

## Staff Report

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**Report To:** Tom Thomson Art Gallery Advisory Committee  
**Report From:** Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator  
**Meeting Date:** November 6, 2024  
**Report Code:** AG-24-011  
**Subject:** November Update Report

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### Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report AG-24-011 respecting November Update Report, the Tom Thomson Art Gallery Advisory Committee recommends that City Council receive the report as the Director and Chief Curator's update on the Gallery's Programming and Operations for information purposes.

### Highlights:

- The Gallery opened three new exhibitions on September 28 including *Creative Pathways*, a project that was developed through a partnership with the Reach Centre that highlights the creativity of the neurodivergent community. This exhibition was featured on CTV news Barrie.
- Temporary art storage racks have been set up in the studio and staff are working with a team of volunteers to move the art collection in advance on the double HVAC replacement work which will begin on January 13, 2025.
- The Gallery hosted a Welcome Reception for the Cobble Beach Concours d'Elegance attracting 120 attendees, including international visitors – participants, judges and guests of the Concours event and local dignitaries. Guests provided a lot of positive feedback on the exhibitions.
- Staff submitted a grant application to Bruce Power for a *Safekeeping the Planet* Symposium, part of next year's

programming, and extension from our Safekeeping exhibition as well Earth Day festivities.

## **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: This report supports the delivery of Core Service

## **Climate and Environmental Implications:**

This supports the objectives of the City's Corporate Climate Change Adaptation Plan by increasing awareness and knowledge of corporate climate change adaptation.

## **Previous Report/Authority:**

[AG-24-009](#)

## **Background:**

### **Current Exhibitions**

*Creative Pathways: Celebrating the Neurodivergent Community*  
Continues to January 4, 2025

Through a public call, the Gallery, in partnership with the Reach Centre Grey Bruce, invited local artists who self-identify as neurodivergent to submit artwork in response to the concept of community. The call was an extension of the community quilt project that was completed in the fall of 2023, which saw over 100 artistic expressions on small sheets of paper that were stitched together into a large collaborative depiction of what community looks like. Four artists—Nancy Allan Hall, Lydia Knox, Emmitt Williams, and Kristofer Wist—were selected by the jury to participate in this exhibition, each offering their vibrant, individual interpretations of this topic. At its heart, *Creative Pathways* celebrates artistic expression and community partnership while highlighting the immense talent and creative energy of neurodivergent artists in our region. The opening reception for this exhibition attracted many Reach Centre participants and community members to celebrate inclusiveness. CTV News Barrie also featured this exhibition on their evening news.

Bonnie Devine: *Land in War*  
Continues to January 4, 2025

In this exhibition, Devine reflects on land and how its possession and control are at the heart of warfare through the stories of eight pivotal figures: three Victoria Cross recipients interred in Owen Sound, four Indigenous warriors who fought on various North American battlegrounds, and her father, who served with the Canadian army in Belgium and Holland in 1944. The exhibition includes delicate charcoal portraits of these individuals, coupled with expansive landscape paintings inspired by their actions, and smaller monoprint studies of each battle site. During a time marked by escalating global conflicts, Devine's work prompts reflection on colonialism's tendency to incite violent conflict and the devastation it causes to both people and the natural world.

Devine is a visual artist, writer, and educator. Born in Toronto and raised as an off-reserve member of the Anishinaabek of Serpent River First Nation, which is located on the north shore of Lake Huron, Devine's work emerges from the storytelling and image making traditions that are at the root of Anishinaabe culture. Her cross-disciplinary practice combines written, sculptural, painted, and performative gestures to explore issues of land, treaty, and history. Though formally educated in sculpture and installation art at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD U) and York University, Devine's most enduring learning came from her grandparents, who were trappers on the Canadian Shield in northern Ontario.

Devine's installation and video works have been shown and collected nationally and internationally including by the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Gallery of Canada, and the Smithsonian's National Gallery of the American Indian.

The TOM has reached out to the Legion to cross-promote Devine's artist talk which will take place in advance of Remembrance Day on November 9. The Gallery is also partnering with the Billy Bishop Museum which will bring some artefacts to the Gallery for the talk.

Tom Thomson: *Homecoming*  
Continues to January 4, 2025

As one of Canada's most recognized and celebrated artists, this exhibition

explores the role that Owen Sound and surrounding areas played in Tom Thomson's artistic growth and his emergence as a national icon.

Thomson grew up on a farm near Leith, just northeast of Owen Sound and after apprenticing at a foundry and machine shop in Owen Sound in 1899, he left the city to further his education and seek adventure in Seattle, Washington. A few years later in 1902, his parents sold the Leith family farm, moving to a home overlooking Owen Sound on the East Hill, near the present-day site of Georgian College. Three years later, Thomson would return to Ontario and work in Toronto as a graphic designer, but he regularly visited Owen Sound to see his family and friends. In 1908, Thomson's parents built a new house at 528 4th Avenue East, providing Thomson with easy access to the Sydenham River and surrounding hills in what is now Harrison Park. The artworks he created during these visits act as key markers in tracing his artistic development.

It is from the Owen Sound region that Thomson captured family members' likenesses in early sketchbooks, recorded local scenes in line drawings using pen and ink, experimented with recording the landscape through black-and-white photography, and most importantly, transitioned from watercolour to oil painted landscapes, for which he would become famous.

This exhibition is presented through the research of David Huff, former Curator of Collections.

## **Programming**

It's vital to highlight that the double HVAC replacement project will impact Gallery programming and operations. Staff are relocating the majority of the art collection to our studio space which is traditionally used for public programming, including make-art activities and workshops. This shift will temporarily limit our use of this space until mid-year 2025, requiring staff to identify alternative locations for certain programs.

To ensure continuity, we are collaborating with the library to facilitate our regular school tours and make-art bookings, increasing access for students and classes for our fall exhibitions. Several classes are already booked, and staff are using the library's auditorium for the art-making component. This partnership will help us maintain our commitment to educational outreach and provide enriching experiences for our community.

Highlights in September/October:

- September 6: Deadly Pairing Fundraiser at Coffin Ridge Winery with approximately 100 people in attendance.
- September 7: Artist Talk with Gordon Monahan
- September 13: Welcome Reception for Cobble Beach Concours d'Elegance with 124 guests in attendance.
- September 14: Concours d'Lemons Gallery Tour
- September 26: Babytime Gathering (10:30 AM - 11:30 AM) – largest babytime program yet with over 30 parents and babies in attendance.
- September 28: Fall Exhibitions Opening Reception (2 PM - 4 PM) – over 140 visitors in that day to celebrate the new shows.
- End of September: Submitted grant application to Bruce Power for Safekeeping the Planet Symposium, part of next year's programming, and extension from our *Safekeeping* exhibition as well Earth Day festivities.
- October 1: CTV News Barrie Coverage of *Creative Pathways* exhibition – Reporter KC Kolby came to the TOM to interview Director and Chief Curator Aidan Ware, along with Jennifer Miller, Executive Director of the REACH Centre Grey Bruce for this broadcasting of exhibition highlighting neurodiverse artists.

#### Upcoming Programming for November/December:

- October 25 - November 11: TOM as a location for the Poppy Campaign by the Owen Sound Legion, coinciding with Bonnie Devine's exhibition honoring local war heroes.
- October 31: Special Babytime programming in Bonnie Devine's exhibition space (10:30 AM - 11:30 AM) with a costume theme for parents and children.
- Early November: application to the Commonwell L.E.A.F. grant program in support of converting the studio into a dedicated makerspace and learning center for the TOM, enhancing future programming efforts. The application deadline is November 8, 2024.
- November 9: Artist Talk with Bonnie Devine - discussing her exhibition and featuring memorabilia from local war heroes in collaboration with the Billy Bishop Home and Museum.
- November 19-21 (date to be finalized): Guided tour and art activity for 28 grade 6 students from Eastridge. Collaboration with library for make art activity due to HVAC project preparation and collection occupying the studio space.

- November 22: Art Explorers – focus group from the Canadian Federation of University Women’s Association take a guided tour of fall exhibitions.
- November 29: TOM Talk for the SPECS group - introducing seniors to the Gallery and discussing its role in the community.

These initiatives are designed to engage diverse audiences and strengthen the Gallery's role as a cultural anchor in Owen Sound.

### **The OPEN Team**

The OPEN Team was successful in receiving a grant from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation in the amount of \$4600, which is supporting the implementation of a pollinator garden at the Billy Bishop Museum. The launch of this completed project took place at the Billy Bishop Museum on Saturday, September 7 at 1pm. The OPEN Team was also successful in receiving a \$10,000 grant from Bruce Power in support of designing and planting pollinator gardens at the Library and Art Gallery. The grant funds are administered by the Library. Planning for this is underway in consultation with Master Gardeners.

### **Gallery Night at the Movies**

This ongoing program, an Official Film Circuit Centre, in its 27<sup>th</sup> season, is supported by four long-standing sponsors, providing community members with an opportunity to see films that may not otherwise be available in our region, and supports the Canadian film industry by providing filmmakers and distributors with the opportunities to extend the reach of their releases into smaller communities across the country.

Movie attendance at the first two films THELMA and GHOSTLIGHT was 257 and 284 respectively. The November film is FANCY DANCE and the December film has yet to be confirmed. Five film dates for winter and spring 2025 will be announced soon.

Many patrons took advantage of the ability to purchase passes online this year, as well as renew their Supporters Circle Memberships.

### **Tourism at the TOM 2024**

A staff report was presented to the Service Review Ad Hoc Committee analyzing this pilot project. The report outlined the following outcomes:

- Tourism Services offered at the Tom Thomson Art Gallery as a pilot project for summer 2024 in alignment with Service Review Project 3a3.
- Visitor numbers in 2024 grew to 14,324 from May to September, marking a substantial growth compared to previous years, with August seeing a record high of 4,013 visitors.
- The project actively participated in numerous local events, including the Waterfront Festival and Summerfolk, boosting visibility and strengthening connections with community groups, visitors, and residents.
- Effective collaboration with the Marine & Rail Museum and targeted social media campaigns significantly enhanced public engagement, resulting in a 54.1% increase in followers and strong promotional support for the new Visitor Services location.

Council approved the recommendation in this report to continue the Pilot of Tourism at the TOM for 2025.

## **Art Collection**

Condition Reports for all public art are now complete and a report is attached.

Tom Thomson's Palette from the Gallery's Collection continues to be at the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) in Ottawa. Staff received a report with recommendations for its conservation which includes the repair of critical cracks. The Director and the Curator of Exhibitions and Collections will be discussing treatments with the conservator to establish a plan. The cost for essential repair is covered by the CCI. Optional treatments do have a minimal cost but we are not likely to undertake those.

## **Fundraising**

A report from the Chair of the Fundraising Team is attached to the Agenda for this meeting.

A Deadly Pairing fundraising even took place on September 6 at Coffin Ridge

Winery with approximately 100 people in attendance. Although there were less tickets sold than last year, the event was still a significant success for the Gallery, raising almost \$7000 net revenue and importantly, this event continued to build and enhance the Gallery's connections, profile, and reach. Feedback from attendees was very positive with many people saying that they were looking forward to attending the event next year again. The event, which featured 10 tasting stations, was supported by the outstanding generosity and contributions of Coffin Ridge Winery which not only donated the venue, but also the wine samples.

As part of a larger partnership, in 2023 the Gallery and Winery launched a limited-edition Tom Thomson-inspired bourbon barreled Marquette wine called *Night Spirit*, which features Tom Thomson's iconic painting *Northern Lights* from the Gallery's collection. They also launched a unique Thomson maple inspired cider titled *Brush with Death* and are planning a Thomson-inspired beer which will be titled *Tombstone Tom*. A portion of the proceeds from the sales annually go to the TOM.

Coffin Ridge Winery has been a wonderful and important partner and supporter of the TOM. The partnership even extended to the development of a Tom Thomson map which highlights all the local Tom Thomson points of interest, including the Historic Leith Church and Cemetery (where Thomson is buried), the Tom Thomson Trail, the Winery, the Art Gallery, and Harrison Park where Thomson was known to frequent.

The Gallery has received a \$10,000 private donation to support staff time in the reconfiguration and moving of the art collection this fall, in advance of the double HVAC replacement in 2025.

A verbal update will be provided by the Director with respect to special fundraising strategy meeting on October 30.

## **Grants**

The Gallery submitted an annual update report to the Canada Council for the Arts and has received a grant (\$70,000).

The Gallery submitted Year 2 update to the Ontario Arts Council for the Operating Grant and has received confirmation of that grant for 2025 (\$51,249).

## **General Facility**



Gallery staff have been working with the Manager of Corporate Services and the Corporate Facility Project Coordinator to establish a plan to accommodate the replacement of both HVAC units, which service the gallery and collection spaces. The work will commence in January 2025. However, much of the art collection is currently being moved in order to accommodate the work. Temporary storage is established in the Studio and in the upper galleries to hold the works while this replacement occurs. It is anticipated that the Gallery will be closed to the public for a period in early 2025, however staff are working on plans to continue with public engagement during that timeframe.

Having staff undertake this work saved over \$300,000 in the capital project costs and volunteers are supporting this work, coming in on rotational shifts 3-4 days each week.

This is a major undertaking that will require all staff to be dedicated to the movement of the artworks, documenting their condition and location, and planning for their return to their regular storage spaces. This is also a unique opportunity for the staff to develop a plan to reorganize some of the art collection and utilize the art racks purchased for better storage.

## **Analysis:**

We are building on the success of last year through our exhibition and program delivery, partnerships, and in creating a deeper connection to the community. Creative Pathways was a milestone project for the TOM that demonstrated our commitment to being an inclusive and safe space for creativity and community.

We had ambitious fundraising and revenue targets for 2024, which we have struggled to achieve, but we are proactively looking at ways to create a new strategies to help the Gallery better achieve its goals.

## **Financial Implications:**

Currently, the Art Gallery budget is tracking over budget due to shortfalls in fundraising revenue. A special meeting of the Fundraising Team, members of Council, and staff will be held on October 30 to consider strategies to support the TOM through these challenges.

Factors related to revenue shortfall, as previously reported, include:

- Movies are under budget in revenues

- Fundraising events under budget in revenues due to the cancellation of two events that were out of staff control (one for health reasons of the venue donor and the other for lack of ticket sales and competing events). Efforts were made by the Fundraising Team to expand the fall Deadly Pairing event to include a live and silent auction, use of Tip Tap Pay on site, and Table Sponsorship, however ticket sales were lower than the year previous (100 verses 200 in 2023).
- General donations revenue is under budget.
- There were some additional one-time costs in office supplies with the implementation of Tourism at the TOM and the move of TTAG staff offices to the second floor.
- Membership costs are higher due to Galleries Ontario (GOG) 2023 and 2024 costs being paid in the 2024 year.
- The Gallery has gapped a position and these savings are recognized in the City’s overall budget but not directly in the budget for the Gallery.
- Some additional costs in travel due to the OPEN Team being selected to present at the Canadian Museums national conference in April were incurred however, this represented a significant opportunity to share the positive impact of this collaboration at a national conference.

As noted above, admissions for A Deadly Pairing fell short of projections as did donations at the event, and silent auction revenues which heavily impacted the results of this event. Expenses were moderately higher with the cost to rent washrooms and a more expensive tent.

Key feedback gathered by the fundraising team included the fact that the event tickets were more this year (\$150 verses \$125 in 2023), the time of year is complicated by back to school and Labour Day weekend, and that some people were just not aware of the event (there was modest social media advertising). Other commentary included that these are challenging economic times.

Deadly Pairing

	<b>Projected</b>	<b>Final</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
Admissions (250 cap)	\$35,175.00	\$14,970.00
TIP TAP donations	\$500.00	\$30.00
Silent Auction	\$5,000.00	2515.00

Table sponsors	\$5,000.00	\$4,540.00
Wine donated by Coffin Ridge	\$2,500.00	\$1,928.00
<b>total revenues</b>	<b>\$48,175.00</b>	<b>\$22,828.00</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Caterer	\$4,000.00	\$4,746.00
Wine samples	\$2,500.00	\$1,928.00
Entertainment	\$2,800.00	\$3,158.00
Coffin Ridge Staffing	\$2,300.00	\$1,410.00
Rental costs	\$3,500.00	\$4,457.00
Supplies	\$1,500.00	\$1,200.00
Advertising	\$250.00	\$215.00
<b>total expenses</b>	<b>\$16,850.00</b>	<b>\$17,114.00</b>
<b>NET PROCEEDS</b>	<b>\$31,325.00</b>	<b>\$6,869.00</b>

Each year the Gallery relies heavily on fundraising to achieve its budget goals and this year there were many challenges. The special meeting on October 30 will present staff and the Advisory Committee the opportunity to share ideas and strategies for moving forward.

A special meeting is planned for October 30, 2024 regarding Fundraising and other revenue sources. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

### **Communication Strategy:**

The Director continues to work with the staff to ensure that public communication of programming and exhibitions is broadly transmitted and easily accessed.

The Gallery publishes a weekly Artefacts newsletter and is active on Facebook and Instagram accounts. Media releases and advisories are sent out ahead of major events and exhibitions.

## **Consultation:**

The City Manager and Director of Community Services have reviewed the Gallery's programming and administrative plans.

The Director of Corporate Services assisted staff in preparing the financial summary.

## **Attachments:**

N/A

## **Recommended by:**

Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator

Pam Coulter, Director of Community Services

## **Submission approved by:**

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator at [aware@tomthomson.org](mailto:aware@tomthomson.org) or 519-376-1932 ext. 5001.