Matters

Depending on the artistic discipline, home and creative spaces are not always separate. Of course, the scale of creative space is severely reduced for artists who have home studios. In instances where an additional studio is required, this obviously adds another expense for artists to cover. One artist looking for studio space saw spaces that were listed as “affordable” costing \$1,200 per month.⁶ On top of housing, such a cost is prohibitive. The solution, then, became finding a one-bedroom apartment that could be arranged to also have a studio. However, this then means that “if I want to do studio visits, if there are people who want to come, at the end of the day that’s still my home.”

Dance is one discipline in which creating at home is often not possible. For one dancer we spoke with, this is especially true as they share a one-bedroom apartment with a roommate. Because renting is becoming increasingly expensive, they explained that by having a roommate they are able to rent rehearsal space via a coworking arrangement. They note that there are some free or otherwise accessible spaces like cultural centers in their neighborhood, but these are difficult to book as there is such high competition. Yet, having these spaces close to where they lives is important, as they need to avoid public transit as a cost-saving measure.

Whether or not artists have creative space either in-home or elsewhere, we also heard from Montreal artists, more than from artists in the other cities, about storage space for art. Storage is potentially an added cost, whether it be renting a larger home

with extra room or renting space elsewhere. Off-site storage space also potentially means additional transportation costs. As well, like with creative space, the size of where work gets stored can negatively impact the scale of work that artists can create. Beyond artists who need storage, galleries and other organizations that purchase works also need to have spaces, typically on-site, in which to store their acquisitions. Their capacity to store them thus impacts their ability to acquire them: “If it’s too expensive to store the work, then it’s not worth their while to buy it.”

Exhibition and presentation space, too, emerged as a theme in Montreal. Even if a gallery does purchase a work, the size of presentation spaces poses some issues. While large gallery and exhibition spaces might seem like a dream come true, the size of these spaces is frequently misaligned with the size of studio spaces: “as a studio artist, could I envision work on that scale? If we’re only offered these little lobbies in which we can try to fit our work and ideas, how is [this reflected in] the work?” This presents some aesthetic concerns and, potentially, hampers the ability for artists to build out their practice to—quite literally—scale up their work. For artists who cannot afford large studio space, it can be difficult to build experience creating large-scale projects.

One of the impacts of both size and cost of creative and/or storage space is further pressure for artists to create digital work. In the last several years, even before the pandemic, desires for the creation of digital work have been increasing. As we know, during the pandemic the sector was forced into virtual modes of delivery. For artists in disciplines not typically associated with digital creation, this presents a major skills gap. Working digitally also brings up issues around copyright as well as needing to shift to virtual modes of delivery. These two issues were major learning curves for many parts of the sector, and the latter often meant spending money to purchase equipment and/or take professional development courses.

Slow to Change: Racism and Representation

Woven throughout all of the conversations we had with artists in all four cities was the recognition that while work is being done to confront systemic racism that is revealing the many ways it manifests, it remains pervasive. One Montreal artist told us that:

“An obstacle in general that was there before the pandemic is that my artistic practice, and my approach, are really based on my identity as a person of African descent. In my art, I want to present Black people and Black identities, but I find that it’s really hard in Montreal to make people respect that. Even when I have more opportunities to create, I don’t have the impression that my work is respected. [This] makes it hard to develop my process and remain true to what I want to do. I have a lot of contracts in which I’m asked to represent diversity, to do something just to check off a box. That’s not

⁶ The perception from artists that we spoke with is that corporations are purchasing up studios and then raising rental fees. How accurate this is remains unclear but identifies an area for further investigation.

what I do. I find that really disrespectful, and it happens far too often. Every week I have discussions in which I have to insist or find a way to explain myself. As a result, I have to turn down a lot of projects.”

What we see in this artist’s story is an ongoing struggle to be respected and understood and to not be tokenized. In these situations, they find themselves advocating to be able to fully represent themselves and Black identities. She continued:

You can also see ... in the media in how some people of African descent are or are not represented, or how they are limited in their identity ... People want to put us in quota boxes. They want to label us as artists of immigrant origin. ‘Ah, you are a Black woman’ ... And I find that, yes, the effort is often there but it’s done in such an awkward way that we feel reduced to a superficial part of our identity and not how we are as artists in all our personal and artistic complexity.”

What this artist is describing is that they are not valued as an artist first like others are. Rather, it is their Black presence, not their art or individual voice, that is important to organizations. When asked if this affects their desire to leave Montreal, they said, “Yes. I don’t want to always be doing art about me as a Black woman. My art is influenced by that but it’s not all I do. And it’s sometimes a drag to have to be that. And now I feel like that’s all that’s being asked in Montreal.” Moreover, despite the financial hardships that artists face, she chooses to turn down contracts when this kind of racism appears thus driving her to spend even less time creating artistic work and contributing to Montreal’s arts community.

THE TAKEAWAY

The Montreal discussions were particularly emotional for several of the artists involved, particularly when sharing experiences of racism. Montreal artists explained in great detail to troubles with creative space, and storage for creative works, and the ways this impacts the creation of art. They also spoke about commercializing their practice, which is one way of continuing to be a creator instead of leaving a creative practice altogether. There was a focus in Montreal on the role of the arts during the pandemic years, and how the arts contribute to mental health. So, it is perhaps not surprising that some participants were thinking about commercializing their practice instead of switching careers. However, as we described above, some are also considering building some kind of exit strategy because of the realization that financial security might be possible elsewhere.

LOOKING AHEAD

This project is one effort to identify areas that need further attention from funders. Much of the information gathered through our discussions with artists points to areas for further collaboration between funders as well as larger issues where the arts sector would benefit from building relationships and projects with other sectors. What is reported in this document offers a prompt for funders to consider ways of supporting the sector beyond granting. By continuing to collaborate we will be better able to leverage resources and knowledge that will advance our priorities and those of the artists, arts organizations, and communities that we serve.

APPENDIX A

Introduction

[Insert Municipal Funding Body] is partnering with [list other municipal funders] and the Canada Council for the Arts to better understand the emergent trends and factors that influence where artists live and work. This survey is open to professional artists from any discipline who:

- ▶ currently have, or have previously had within the last three years, a creative practice
- ▶ live, or have lived within the last three years, in [city]

The information you provide through this survey will be aggregated in a report for the funders that will identify the emergent issues that artists encounter. Your responses will also help us identify key topics to explore more deeply in small, 90-minute discussion groups specific to each local context. At the end of this survey, you can identify if you would like to be considered for participation in those groups. You are welcome to complete only this survey and not participate in the discussion groups.

A summary report will be publicly available on each partner's website.

The information gathered through both the survey and the discussion groups is solely for research purposes. Only research staff at the partner organizations will have access to the raw data. Once analyzed, statistical data will be reported in aggregate. All transcripts from the discussion groups will be anonymized, and no participant will be identified in any report without consent. No data, either quantitative or qualitative, will be entered into our granting system. Participation with this survey and/or the discussion groups will not impact any current or future granting applications.

Questions?

If you have any questions about this research, please contact research@canadacouncil.ca.

Survey

1) First 3 letters of your postal code (required).

2) How many years of artistic practice do you have? (required)

- a. 0-5
- b. 6-10
- c. 11-15
- d. 16-20
- e. 21+

3) In which discipline(s) do/did you work? Select all that apply (required).

- a. Black arts
- b. Circus arts
- c. Craft
- d. Community-engaged arts
- e. Dance
- f. Deaf and disability arts
- g. Digital arts
- h. Indigenous arts
- i. Inter-arts
- j. Literature
- k. Film and media arts
- l. Music/sound
- m. Multidisciplinary
- n. Public art
- o. Theatre
- p. Visual arts
- q. Not listed above: [text-fillable field]

4) Compared to your artistic practice pre-pandemic, are you practicing (required):

- a. More
- b. Less
- c. The same
- d. I have given up my practice but work in the sector in another capacity
- e. I have given up my practice and have left the sector altogether

5) Languages Spoken at Home (optional):

- a. English
- b. French
- c. Additional/Others: [text-fillable field]

6) Do you identify with any of the following groups? Check all that apply (optional):

- a. Deaf or hard of hearing
 - i. If you would like to specify in your own words how you identify, please do so here: [text-fillable field]
- b. Disabled Person/Person with a disability
 - i. If you would like to specify in your own words how you identify, please do so here: [text-fillable field]
- c. Black
 - i. If you would like to specify in your own words how you identify, please do so here: [text-fillable field]
- d. Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, or Métis)
 - i. If you would like to specify in your own words how you identify, please do so here: [text-fillable field]
- e. Official language minority
 - i. If you would like to specify in your own words how you identify, please do so here: [text-fillable field]
- f. Racialized or Person of Colour
 - i. If you would like to specify in your own words how you identify, please do so here: [text-fillable field]
- g. Woman
 - i. If you would like to specify in your own words how you identify, please do so here: [text-fillable field]
- h. 2SLGBTQIAP and/or gender-diverse
 - i. If you would like to specify in your own words how you identify, please do so here: [text-fillable field]

7) Have you moved to your current location from a different location in the last 3 years (required)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8) (required if 7 = yes) From where?

- a. [text-fillable field]

9) (required if 7 = yes) Why? Check all that apply.

- a. I was not able to generate enough income through my artistic work.
- b. The cost of living was too high.
- c. Better access to affordable housing.
- d. Better access to affordable creative/rehearsal spaces.
- e. I did not receive adequate granting support.
- f. There are better granting opportunities elsewhere.
- g. There is more demand for my work/better artistic opportunities elsewhere.
- h. I did not feel like I belonged in this city.
- i. Living in this city was negatively impacting my physical health.
- j. Living in this city was negatively impacting my mental health.
- k. I've moved to where other artists are located.
- l. For my partner/family reasons.
- m. Other (Please feel free to elaborate)
 - i. [Text-fillable field with ~200 words]

10) (required if 7 = no) Are you considering moving from where you are currently located?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

11) (required if 10 = yes) Why? Check all that apply.

- a. I am not able to generate enough income through my artistic work.
- b. The cost of living is too high.
- c. Better access to affordable housing.
- d. Better access to affordable creative/rehearsal spaces.
- e. I do not receive adequate granting support.
- f. There are better granting opportunities elsewhere.
- g. There is more demand for my work/better artistic opportunities elsewhere.
- h. I do not feel like I belonged in this city.
- i. Living in this city is negatively impacting my physical health.
- j. Living in this city is negatively impacting my mental health.
- k. I want to move to where other artists are located.
- l. For my partner/family reasons.
- m. Other (Please feel free to elaborate)
 - i. [Text-fillable field with ~200 words]

12) We are gathering a small number of artists to hear their perspectives on the factors that impact where they live and work. Would you like to be considered for participation (optional)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

13) The 90-minute discussion groups will be moderated by a person from the local arts community. Research staff from some of these partners may be in attendance to observe in support of analysing and interpreting the information that is shared in discussion. Discussion group participants will be paid for their time. If you are still interested, please provide (required if 12 = Yes):

- a. Name
- b. Pronouns
- c. Email address where you may be reached
- d. Please provide details on any accessibility supports that you require to participate in the discussion group. This will not affect how participants are selected.
- i. [text-fillable field ~50 words]

14) Please tell us why you are interested in participating in the discussion groups (required if 12=yes):

- a. [text-fillable field ~250 words]

Thank you for completing this survey.

Discussion Lead Biographies

Vancouver: Kenji Maeda

Kenji's (he/him) experiences are diverse and grounded in his passion for the arts, education, and building community, and influenced by his Uchinanchu heritage. Based on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, he is the Executive Director of the Greater Vancouver Professional Theatre Alliance and an arts and culture consultant. Kenji currently sits on the board of Mass Culture, a national organization where research and the cultural sector intersect, and an alum of the Banff Centre's Cultural Leadership Program.

Calgary: Jenna Rodgers

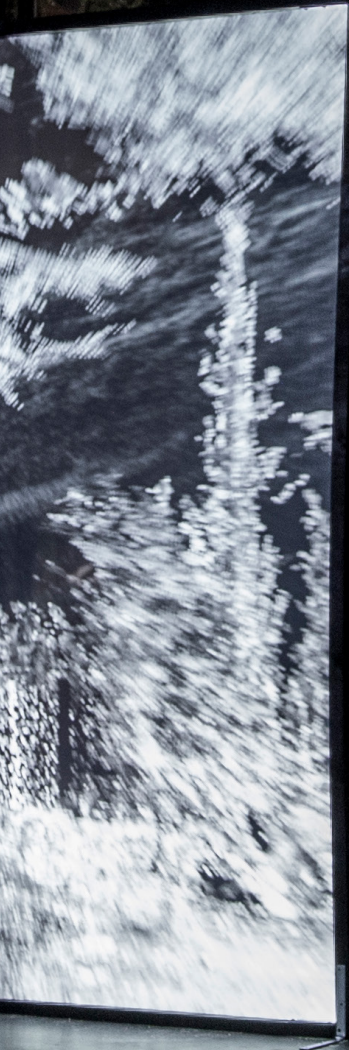
Jenna (she/her) is a mixed-race Director and Dramaturg who gratefully resides on land called *Moh'kins'tsis* (Calgary), on Treaty 7 Territory. She is the founding Artistic Director of Chromatic Theatre, the Dramaturg for the Playwrights Lab at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, the Board Co-Chair of LMDA, and the Director of Theatre Alberta. She is a graduate of the NTS Artistic Leadership Residency (2020), the Banff Centre's Cultural Leadership Program (2019), and a member of the artEquity National Facilitator Training cohort (2018). Jenna holds a MA in International Performance Research from the universities of Amsterdam and Tampere.

Toronto: Sean Lee

Sean Lee is an artist and curator exploring the assertion of disability art as the last avant-garde. His methodology explores crip curatorial practices as a means to resist traditional aesthetic idealities. Orienting towards a "crip horizon", Sean's practice explores the transformative possibilities of accessibility as an embodied politic and disability community building as a way to desire the ways disability can disrupt. Sean holds a B.A. in Arts Management and Studio from the University of Toronto, Scarborough and is currently the Director of Programming at Tangled Art + Disability. Previous to this role, he was Tangled's inaugural Curator in Residence (2016). Sean has been integral to countless exhibitions and public engagements throughout his tenure at Tangled Art + Disability. In addition to his role at Tangled, Sean is an independent lecturer, speaker, and writer adding his insights and perspectives to conversations surrounding Disability Arts across Canada, the United States and internationally. He has taught "Accessibility in Curating: A Framework" at NODE Curatorial Studies Online and the Hidden Project with Goethe-Institut Shanghai. Sean currently sits on the board of Toronto Arts Council and CARFAC Ontario, and is a member of the Ontario Art Council's Deaf and Disability Advisory Group and Chair of the Toronto Art Council's Visual Arts / Media Arts Committee.

Montreal: Laurence Dubuc

Laurence D. Dubuc is a Mitacs post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Arts, Culture and Media at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC). She completed her doctoral thesis at the University of Montréal on the network of artist-run centres in Montreal. Her research focuses on the precariousness of artistic work, individual and institutional strategies for improving the working conditions of artists, and collaborative and community-centered work methodologies. She currently works in partnership with Mass Culture and the Urban Just Transitions research cluster at UTSC. In parallel to her academic work, she has worked as a consultant in the arts sector in Montreal and elsewhere in Canada for several years in addition to being involved with artistic communities in various ways.



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KAI ANALYTICS