

Staff Report

Report To: Tom Thomson Art Gallery Advisory Committee
Report From: Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator
Meeting Date: May 7, 2025
Report Code: AG-25-004
Subject: May Update Report

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report AG-25-004 respecting May 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 exhibition spaces at the Tom Thomson Art Gallery re-opened on April 5 with three new exhibitions and an artist panel talk.
- In connection with Earth Day, the TOM is highlighting youth perspectives on environmental concerns – the exhibition *Safekeeping* offers the perspectives of local youth through collaborations with Hillcrest Elementary School and the Youth Climate Action Group. In the atrium, Upcycling TOM showcases East Ridge students' vibrant recreations of Tom Thomson's *Sunset Sky*, transforming everyday waste into art with purpose. These were showcased as part of Earth Day on Saturday, April 26.
- The Gallery has received a donation of three Tom Thomson oil sketch paintings. These were generously bequeathed by Gloria M. and James E. Smith of Toronto and come with a compelling family history. The Gallery is seeking donations to cover the cost of conserving, cleaning, and reframing them.

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-24-011](#)

Background:

As previously noted, the exhibition spaces at the Gallery were closed January 6, 2025 – April 4, 2025 for a planned replacement of aging HVAC systems. This project has now successfully been completed. This upgrade will ensure the humidity, temperature and air quality are appropriate for the care of the collection over the long term. Tourism at the TOM remained open to the public throughout that time so that visitors could continue to access Tourism and other Gallery services. The Gallery, including exhibition spaces, and Tourism Services, are now open Tuesday – Saturday 10am to 5pm and will again move to being open 7-days per week starting on the May long weekend.

Exhibitions

This season at the Gallery, our exhibitions invite reflection on stewardship, sustainability, and shared hope. They celebrate Canadian artists, Canadian landscapes, and the voices of young Canadians.

Safekeeping

Continuing to June 14, 2025

This exhibition underscores the vital roles of stewardship and conservation, not just within the realm of art, but also in the broader context of environmental protection. What makes it especially meaningful is that it amplifies the voices of local children and youth, who are at the forefront of

addressing critical environmental issues. The Gallery's Curator of Public Projects and Education worked with local students from Hillcrest Elementary School and the Youth Climate Action Group to share their thoughts, ideas, and insights in dialogue with selected works from the Gallery's collection. It encourages us all to reflect on how we can come together to safeguard our planet for future generations.

In connection with the *Safekeeping* exhibition, the Gallery unveiled a stunning new donation of three Tom Thomson paintings. These were generously bequeathed by Gloria M. and James E. Smith of Toronto and come with a compelling family history. They were originally gifted by Tom Thomson's mother, Margaret Thomson, to her niece Charlotte ("Lottie") Tripp Gilchrist, who was raised closely with the Thomson family in Leith. Passed down through generations, they have now found a permanent home in the Gallery's Collection. Following this initial presentation, the paintings will undergo professional conservation work, including careful cleaning and re-framing using archival materials, ensuring their preservation for future generations. This essential work will protect these rare pieces and allow audiences to appreciate Thomson's legacy for years to come. Georgian Bay Art Conservation has generously agreed to support this work through contributing some of the costs in-kind and the Gallery is currently seeking contributions to the cost of conserving these works.

Nicholas Hornyansky: *An Everyday Utility*
Continuing to June 14, 2025

Presented in the Jennings Young gallery, this exhibition showcases the work of Hungarian-born artist Nicholas Hornyansky, who made Canada his home in 1929. Through his etchings, aquatints, and paintings, Hornyansky captured Canada's landscapes, architecture, and people; offering a poetic impression of Canada at a time when conversations about national identity are at the forefront. *An Everyday Utility* celebrates Canadian life through the eyes of an immigrant artist.

Soft Futures
Continuing to June 21, 2025

Soft Futures brings together the work of Ashley Beerdat, Rihab Essayh, and Winnie Truong to explore the power of imagination in shaping alternative futures. At a time marked by anxieties relating to climate crisis, social

upheaval, and disconnection in the digital age, these artists envision spaces of transformation, resilience, and care. Through an immersive installation, painting, animation, sound, sculptures, and dioramas, the works invite us to slow down, reflect, and imagine futures where softness—both literal and conceptual—becomes a radical force for reconnecting with nature, each other, and ourselves.

Each artist offers a unique vision that intertwines vulnerability, imagination, and connection. For Essayh, this is achieved by creating a sanctuary under the canopy of a tent, inviting contemplation and collective care, where softness transforms into a force for empathy and resilience. Beerdat channels the power of imagination to navigate uncertainty, using painting to explore the evolving relationship between nature, time, and renewal. Truong blurs the lines between the human and botanical, crafting hybrid beings that challenge our understanding of identity and beauty, while also inviting us to reconsider the interconnectedness of all life. Collectively, their works open new possibilities for healing and growth.

Ashley Beerdat is a painter, muralist and arts educator based in the GTA. She has a BA in Studio Art and Art History from Western University and her MFA from the University of Waterloo. Her work is held in Mississauga's permanent corporate art collection and has been exhibited at Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery and The Artist Project, among others. She has also painted murals for the City of Brampton, Mississauga, and Toronto. Ashley is a recipient of the SHRCC Doctoral Fellowship, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship, and the Walter Metzger Memorial Award.

Rihab Essayh was born in Morocco and raised in Montreal. Essayh is an interdisciplinary artist whose large-scale, immersive installations create spaces of slowing down and softening. Her research considers issues of isolation and disconnection in the digital age. She completed her MFA at the University of Guelph in 2022. Her work has been shown at the Art Council of Montreal, La Centrale Powerhouse Gallery (Montreal), and the Art Gallery of Guelph (Guelph), among many others.

Winnie Truong is a Toronto artist working with drawing and collage to explore ideas of identity, feminism, and fantasy, along with a digital art and animation practice. She has exhibited across Canada, the US and Europe with solo presentations at Volta New York Art Fair, Pulse Miami Art Fair and Art Toronto. Truong is a 2017 recipient of the Chalmers Arts Fellowship. Her work is held in the several major collections including The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Doris McCarthy Gallery at the University of Toronto,

Bank of Denmark, Canada Council Art Bank Collection, and in several major Canadian Bank art collections.

Exhibitions Opening June 28, 2025:

Elly MacKay: *Only Human*

This is a solo exhibition of new work by Owen Sound artist Elly MacKay that grapples with mounting ethical questions surrounding the rise of artificial intelligence and the complications of preserving artistic autonomy in the digital age. Visitors will be asked to lock their cellphones away before engaging with MacKay's intricate dreamlike diorama — a protective and perhaps futile tactic to push back against technologies invasive gaze.

All the Calm and Calamity

Although war and peace are diametrically opposed, they exist simultaneously. This exhibition explores this dichotomy by examining the work Tom Thomson created in Algonquin Park between 1914 and his death in 1917, within the context of the collective anxieties and uncertainties that pervaded daily life at that time during the First World War. The exhibition will also include works by Thomson's contemporaries drawn from the Collection, in addition to works borrowed from the Canadian War Museum and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

Su Rynard

As a counterpoint to *All the Calm and Calamity*, this two-channel video installation offers a haunting and disquieting story of Vernon Rowley, the artist's uncle who participated in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945. The video footage combines verbal and written exchanges with family archives, historical footage evoking nuclear warfare, and the stark landscapes of the Utah airfield and bombing range where Rowley trained for the atomic mission by the US government.

Education & Engagement Highlights

The Gallery has re-launched children's art camps for summer and delivered a very successful March Break Camp. The camps, which are for ages 8-12, combine hands-on artmaking, outdoor exploration, and creative adventure,

inspired by the legacy of Tom Thomson. Campers have the opportunity to learn about art and develop their skills through weekly themes based on Tom Thomson's life and work. In addition, each week includes creative day trips to Harrison Park, where Tom Thomson first painted, providing campers with the chance to connect with nature and the landscapes that inspired some of his early works. Registration for Summer Art Camps is now open and there are 6 weeks available running from July 7 to August 22. The cost is \$275 per child. Special thanks to the Kiwanis Club of Owen Sound for their sponsorship of this program, which will also enable identified disadvantaged youth to attend at no cost.

In keeping with the theme of the environment, the Gallery has some incredible renderings of Tom Thomson's *Sunset Sky* on display in the atrium. The Gallery is thrilled to present Upcycling TOM again this year in partnership with Owen Sound Waste Watchers and East Ridge Community School. The students used all kinds of materials including bottle caps, fabric, cardboard, and discarded books, to transform waste into incredible recreations that capture the vibrant spirit of Tom's original painting. This project highlights the importance of sustainability, raising awareness about the environmental impact of single-use plastics and showing us how we can all make a difference. These incredible upcycled creations were featured during the Earth Day festivities in Owen Sound on April 26th and at a special Family Night celebration on April 29th for East Ridge students, teachers, and families.

Looking ahead, the Gallery is participating in ArtWalk again this year on June 21 from 10am to 3pm. This event attracts many visitors to the city to enjoy arts, culture, shopping, and restaurants. The Gallery will also be participating as a site in Doors Open that day.

2025 Winter/Spring Film Programming

The Gallery wrapped up its spring Gallery Night at the Movies season which featured five film screenings, one per month from January to April. In addition to this, the Gallery celebrated National Canadian Film Day on April 16 with a special presentation of *Young Werther* at Owen Sound Galaxy Cinemas. We were excited to be a part of this national initiative celebrating our diverse culture and supporting the Canadian Film industry.

In conjunction with the Toronto International Film Festival, The Gallery's film

series is one of our most successful and long-running programs. As an Official Film Circuit Centre, Gallery Night at the Movies provides local filmgoers 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 the opportunities to extend the reach and theatrical runs of their releases into the smaller communities across the country.

With a season running from September to April, Gallery Night at the Movies brings the best of Canadian, foreign, and independent film to the region, featuring highlights from TIFF and the Film Festival Circuit. Our films are screened at our local Cineplex Theatre, Galaxy Cinemas in Owen Sound, offering a true cinematic experience with all the amenities.

Collection

Staff are working to relocate the collection back into the vault following the completion of the HVAC replacement project which required staff to move it to temporary storage. As part of this project, staff are reconfiguring areas of the vault to create efficiencies by re-utilizing the temporary art storage shelves and units with an overall objective of having the collection better stored.

On April 15, five Tom Thomson paintings from the Gallery's collection, which had been on tour as part of the *Tom Thomson: North Star* exhibition, were returned. The exhibition, developed by the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, launched in 2023 and toured to the Art Gallery of Alberta, Audin Art Museum (Whistler, BC), and finished at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery (Fredericton, NB) in 2025. For the exhibition, Tom Thomson's *Snow and Earth* (1917) was reframed by the McMichael to provide better stability to the piece and the TOM will keep the work in the new frame at no cost. In addition to this, Tru-vue non-reflective glazing was added to *Wild Flowers* (1915) and *Algonquin Park* (1915) to provide additional protection.

Operations

Tourism at the TOM

All staff are supporting the continued provision of services to the public at the front desk with new public hours 10am – 5pm Tuesday to Saturday. As previously noted, the Gallery and Tourism hours will extend to 7-days per

week starting on the May long weekend.

Reconfiguration of the Storage area under the Atrium

Staff are re-organizing and reconfiguring the Atrium storage for better use of space and to eliminate safety hazards. This includes a comprehensive review and cleaning of education, exhibition, and operations supplies.

Fundraising 2025

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

The Gallery posted for a part-time fundraising coordinator position and an offer has been accepted. This position is expected to start on May 1, and it will be 20 hours per week, Thursday to Saturday.

Staff are working with the Fundraising Team on a fundraising plan for 2025 which seeks to meet revenue targets for the Gallery. The plan includes a strong focus on sponsorship, advanced event planning, and testing some new concepts.

In alignment with the fundraising plan, staff are in the design stage of the 2026 fundraising calendar which will feature works from the collection on the theme of 'horizons'.

Grants

The Gallery submitted the 2025 annual update report to the Canada Council for the Arts and has received payment of the \$70,000 grant for this year. Staff have also submitted the multi-year operating grant (4-year grant, 2026 - 2029) to the Canada Council for the Arts. The Gallery is in the final year of its current multi-year operating grant.

The Gallery received Year 2 of its Ontario Arts Council Operating Grant (for 2025) and will be providing the Year 3 annual update for the deadline on June 4. The amount of this grant is \$51,106 and is on budget.

The Gallery received grant funding from Young Canada Works for two summer students to support the development and delivery of summer art camps. The amount of this grant is \$12,600.

The OPEN Team was successful in securing \$15,000 from Bruce Power to support the implementation of pollinator gardens at the Library and Gallery in 2025.

Analysis:

Although the closure of the exhibition spaces will have an impact on attendance and door donations, it took place during the Gallery's off-season. Typically Spring to Fall is the busiest time for the Gallery with many tourists and visitors coming to see the exhibitions. Staff successfully undertook a major project to relocate the collection for the HVAC replacements and used that as an opportunity to create efficiencies. The re-launch of art camp programming is reconnecting kids and parents with the Gallery as are projects such as *Safekeeping* and Upcycling TOM. The Gallery is back to regular open hours which will be extended in May to create great access for visitors.

Financial Implications:

Operating grants have been successfully received as well as funding for two summer student positions to support art camps. The Gallery is working with the Fundraising Team to roll out the 2026 calendar and focusing on sponsorships to support exhibitions and programs. Although fundraising remains a challenge in the current economic climate, the Gallery is optimistic that the new Fundraising Coordinator position will provide key support in growing the Gallery's fundraising portfolio and establishing a solid infrastructure for fundraising in the future.

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:

Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services

Attachments:

N/A

Recommended by:

Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator

Pamela 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 or 519-376-1932 ext. 5001.