



Abstract

This paper highlights three community-based initiatives that empowered seniors, racialized immigrant women artists and street artists to share their unique perspectives. From 2021 to 2023, Contemporary Calgary and the University of Calgary collaborated with artists, community partners, and the Downtown West neighbourhood to provide programming in a repurposed light rail transit car to vitalize the community through arts. Through exhibitions at Contemporary Calgary, these artists were able to tell their stories. Visitors were able to engage with, listen to, and learn from the artists' experiences. The programs fostered strong bonds among participants, resulting in ongoing collaboration and support. Drawing inspiration from Silverman's (2010) concept of the museum as social worker, this paper builds on a model of care in the art museum (Eiserman, 2000) wherein contemporary art museums serve as spaces for marginalised individuals to express themselves and for communities to actively listen and respond.

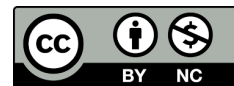
Keywords: museum, community-based art, community development, socially-engaged art, ethics of care, sociology, art education

Opening Spaces for Listening in Art Museums through Community-Based Art

© 2024 Jennifer Eiserman, Beaumie Kim and Ryan Doherty

DOI: [10.59236/artsculturedev.v1i1.12](https://doi.org/10.59236/artsculturedev.v1i1.12)

Published: May 2024



License: [CC BY-NC 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

ARTS CULTURE & DEVELOPMENT, an open-access, blind, peer-reviewed, annually published, journal on the Role of Arts and Culture in Global Development Practice. ISSN: 2997-5646.

Art and culture are seen as important means of transforming society (Holt & Maguire, 2022). The project we describe in this paper, *YYC/LRT: Community-Based Art as Community Development* (*YYC/LRT*)¹ was built on the

¹ When the public sculpture/studio is referred to, we use the italicised form, *YYC/LRT*. When the research project is referred to, we use the unitalicized form, *YYC/LRT*.

belief “in the power of art to transform the places and lives we live” (Contemporary Calgary, n.d.), seeking to support a caring, compassionate community, Calgary’s Downtown West neighbourhood, in establishing the vibrancy it desires (City of Calgary, n.d.; Sadeghpour, 2021). A research team comprised of an art educator (and co-author of this paper) at the University of Calgary and former curator at Contemporary Calgary brought together two contrasting spaces to address this belief. Contemporary Calgary is an imposing Art Brut concrete structure that members of the community perceived as unapproachable (Sadeghpour, 2021).). Further, it is filled with contemporary art that the co-authors understand can be intimidating to many. The YYC/LRT is a community studio created from a decommissioned light rail transit car. Through arts engagement, YYC/LRT served as a less intimidating space for members of the community to gather, engage in artmaking, and share their experiences. Within the inviting space of the YYC/LRT studio, artists, art education students, and participants learned from each other, found support for their life challenges, and developed lasting relationships. Working with Contemporary Calgary to exhibit their work provided participants with opportunities to become familiar and comfortable with the museum.

This paper describes the evolution of the YYC/LRT project, through community-based initiatives that started with a land acknowledgement to honour its Indigenous stewards. In this paper, we discuss how these programs focused on creating inclusive spaces for marginalised groups within the neighbourhood, specifically for seniors, racialized immigrant women artists, and street artists. The programs, held both in YYC/LRT and Contemporary Calgary’s studios, fostered strong bonds amongst participants, resulting in ongoing collaboration and support. Through participant exhibitions at Contemporary Calgary, the artists shared their stories with museum visitors who were able to engage with, listen to, and learn from the artists’ experiences. The YYC/LRT project demonstrates how contemporary art museums can invite marginalised individuals in, and that museums can be inviting, safe spaces for expression, listening, responding, and can meaningfully contribute to their local community.

Museums as Caring, Relational, and Participatory

Museum scholar Lois Silverman (2010) has characterised museums as institutions engaged in “social work”, describing the ongoing impetus of museums to address social problems, social conditions and pursue social change. She traces this identity back to museums’ earliest origins in Greek *mouseions*. One could say that museums do care for communities (Eiserman, 2000) considering a model that describes an art museum’s relationship with their communities based on Noddings’ (1984) ethics of care. Eiserman’s model includes three conditions necessary for caring relationships: the one-caring is present and available to the cared-for; the one-caring acts in a caring manner; and the cared-for communicates to the one-caring that they have received the care. Further, the caring relationship is characterised by “engrossment”, “displacement” and “reciprocity” (2000, p.9). Engrossment requires the one-caring to be present and ready to listen to the actual needs of the one cared-for. The one-caring must displace their own needs, committing themselves to the needs and goals of the

cared-for. Finally, the cared-for is an active participant in the caring relationship, communicating to the one-caring that their needs are being addressed. This model proposes that art museums, as ones-caring, have a responsibility to open up spaces for the cared-for, including those on the margins of society– those whose claims are uncertain due to social bias. This model also provides for the rich reciprocity that can occur when museums become open spaces for listening (Eiserman, 2000).

Foundational to the project is relational aesthetics' view of artists as facilitators who empower viewers through engagement in specific social contexts. YYC/LRT is built on approaches within contemporary art that favour relational (Bourriaud, 2002) and participatory (Bishop, 2006, 2012, 2013) perspectives. Further, Delany (2014), identified that approaching aesthetic experiences through collective experience fosters engagement, careful listening and thoughtful conversations. The viewer's relationship to aesthetic production changes from one of judgement (good/bad; approve/disapprove) to dialogue around meanings. Equally important to the conception of YYC/LRT is Bishop's (2012) assertion that art has the potential to be a "de-alienating endeavour". The YYC/LRT programs emphasised *relationships* rather than being isolated by the mechanisms of the capitalist consumer project, changing the role of the museum from a repository for objects to a participatory site for social engagement, creating dialogue within the communities it serves. Simon (2010, 2016) articulated how the institution becomes a "platform" connecting different users as "content creators, distributors, consumers, critics, and collaborators" (p.173). By embracing a "participative" identity, museums can evolve into outward-facing institutions that proactively seek to partner with local communities (Black, 2021).

Further, YYC/LRT was also informed by Saveri's (2019) approach to education, coined as "sociogogy" that is defined as:

human interaction of the kind of discovering and discussing and debating and challenging that is so important to developing the human relationship around learning. (p.2)

Rather than focusing on the object of instruction, sociogogy's focus is the evolution of the learner, and by extension, communities of learners. It brings people together to learn from and with each other. It is a collaborative process, in which the roles of "teacher" and "learner" shift as necessary (Saveri, 2019).

Contemporary art, engaged in social practice, might be characterised as a form of sociogogy: artists create spaces and opportunities for members of communities to come together to discover, discuss and debate. Contemporary art embraces the shifting of roles between "artist" and "viewer/audience/participant"; it is often a collaborative, co-creative process.

In this paper we tell the story of how Contemporary Calgary became an open space for listening through the YYC/LRT. First, we describe its origins in the MFA thesis project of University of Calgary MFA student Bryan Faubert and then how the project was then conceived as a community initiative. We then describe four programs by the YYC/LRT project that engaged marginalised members of the community, with the goal of

relationship-building, of listening and learning from the voices of participants. Finally, we share three key elements we identified as necessary for museums to meaningfully contribute to community development.



Figure 1. NYC/MTA:YYC/LRT at nvrInd

The Origins: NYC/MTA:YYC/LRT and The Future of Stephen Avenue Project

Artist Bryan Faubert was an MFA student at the University of Calgary whose MFA thesis project, *NYC/MTA:YYC/LRT* repurposed a decommissioned Light Rail Train (LRT) car, creating a public sculpture that linked his street art practice to place-making and community building (Faubert, 2020). Jennifer Eiserman was Faubert's thesis supervisor and Ryan Doherty, then Senior Curator at Contemporary Calgary, was a member of the thesis committee. As the University of Calgary was not able to provide a place for Faubert to work on his piece, nvrInd Arts Foundation, a community arts centre (see nvrInd.ca) donated electricity and space in their parking lot for Faubert to create the public sculpture. It was Faubert's goal to locate the piece adjacent to the Calgary LRT line and to create a community studio within it. We wanted to move the piece adjacent to Contemporary Calgary, beside which the LRT line runs as Contemporary Calgary had just moved into its landmark Art Brut home. We believed that the *YYC/LRT* community studio would make Contemporary Calgary a more approachable, welcoming space for visitors and could initiate the relationship Contemporary Calgary sought with its neighbours in the Downtown West. We sought funding for the capital costs for this endeavour with many challenges until we learned about the City of Calgary's *Future of Stephen Avenue* (FoSA) project, exploring ways to 'activate' the westernmost part of Stephen Avenue and invigorate the adjacent Downtown West neighbourhood (City of Calgary, 2020).

NYC/MTA:YYC/LRT Becomes YYC/LRT:The Future of Stephen Avenue Project (FoSA)

FoSA is an initiative of the City of Calgary to redevelop 8th Ave Southwest which runs like a spine down the centre of Calgary's downtown (City of Calgary, 2023). When we learned about the FoSA project, YYC/LRT was born, opening up available funding for us to experiment with and conduct research on the processes of a community/museum partnership using the YYC/LRT. FoSA's 'Activate and Experiment' phase,

envision[ed] long-term change on Stephen Avenue by testing ideas to better understand and measure the impacts of change along downtown's main street. Through this phase we [made] temporary changes to the Avenue. The goal [was] to bring Calgarians on board throughout the process, before making any investments in a permanent redesign. (<https://engage.calgary.ca/stephenavenue>)

During this phase, funding was provided for us to enact these temporary changes. By agreeing to locate YYC/LRT along 8th Avenue Southwest (about two blocks from Contemporary Calgary), we received funding to retrofit the interior of YYC/LRT as a studio and were able to move it to the Downtown West.

Community-Based Art Programming

Once we secured this move, we began to pursue arts and cultural program funding. With funding support from the University of Calgary, our first engagement with the community was a Land Acknowledgement program which involved ten sessions over the course of a month, led by artists Bryan Faubert and Nicole Tritter (Miq'mac heritage) with the support of Indigenous elder Cheryle Chagnon-Greyeyes and Indigenous artists Seth Dodginghorse and Tamar Cardinal. This Land Acknowledgement program aimed to initiate the programming and support participants' learning about what The Land means to its first human inhabitants and to build their own relationship to The Land. Participants worked alongside the artists and elder, creating a body of work that expressed a deep appreciation and relationship with The Land that has supported and nurtured the many living creatures who have called it their home. An exhibition at Contemporary Calgary documented the processes of the Land Acknowledgement program.

Subsequently, a Partnership Engage grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada allowed us to create a series of over twenty community-based art programs at the YYC/LRT over eighteen months, which energised the Downtown West through artmaking and fellowship. We describe three of these programs that focused specifically on marginalised groups in the Downtown West: The *55+ Open Studio*, which grew out of three programs offered to seniors; *(Re)Imagining Inclusion*, a program for racialized immigrant women artists; and *Street to Studio*, supporting street artists in their studio art practices. As part of the research process, project participants completed informed consent and answered questionnaires about their experience with the programs. Some participants also volunteered to be interviewed to share their unique perspectives. For

the purposes of this paper, we identify the participants by their real names, initials, or pseudonyms based on the preferences they stated on the informed consent forms.

55+ Open Studio: Zines – Telling Our Stories and Book It!

The 55+ Open Studio program grew out of YYC/LRT's collaboration with Unison at Kerby, a seniors' organisation located in the Downtown West, located across the street from Contemporary Calgary. YYC/LRT had approached Kerby about partnering with University of Calgary BFA students and Contemporary Calgary to create programs for their members. Aditi Sharma, Kerby's manager of education programming, was excited about working with the university students and delighted to learn about Contemporary Calgary and programming possibilities for the seniors. Three YYC/LRT programs (*Sound Self-Portraits*, *Zines – Telling Our Stories* and *Book It!*) eventually became the 55+ Open Studio, which has continued as an ongoing program at Contemporary Calgary.

Self-Portraits

Self-Portraits at YYC/LRT was held in the spring of 2022, led by University of Calgary BFA students. The program was inspired by artist Dona Schwartz's, *Ordinary People*, an exhibition of black and white portraits of Calgary residents. Ten Kerby members worked with the students to create self-portraits using photography, collage, and sound media over a six-session program held at the Kerby Centre, YYC/LRT, and Contemporary Calgary. The first two sessions at Kerby, involved an orientation and portrait photography workshop, allowing the participants to become acquainted with the student instructors in a familiar setting. During the next two sessions at YYC/LRT, participants created mixed-media self-portraits. The final two sessions were held at Contemporary Calgary where participants engaged with the exhibition for the first session, and then created sound self-portraits during the second.

Students curated an exhibition of the resulting artworks at Contemporary Calgary from early-April until the end of August 2022. Kerby participants, their guests, and the students attended an opening of the exhibition at which we, and representative students, made remarks. The seniors expressed how they enjoyed working in the intimate, nontraditional studio space of YYC/LRT; they also would have enjoyed spending more time at Contemporary Calgary². Sharma later reported that the exhibition was an important element in creating a positive relationship between Kerby participants and Contemporary Calgary adding that she was interested in pursuing more programming with Contemporary Calgary.

² YYC/LRT did not have ethics certification at the time of Self-Portraits. Therefore, we could not gather data from the participants. These reports are anecdotal, from Eiserman's conversations with participants.

Zines – Telling Our Stories



Figure 2. Artist-students working with Zines participant

As a result of Sharma's enthusiasm, later in the fall of 2022, MFA student Gail Hinchliffe, who had an extensive background in seniors' creativity, developed a zine program for Unison at Kerby members. In response to the previously expressed desire to spend more time at the gallery, the seven-session program, *Zines – Telling Our Stories*, was held exclusively at Contemporary Calgary. The program engaged with two concurrent exhibitions: *Human Capital*, a group exhibition that focused on immigration experiences, and *Astral Dance*, a solo exhibition of the work of Chitra Ganesh. The exhibitions explored multiple ways of articulating a 2D surface. Jordyn Wasik and Sophie Garcia, University of Calgary BFA students who had helped to develop *Self-Portraits*, volunteered as assistants. A small group of five participants created artists' books telling their families' immigration stories.

The program had originally been designed to teach participants how to make zines to share their immigration stories and incorporate 2D methods from *Astral Dance*. However, the participants had other ideas about what they wanted to make. Hinchliffe presented the zine concept to the participants and demonstrated how to make one. She then shared her own zine about her family's immigration story. When one of the participants asked if they could make any kind of book that would tell their stories, we all agreed that the book project could expand beyond the zine to various kinds of books. This honouring of emergent curriculum, care for the participants' needs and the respect shown to them by the program leaders was fundamental to all the YYC/LRT programs. We found that the approach created an intimate and friendly workshop atmosphere from the outset, with a sense of community that promoted engagement amongst the participants. Participant Karen Wyllie shared her perspective.

Community was encouraged. There was a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Everyone was engaged – participants and facilitators. Community among participants was promoted by not giving us much instruction, so we shared among ourselves – showing each other our art and talking about how we'd worked out problems and offering suggestions to each other. It helped that we were a small group. (Karen Wyllie)

The student facilitators' engagement and welcoming attitude and patient support were important to creating the sense of community and was very meaningful for participants. Wyllie further reported.

I like that the students were learning about art education and how to do it in a way that encourages people to find their own path. I liked that I was helping with their education. The workshop increased my hopefulness about the world – seeing people coming together and enjoying each other and getting satisfaction from making things and young and old enjoying each other. ... I feel more alive. (Karen Wyllie)

Another participant expressed their experience of the workshop.

The workshop was a wonderful experience for us seniors to meet the students, share goals and problem-solve together. We were peers with a common goal of having a good experience and complete what we set out to do. (C.L.)

This program fed into the subsequent program *Book It!* which was the next and third program created in collaboration with Unison at Kerby.

Book It!

We partnered on *Book It!* with Sigla Books, a rare book seller across the street from YYC/LRT. When first invited to participate in the program, David Sidjak, owner of Sigla Books, was not convinced that he needed, or wanted, to collaborate. After we and Sidjak had multiple long, friendly conversations getting to know each other and sharing values and goals, Sidjak came to believe that a program to engage participants with books and increase their appreciation of them would be meaningful to him and the shop. Hence, *Book It!* was created to build on the

successes of *Zines – Telling Our Stories*, to engage both members of Kerby and the wider Downtown West community in building a deeper relationship with books.



Figure 3. Participants in Book It! program working in YYC/LRT studio

This time, University of Calgary BFA students created and implemented a four-session program entirely at YYC/LRT, due to its proximity to the bookstore. They met with Sidjak on two occasions to learn about books and bookbinding and to browse through the treasures in the shop. They were impressed and inspired by Sidjak's knowledge, his generosity in sharing, and the rare books (some of which are over 300 years old). In these sessions, participants learned how to use comic book approaches embellished with collage to tell a story about themselves.

Participants included four of the five Kerby members from *Zines – Telling Our Stories*, two youths (ten and twelve-year-old grandchildren of one of the participants), and a University of Calgary student. In each session, four to six University of Calgary BFA students worked with the participants.

As such, *Book It!* created a unique intergenerational experience. Once the University of Calgary BFA students finished their demonstration, they also participated in creating comic books alongside the participants while remaining available to support the work. The Kerby member participants found this intergenerational, artmaking experience meaningful. One participant stated,

I appreciated the relationships I developed with the U of C students who were keenly interested in our projects and were available to assist if we had any questions. ... I was so inspired by their positive attitudes, comprehensive overview about the project and their support of our process in beginning this project that I was able to hit the ground running even before stepping into the first session. (C.L)

Another participant was impressed by,

the extent of the interest shown by the young people. Their enthusiasm was infectious. I was thrilled with how they embraced working with us older folks. It was truly gratifying to share this experience with them. (Donna Stiltanen)

On the last day of the *Book It!* program, as she was leaving YYC/LRT, Donna Stiltanen turned back toward us with tears in her eyes and thanked us for the program, saying that it had “saved her life”. She later wrote in her questionnaire,

I no longer felt so isolated and alone. I looked forward to every session and being around people with shared interests. It did wonders for my depression and anxiety. Working with the young people and sharing ideas and techniques was phenomenal. (Donna Stiltanen)

The books created by participants of both programs, *Zines – Telling Our Stories* and *Book It!* were featured in a documentary video that was exhibited at Contemporary Calgary April through May 2023. All artist participants, students and the research team, gathered for an artist reception, which included inviting friends and family to see the books. The reception allowed participants to reconnect and build on relationships with each other and the museum.

Overall, the Kerby members’ engagement in artmaking within this communal context was extremely meaningful. As a result of the three programs, YYC/LRT, Contemporary Calgary, and Kerby, decided to develop the *55+ Open Studio* program which since May 2023, has been held weekly for three-hour sessions with an average of ten attendees each session. Continuing members of the *55+ Open Studio* included four Kerby members who had participated in the earlier programs, new Kerby members, and others who learned about the program from its members, from Contemporary Calgary, or via Unison at Kerby’s newsletters or the respective websites.

The *55+ Open Studio* has created a community of artmakers who are meaningfully exploring who they are and what their lives mean after retirement. Members share new media, techniques and tools with each other and provide honest, caring critique. Together, they tour exhibitions at Contemporary Calgary and nearby galleries. They have also invited speakers to share their experiences of creative ageing and artmaking as they are finding

their way into life-after-work, life-after-parenting, and sometimes life as a single person again. Contemporary Calgary is providing *55+ Open Studio* with a space for this exploration, one that listens and validates their experience. C.L. wrote,

Thanks for this wonderful opportunity, I continue to be involved with Contemporary Calgary ... and my participation has blossomed into developing new friendships and learning about others' art projects and processes. I have been told by other participants that the Contemporary Calgary [55+ Open Studio has] helped them through the previous isolation with covid lockdowns and build confidence to get out, participate and meet others. In other words, the [55+ Open Studio is] developing a strong sense of community, sharing insights and skills and overall helping people, some of whom are relative newcomers to Calgary, to feel a sense of belonging that they may never thought was possible in Calgary. (C.L.)

(Re)Imagining Inclusion

(Re)Imagining Inclusion was led by University of Calgary doctoral student Nurgül Balaç, who developed the program for racialized immigrant women artists (re)emerging into art careers in Canada. The program focused on participants creating new work, sharing their stories and skills, and being introduced to Contemporary Calgary. Balaç's lived experience as a racialized immigrant woman from Türkiye, whose journey to Canada involved sojourns in Spain and the United States, informed her work with this marginalised group.

During March and April, 2023, seven women artists participated in multiple sessions, some of which were held one-on-one with Nurgül to accommodate the artists' varying schedules. The first of these meetings was always one-on-one and involved Nurgül casting the artist's feet; the resulting cast pieces represented the artist participant's journey to Calgary and the difficulties they experienced "finding their footing" in their new home. During this first session, Nurgül talked with the participant artist about the participant's immigration experiences. In subsequent individual sessions, Nurgül supported the artists in developing work for the culminating exhibition at Contemporary Calgary. Group sessions offered opportunities for the artists to meet the other artists who had also encountered roadblocks to re-establishing their careers once they arrived in Canada.

The artists discovered a commonality in their experiences that provided them with a sense of solidarity. One artist participant, Melika wrote, "It's interesting how much similarities could be between our living experiences of immigration while they are unique in their own ways." Another participating artist wrote,

I was surprised when I realised that I have so much in common with other artists. I was surprised when I figured out our artist friends are struggling to find a real job. They feel discriminated against because of their language barrier or their scarves. (Faruze)



Figure 4. (Re)Imaging Inclusion, Making mold of participant's feet

With the confidence gained from telling Nurgül their stories in their sessions, the artists felt more comfortable giving voice to, and validating, their experiences with others. One artist remarked about her experience.

The way I was confident and comfortable to share my thoughts and experiences about being an immigrant artist and the way Nurgul was willing to listen and share her ideas about the concept of being an immigrant artist in a new living environment have been meaningful to me. (Melika)

Providing the artists with the space and time to tell their stories to Nurgül, to each other, and to the Calgary community through their work, was important to the women. One of the artists stated that she believed that the sessions “helped [her] to adjust to [her] new situation as a newcomer” (Anonymous). Faruze wrote, “All the newcomer artists are searching for a space to feel connected and/or produce collectively” (Faruze).

(Re)Imagining Inclusion also provided the artists with opportunities to share art forms and media. This was significant as newcomer artists are often isolated from other artists (Grant and Buckwold, 2011). Melika described in her interview the conditions that can lead to this isolation. She worked full-time for a subsistence wage in a job disconnected from the art world, leaving her with little time or money to engage with art. Further compounding Melika’s challenges was her living space which was not large enough for her to make art, and she could not afford studio space. Faruze also describes this similar challenge and the way *(Re)Imagining Inclusion* helped to address this,

All the newcomer artists are searching for a space to feel connected and/or produce collectively. We had Lrt train as a studio and also we learned different mediums from each other. I am sure we will meet in future artistic projects. (Faruze)

The works created in *(Re)Imagining Inclusion* were exhibited at Contemporary Calgary in August 2023, giving voice to the artists’ struggles finding new homes in Calgary. An opening reception welcomed their family and friends to see the work and become acquainted with Contemporary Calgary, and also provided the public a chance to hear about the significance of the project for Balaç and the artists. Through exhibiting her cartoon works, one of the artists valued the opportunity to share the challenges of immigration with the public by “visualizing them in cartoon form” (Anonymous). The artists also shared traditional art techniques from their homelands with the public through *(Re)Imagining Inclusion* at Contemporary Calgary. For example, Medina not only shared her immigration experience with Calgarians, but also the Ebru art form she learned from her homeland. She expressed,

For me, it is a chance to show people the art which I am doing since 2010. Turkish Marbling Art Ebru is quite popular in Turkey (*sic*), but nobody knows it here. It is unique type and unusual art known for a meditative effect. I am happy to get a chance to share my knowledge and skills with locals.

Through the experience of mounting the *(Re)Imagining Inclusion* exhibition at Contemporary Calgary, newcomers gained knowledge of the processes required to exhibit artwork in Canada. Nurgül also acquainted the artists with funding structures which empowered two artists, who later reported that they applied for a grant from a municipal funding agency to fund a collaborative project. Overall, *(Re)Imagining Inclusion* opened a space for

validating the experiences of these racialized women immigrant artists. They shared their stories and, through this sharing, created a community that provided them with support, friendship, and, as Tayabe described, “a family” (Tayabe).

Street To Studio

The third YYC/LRT project was *Street to Studio*, which resulted from a community artist reaching out to YYC/LRT. Bramble Lee Pryde, owner of White Rabbit Atelier, approached YYC/LRT interested in supporting street artists in Calgary. The desire came from losing her brother, a gifted street artist, Tegan “Lefty” Copeman during the Covid pandemic lockdown. Copeman had been recovering from his addiction and was making his way into the mainstream but the isolation restrictions took their toll on his mental health and he died of an overdose. His family started a “Go Fund Me” in his memory and decided to use the money to help other street artists.



Figure 5. *Street to Studio* participants at YYC/LRT studio

Pryde and Faubert (once a street artist himself), created *Street to Studio* to provide street artists with the skills and knowledge to move their street practices into the studio and mainstream gallery exhibition spaces. Faubert

led workshops that helped four artists adapt street art media into mainstream artforms and Pryde led a workshop on how to develop the artist curriculum vitae, artist statements, and exhibition proposals. Street-artist-turned-mainstream, Nasarimba met with the artists and shared his own journey of moving his work from the street to the studio. Photographer, Hesam Rezaei led a workshop on how to professionally document artwork. We introduced the artists to Contemporary Calgary and public art gallery practices in Canada. The participants also visited a local artist, Jeff DeBoer to learn about the business of art. The works created during *Street to Studio* were exhibited at Contemporary Calgary in July 2023.

The participant artists reported that they valued the meetings with Nasarimba and with senior curator, and co-author, Ryan Doherty. One participant expressed appreciation of Nasarimba's talk saying how it was, in her own words, "very encouraging and felt like something that could be obtainable by any one of us" (Lauren). The idea that they too could be successful mainstream artists seemed real to them after his visit; since Nasarimba had been where they were, they could be where he is. Doherty's visit provided the artists with "inside knowledge on the 'dos and don'ts' within the industry when applying for art shows" as one of the participants shared (Lauren). One participant expressed learning that "there are so many people or services out there for us." (Drew). (See Figure 5 *Street to Studio* participants at YYC/LRT studio).

Being seen and heard by others, and having the space and time to develop relationships, were themes repeated by all four of the artists in *Street to Studio*. Beyond the valued practical skills and knowledge that the artists gained, what emerged as most meaningful for them, and articulated by Lauren, was the chance

to be able to spend quality time with other artists and learn from one another. I also found the friendship that developed between myself and my mentors (Bramble and Bryan) was very meaningful to me. To have an instructor that was encouraging, thorough and thoughtful like Bryan was incredibly meaningful to me. You can tell he really cares about the well-being of his students and learning how to use tools from him was very valuable to me. (Lauren)

To be able to move from the margins of a community, people need to be seen and heard and to have the ongoing support of allies who have made it into the centre. The *Street to Studio* participants felt confident that their new mentors, Faubert and Pryde, would be there for support as they made that journey. The importance of these on-going relationships was highlighted by Travis. He wrote, "... being able to contact brian (*sic*) and Bramble in the future to ask them for advice..." was the most meaningful thing about the program.

Opening Spaces for Listening Guided by Care and Compassion

Through the programs described above, three key caring and compassionate elements necessary for opening space for listening and participating in community development emerged: community partners; safe spaces to build and maintain relationships; caring and compassionate artist-teachers.

Role of Community Partners

Through YYC/LRT we learned that if art museums are to open spaces for listening to their communities, partners are key. Unison at Kerby, Sigla, and White Rabbit Atelier knew what was needed in the community. Based on their experience and understanding, YYC/LRT created meaningful programs that opened those spaces.

Providing a Safe Space to Build and Maintain Relationships

YYC/LRT lowered the barrier that often exists between marginalised members of our communities and the imposing institutions of art museums. C.L., participant in the Kerby projects and now a member of 55+ Open Studio, wrote that she had always felt art museums were “elitist”. However, now she feels comfortable coming to Contemporary Calgary and engages in many of its other programs. Melika, a participant in (Re)Imagining Inclusion, now makes a special point to visit the gallery every week. Travis is going to prepare a proposal for an exhibition in Contemporary Calgary’s community gallery, Bow View Hall. When art museums listen, by providing safe spaces and an ongoing commitment to a relationship, they help build community.

Caring and Compassionate Artist-Teachers

All three programs demonstrated the important role that caring and compassionate artist-teachers play in opening spaces for listening. Participants consistently stated that among the most meaningful aspects of their programs was the relationship they had with their teachers. For the seniors, the engagement with the young art students gave them the sense they were contributing to the students’ growth. The students listened to the seniors, valued their stories and the wisdom that came from these experiences, and continue the relationship with the group (BFA students have been facilitators for Seniors Open Studio). Nurgül’s generosity with the participants was noted by all. Her care and compassion for the participants created the safe space for the racialized immigrant women artists to share their stories with herself, each other, and the Calgary community. Nurgül continues to be in contact with the artists as a friend, fellow artmaker and mentor. Bramble Lee Pryde’s desire to provide other street artists with the help that her brother lacked, her care and compassion for marginalised street artists, created opportunities for the participants of Street to Studio to initiate a journey from the fringes into the centre of Calgary’s art scene.

Conclusion

The Reciprocity of Care and Compassion within Museum/Community Partnerships YYC/LRT tells the story of deeply caring, responsive and reciprocal relationships. In its earliest inception, as an MFA thesis project, YYC/LRT opened a space for professors, a contemporary art curator and a student to listen and learn from each other. The space widened to include other researchers, more members of Contemporary Calgary’s staff, more students, more artists, community partners, and community members. Each widening of the circle resulted from listening to each other, hearing each other’s needs, and responding.

YYC/LRT demonstrated how an art museum can attend to marginalised members of their community, how those with uncertain claims on an art museum's attention can be addressed. Seeking out partners who have concern for these community members and learning about their needs allowed us to be engrossed with the cared-for. Caring and compassionate artist-teachers were the ones-caring, displacing their own needs and goals to meet the needs of the cared-for in their programs. The artist-teachers closely observed signals by those cared-for, regarding the satisfaction of their needs. Through program assessment forms, questionnaires and interviews, YYC/LRT provided the cared-for opportunities to verbally communicate if and how their needs were met. The artist-teachers, the YYC/LRT research team, and the staff at Contemporary Calgary were open and responsive to what the participants (the cared-for) offered them. It was the foundation of care upon which YYC/LRT was built that allowed us to open spaces for listening and learning from each other through community-based art.

References

- Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational aesthetics*. Les Presses du Réel.
- Bishop, C. (2006). *Participation*. MIT Press.
- Bishop, C. (2012). *Artificial hells: Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship*. Verso.
- Bishop, C. & Perjovschi, D. (2013). *Radical museology, or, What's 'contemporary' in museums of contemporary art?* Koenig Books.
- Black, G. (Ed., 2021). *Museums and the challenge of change: Old institutions in a new world*. Routledge.
- City of Calgary (2020). *Future of Stephen Avenue project: Fresh ideas for Calgary's most iconic street*.
<https://engage.calgary.ca/stephenavenue>
- City of Calgary (2023). *The future of Stephen Avenue: Fresh ideas for Calgary's most iconic street*.
<https://engage.calgary.ca/stephenavenue>
- Contemporary Calgary (n.d.). *Vision*. <https://www.contemporarycalgary.com/about>
- Delaney, R. (2014). Other lessons learned from relational aesthetics. *Visual Arts Research*, 40(78), 25-27.
- Eiserman, J. (2000). *Comfort, Care and Conversation: The role of the museum in art education* [Doctoral Thesis]. University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.
- Faubert, B. (2020). *Walk the Line: Betwixt [In]Between*. [Masters Thesis, University of Calgary]. Prism.
<https://prism.ucalgary.ca/items/9bdf564c-4224-4e6c-bbc7-6c6cc14305bb>
- Grant, J. L. & Buckwold, B. (2011). *Attracting and retaining artists: Challenges and opportunities in Halifax* [Working Paper No. 39 2011]. Atlantic Metropolis Centre ~ Working Paper Series.
- Holt, A. & Maguire, C. (2022). Bringing forth human expression, forming identity, and empowering communities through arts and culture: Who defines it? Who is it for? Who gets to do it? In C. Maguire & A. Holt (Eds.), *Arts and culture in global development practice: Expression, identity and empowerment* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: a feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Sadeghpour, F. (2021, July). Personal communication with Farnaz Sadeghpour, Downtown West Community Association, Calgary, Alberta.

- Saveri, A. (2019). *Collaborating to create 4 – From pedagogy to sociology – A conversation with Andrea Saveri* [Transcript]. Personal communication with Dr. Robert Kelly, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.
- Silverman, L. (2010). *The social work of museums*. Routledge.
- Simon, N. (2010). *The participatory museum*. Museum 2.0.
- Simon, N. (2016). *The art of relevance*. Museum 2.0.