

# Post pandemic the arts will need our support

By Patricia Bovey | Opinion | May 13th 2020



Senator Patricia Bovey is committed to ensuring the arts' platform in Canada is solid post pandemic.

Our lives have changed in so many ways during the extraordinary times of the COVID-19 pandemic. We all applaud the bravery and dedication of essential workers in our health system, food chain, deliveries, safety, and more. Meanwhile, we have stayed at home and not seen extended family members and friends.

How have we managed the physical isolation and social distancing? Have you been watching movies, reading books, listening to or making music, or learning how to draw and paint? Artists have generously given their creative gifts through many digital platforms. Thanks to today's technologies, we are the beneficiaries.

I laud artists and arts organizations of all disciplines for sustaining us in these hard times. They have enriched our souls and provided for our mental health. They supported us with a vigil for Nova Scotia's tragedy. They rallied the nation with *Stronger Together* in aid of Canada's food banks. Music is a powerful conduit for all our emotions, and I thank all who have shared, and are sharing, their talents.

Canada's artists and arts organizations are key to the fabric of society, in good times and hard times, especially for our mental and physical health. Throughout history, creators have given hope, dreams, insights, and portrayed their times and places. Arts and cultural industries are Canada's third-largest employer, but the situation for artists is precarious. They are the largest proportion of Canada's working poor living below the poverty line.

During the pandemic's early stages, artists and arts organizations honestly shared their concerns, issues and creative initiatives with me and with a working group of senators. Their candour helped define the emergency assistance programs for the sector, a necessary, basic sustenance.

Provinces and territories are now outlining their plans to reopen following agreed guidelines.

Early in May, Manitoba's art galleries and museums were given the OK to open, while respecting the rules of social distancing, frequent hand washing, wearing of masks in certain circumstances, and constant cleaning of surfaces and public washrooms.



The Winnipeg Art Gallery. Photo by Ernest Mayer.,

Some people are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to re-engage socially, at work and in leisure. Others are concerned about our readiness, a second wave of the virus, or even another shutdown.

As we build new post-isolation normalcy, artists and our cultural sector will assuredly continue their significant contributions to our well-being. We must ensure that they can again take their rightful place in real time. The

cancellations of theatre, dance and music seasons, summer festivals and the shuttering of galleries and museums have had disastrous financial implications.

Other serious challenges include the safety of audiences as we restart. How do audiences and presenters rise above the fear of entering public spaces? We must assess the specific challenges to ensure audiences have the confidence to partake in creative events. We must also ensure that artists can reclaim their careers and reschedule their cancelled performances and exhibitions at home and internationally.

**Having worked in the arts for 50 years this month, I remain committed to doing all I can to ensure the arts' platform is sound and solid so life can reach a positive “new normalcy.”**

As I have from the outset, I continue to seek ideas, defined needs, and potential opportunities, so going forward, we can assure that this essential element of contemporary society is healthy.

My late husband's mantra was, "We are all better off when we are all better off." Let's ensure our provincial and Canada's creative sectors are better off so every aspect of our communities will also be better off. Television, movies, advertising, innovation, mental health, business, education, and tourism are all dependent on the creative sector.

Having worked in the arts for 50 years this month, I remain committed to doing all I can to ensure the arts' platform is sound and solid so life can reach a positive “new normalcy.”