

# ART GALLERY VISION

## SUMMARY

The following document and its contents have been compiled by a general consensus of the Art Gallery Commissioner (the “Commissioner”) and the Art Gallery Committee (the “Committee”) in regards to the AMS Art Gallery (the “Gallery”) and AMS Permanent Collection (the “Collection”), regarded in whole as the Art Gallery Portfolio (the “Portfolio”). This document was initiated to engage AMS Council with and examine the status of the Portfolio since its inception in 1948. The information in this document draws from over a year of research in the AMS Archives, numerous meetings and discussions with the Committee and AMS staff members, and consultation with external parties. The Portfolio has very clear deficiencies in regards to security, visibility, funding and continuity, which have resulted in a strong decline in overall quality of the Portfolio over the past 45 years. Recommendations include:

- Research and purchasing of better security hardware for the Collection
- Better promotional ability from the AMS
- Greater funding for the Portfolio overall
- Changes to the current management structure of the portfolio

More specific recommendations will be presented upon the completion of a series of focus groups, aiming to consult and engage the Society’s membership on the current status and quality of the Portfolio. It is the hope of these bodies that, by voicing their strong concerns about the current state of affairs of the Art Gallery Portfolio, a discussion can begin which will result in effective and positive changes in the Portfolio, which will bring great benefits to the Society.

## CURRENT STRUCTURE

- Commissioner: Student, paid part-time (20 hours/week), 1-year term
- Committee: 4-6 students, volunteer part-time (4-6 hours/week), 8 month term
- Sub-committee of SAC, under the VP-Admin portfolio
- Security and Facilities Manager acts as “advisors”
- 10-16 exhibitions per school year, at 2 weeks duration per exhibition
- Converted to a commercial booking space during the summer
- Approximately 4,000 visitors per year, not including external events

## OBJECTIVES

The Art Gallery Committee has 7 objectives, as stated in the SAC Policy Handbook:

1. To provide an opportunity for UBC student artists to display their works.
2. To bring UBC students into contact with contemporary Canadian works of art.
3. To ensure that the AMS Permanent Collection is properly maintained.
4. To ensure that the AMS Art Gallery is properly maintained and utilized.
5. To ensure that the AMS Art Gallery Policy is enforced.
6. To provide UBC students with the opportunity of gaining experience, through active involvement, at both the practical and conceptual levels, in the display and sponsorship of the visual and performing arts.
7. To provide a stimulating atmosphere for the creative exchange of a wide range of artistic expression within the artistic community, both on and off campus through:
  - a. Encouraging and sponsoring the exhibitions of works of art in the Gallery
  - b. Encouraging the presentation of special events in the Gallery, such as:
    - i. Performance art
    - ii. Group discussions
    - iii. Music recitals
    - iv. Poetry readings
    - v. Studio space
    - vi. Artist talks and reviews
  - c. Encouraging the development and maintenance of contacts, both on and off campus, with:
    - i. Performing and visual arts resources
    - ii. Individuals or groups of artists, craftsmen, performers, etc.
    - iii. Art schools
    - iv. Art departments in University and Community Colleges
    - v. Private and public art galleries
    - vi. Art and craft association and societies
    - vii. Community Arts Councils, etc.

In the past 45 years, it has been increasingly difficult to meet most, if not all, of these objectives due to the four issues listed below.

## SECURITY

- The Collection was meant to be on constant display, accessible to all students in order to inspire an artistic community at UBC, not just in a fine arts sense, but to influence and inspire the sciences as well.
- The “Link” (Brock Hall, ca. 1957-68) and the Gallery were opened to provide a safe place to exhibit the Collection, but that vision was lost almost immediately, partly due to poor security
  - o Resulted in vandalism, theft and damage of Collection
- Security of the Collection has greatly improved, however it cannot be displayed around the building, and is currently restricted to a very limited display period
  - o Secure art storage, patrols near the Gallery, volunteer monitors, etc.
  - o The Committee is mandated to exhibit a selection of the Collection at least twice per year, at two weeks per exhibition
- The Collection could be placed in key areas of the building for students and visitors to interact with if greater security measures were taken
  - o E.g. secure display cases, weight monitors, RFID tags, cameras, etc.
  - o Archives could also benefit from measures to display archival material

## VISIBILITY

- The Collection was nationally celebrated, housing some of the most impressive works of Canadian art, and is the only student managed art collection in Canada
  - o It was considered an honor for an artist to be part of this Collection
  - o The Collection has been displayed at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the National Gallery of Canada and the Tate Gallery in London
- The Gallery has been the start of many careers for local and nationally acclaimed artists, either by their involvement in the Committee or by exhibiting in the Gallery
- The Committee has struggled to promote the Gallery and the student exhibitions they present due to a lack of awareness from the student body, and a marked lack of support from the AMS
- Moving into the Nest, the Gallery will be located on the second floor, which will greatly reduce foot traffic into the Gallery
- Recent measures (promotion from AMS Communications, the AMS website, and the Gallery’s own Facebook page) have helped, but still not enough/ideal

- Better visibility could result from a few changes
  - o E.g. the Gallery's own website, dedicated display/board/digital signage on main floor of the Nest, inclusion on AMS marketing displays, etc.

## **FUNDING**

- Recognizing that students absorb a large cost to create their artworks (close to \$1,000 at times), the Committee never charges for use of the Gallery and strives to cover as much of the cost of exhibition as possible
- The Gallery exhibits 10-16 exhibitions per school year, organizing the installation, promotion and reception of each exhibition
- The Committee is also physically and monetarily responsible for the maintenance of the Gallery and the Vault.
- There has been increased emphasis and desire to hold more events in the Gallery, creating a fun, social atmosphere, yet has received no funding to do so
  - o Recommendation to create new line item for events was brought to Budget Committee for 2014/15 Fiscal Year, however it was not accepted
- Supplies for installation, maintenance and event materials share the same budget line item
- Art Gallery Reserve Fund
  - o Used for the express purpose for the acquisition and maintenance of artworks for the Collection (Bylaw 11(2)(a)(i))
  - o The grant allowance (\$1,500) is not sufficient to adequately cover desperately needed maintenance costs for Collection
  - o Despite 40+ years of requests, pleas and protests from the Committee, the amount has never been increased
  - o In recent years, the Fund has not received this grant as a compromise to run the Artist in Residence program
  - o Accounting for inflation, \$1,500 in 1962 equates to approximately \$11,700

## **CONTINUITY**

- The Committee has lacked any continuity since 1968, after the retirement of B.C. Binning, head of the Fine Arts Department and permanent chair of the Brock Hall Art Committee (now the Art Gallery Committee)

- Binning and his team provided multiple years of a stable, presence which allowed for great continuity and national recognition
- Lack of continuity has resulted in:
  - Monopolies controlling the Portfolio
  - 9 works of the Collection being lost/stolen/sold/destroyed, with numerous other vandalisms
  - Inconsistent maintenance of the Collection and Gallery space
  - Closure and relocation of the Gallery by SAC/Council between 1981-83
  - Loss of important archival documents pertaining to the Collection
  - Inability to maintain proper policy and procedures
  - Difficulty in building/maintaining relationships with cultural organizations
  - Inability to plan/complete longer-term events, exhibitions or programs
  - Difficulty in establishing a solid identity
  - Generally negative reputation in the cultural community
- Commissioner terms are too short/encumbered to effectively improve/manage the Portfolio, resulting in the forced neglect of a specific aspect of the Portfolio. Longer term Commissioners/Committees have been more effective in improving the situation of the Gallery and Collection
  - 1968: Two curators were hired, then fired in 1969, seen as a “luxury the AMS could not afford” at the time
  - 2005: Commissioner stayed on for 3 years and revitalized the Gallery.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Gallery has the potential to become a hub of artistic expression and dialogue, a place where all can come together and experience their creative side, whether they are artist or scientist, musician or engineer. In order for this to be achieved, however, there are numerous changes that need to happen to improve the conditions of the Portfolio. With the support and input of the AMS, the Portfolio can become something to be even more proud of.