



Artist As Changemaker

2024 REPORT



Peter Senge, one of the leading systems thinkers, developed the iceberg model for systems change.

What we see in the world around us is what is happening above the surface.

But what we know about icebergs is that there is so much more happening beneath the surface.

If we dig beneath the events themselves, we can start to see patterns and trends, structures, policies and power dynamics that contribute to what we see and experience at the surface.

At the bottom of the iceberg are the mental models - *the narratives, beliefs, values, and norms that hold the structures in place.*

When it comes to systems change, we can work at any of these levels below the surface to create change. When we tackle the bottom of the iceberg - the mental models that hold systems and structures in place - that's when we see real transformation.

We believe artists have an advantage to rapidly convene and engage people to what is happening beneath the surface to bring awareness and understanding that creates opportunities for change to occur.

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Mount Royal University is situated on an ancient and storied land steeped in ceremony and history that, until recently, was occupied exclusively by people indigenous to this place. With gratitude and reciprocity, Mount Royal acknowledges the relationships to the land and all beings, and the songs, stories and teachings of the Siksika Nation, the Piikani Nation, the Kainai Nation, the Îethka Stoney Nakoda Nation (consisting of the Chiniki, Bearspaw and Goodstoney Nations), the people of the Tsuut'ina Nation, and the Métis.

As such, Mount Royal University is committed to advancing the success of Indigenous learners and respectfully supporting Indigenous cultural identities and integrity, leading to a good life in all its aspects. Mount Royal will challenge settler colonialism and systemic racism and discrimination by addressing the legacy of broken promises and rebuilding the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This includes those who now live at the confluence of the Elbow and Bow rivers, a place referred to by the Siksika Nation, the Piikani Nation and the Kainai Nation as Moh'kinstis, by the Îethka Stoney Nakoda Nations as Wícîspa, and by the Tsuut'ina Nation as Guts'ists'i. Mount Royal will meet these goals by committing to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and adopting and applying the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Artist As Changemaker Program

The Artist as Changemaker Program (AAC) is a seasoned initiative spanning 6 years and 3 iterations, aimed to expand the capacity of artists to facilitate meaningful social change in Calgary Alberta.

Since inception, the Program has been co-designed with participating artists to meet artists needs in facilitating change in community, and in partnership with community organizations.

The Program has two pathways:

- Artist as Changemaker Residency (AAC Residency)
- Artist as Changemaker Fellowship (AAC Fellowship)

Through the Residency, in partnership with local organizations, artists explore the relationship between the artistic process and social innovation as a means to discover unique and creative ways to address complex social challenges. Following the Residency, artists have the opportunity to participate in the AAC Fellowship to deepen their practice, building on outcomes from the Residency.

Each stage of the Program places emphasis on:

- 1 Building Relationships between artists and community partners who are at the forefront of social change to increase capacity of impact
- 2 Social innovation and systems change learning to build on artist and community partners knowledge of systems thinking to aid in social challenges identified
- 3 Process as much as outcomes because change often occurs in the 'how,' not the 'what'

In 2022, the Program launched its longest Residency to date, a total of 18 months of active work (2022 - 2024), supporting 11 artists and 11 organizations, and hosting 6 community showcases. This report will feature the Programs journey map, highlights of the Residency artists and their partner organizations chosen challenge and how they responded, the Fellowship artists response to deepen their practice, and an overview of what we have learned.



Residency + Fellowship Journey 2022 - 2024



Phase 1: September 2022 - June 2023

Emphasis on:

- Introducing to Social Innovation Learning
- Project Exploration with Community Partner

September 14, 2022
Residency Program Launch

October 14, 2022
Curiosity session with
Lena Soots-Haley

November 16, 2022
Calgary Arts Development
Living a Creative Life

November 18, 2022
AAC Mixer with Artists
+ Community Partners

November 22-24, 2022
Social Innovation
with James Stauch

June 2, 2023
Midpoint Showcase

April 17, 2023
Residency Reflection

April 14, 2023
Cohort Social

March 30, 2023
How Might We workshop with
Skye Louis + Lena Soots-Haley

February 28, March 1, 7 + 8
Evaluating Social Innovation
with Sara Bateman

Phase 2: September 2023 - April 2024

Emphasis on:

- Going deeper with community partner
- Community impact
- Learning in social innovation and art for social change

September 22, 2023
Community Building Workshop
with Latasha Calf Robe

October 11+12, 2023
Systems Change and Storytelling
with Dr. Katharine McGowan

November 24, 2023
Showcase codesign
with artists

May 22, 2024
Residency + Fellowship
Reflection Gathering

May 10, 2024
AAC Community
Showcases

May 3 + 4, 2024
AAC Cohort Final
Showcase

February 20 + 21, 2024
Economics of Social Innovation
with Barb Rallison

January 26, 2024
Showcase codesign
with artists

“This residency gave me a sense of direction in the sense that it gave me an extension of my practice. It helped me to learn how to be in further conversation with the community beyond just showcasing my work.”

Ado Nkemka

Ado Nkemka is a singer/songwriter/guitarist that performs – both solo and with a band – under the name A.N. She captivates audiences with her distinctive dark timbre and in-your-face vocals. Based in Calgary, AB, both self-taught and formally trained, her sound is inspired by late 60’s and early 70’s pop and R&B radio as well as contemporary rock.



Ado Nkemka (A.N.)

Organization Partner: The Alcove Centre for the Arts

The Alcove Centre for the Arts is a public recreational creative space for members of the community to both teach and learn. The Alcove believes that creativity is integral to the human experience. Their mission is to make art more accessible by providing a space that cultivates a creative community.

Co-created Question: How might we reduce the barriers to accessing safe, collaborative learning environments and showcase opportunities in the arts?

Primary Artistic Medium: Music: singer-songwriter, guitarist

Project Description: Letters to My Younger Self was a mailbox installation that led to a community conversation. The installation, housed at The Alcove, called for artists, hobbyists, and general community members to write letters to or from the perspective of their younger selves to dream up the world they wished to see. The “How Might We” statement inspired the letters by imagining alternative realities for ourselves and our world.

Purpose: This project is inspired by a presentation that Ado gave at a multi-college and university symposium called “Learning How to Learn: Navigating life, neurodivergence, the classroom and the studio to do your best work.” Her goal with this project is to understand the community’s needs by hearing them imagine a fully inclusive artistic landscape to draw out her own personal experiences in the arts that will inform the development of a book/toolkit of the same title.

Artist Stated Impact: It seems like the project connects most with people who are on a similar journey of a return home to self, on a journey of healing, and on a journey of stepping into their power, by way of processing disheartening early life experiences (childhood).

“The network of people that The Alcove was able to connect with and the relationship and community connections that we have now with Trico and other organizations wouldn’t have happened the way they did if it hadn’t been for this residency.”

Bethel Afework, The Alcove Centre for the Arts

Organization Partner: Centre for Newcomers, Real Me Program

Centre for Newcomers, The Real Me Intervention Program works with newcomer youth currently at risk of becoming involved in criminal activity. Program staff help youth participants to reach their highest future potential, regardless of their past.

Co-created Question: How might we keep at-risk youth engaged in pro-social activities to divert them from future run-ins with the law, gang activity, trouble at home?

Primary Artistic Medium: Oils, acrylics and mixed media

Project Description: Apiow offers youth the opportunity to learn about various painting styles, the use and care of equipment, and the steps to plan and design their own projects. Youth are taught a multitude of themes, such as landscape, still-life, figurative drawing, and portraits, using various paints and mixed media. These projects have become beneficial when supporting youth in understanding colour theory, composition, and encouraging creativity.

Purpose: "Let's Paint" is a regular art class for youth ages 8-24 years old. These classes were delivered at the Centre for Newcomers, a primary settlement services agency for immigrants and refugees arriving in Calgary. This art program provides youth with a sense of belonging and routine, creating a therapeutic space for newcomer youth with past trauma and a sense of loss from their home countries. The program has allowed youth to feel connected with each other, meet new peers with similar backgrounds, and provide opportunities to practice English.

Artist Stated Impact: Providing a sense of belonging, routine, and creating a therapeutic space for newcomer youth has been the highlight of my year. I've witnessed them grow, personalities changing and the quietest youth becoming the loudest in the classroom.

"I loved being able to make an impact in my community, I had no idea that I was going to achieve this level of work and change."

Apiow Akawi

"We're able to support people doing the work and watch them grow in the work. There's a real responsibility that we have to empower young people who are pursuing the arts and they themselves become the changemakers."

Noel Bahliby, Centre for Newcomers

Apiow discovered her passion for arts at the age of six. What started as a creative and emotional outlet led to her deep respect and appreciation for the arts. Today, her work primarily consists of portraits, landscape, and human figures that are created in oils and acrylics on canvas. Apiow uses deliberate compositions and symbolism to shed light on the dark and beautiful chaos of emotions that is intentionally portrayed across all her work.

A portrait of Apiow Akawi, a young Black woman with voluminous, curly black hair, wearing a black turtleneck top and large gold hoop earrings. She is smiling warmly at the camera. The background is a plain, light grey.

Apiow Akawi

“In the artistic process, this residency has allowed us to create a bigger “net” - it has expanded our capacity. It broadened my own understanding and how much is “under the surface” and we need to seek out these experiences to let the sparks be lit to ignite change. We’re making people think maybe just a little outside their comfort zone, raising their awareness. The fact that we’re here, aware and trying makes all the difference.”

Catherine Robertson, Rainbow Elders

Louie is a trans nonbinary artist and writer of English-Scottish descent residing in Moh'kins'tsis (Calgary), on Treaty 7 Territory. Through themes of archetype, history, liberation, queerness, and disability, they explore portraiture and storytelling. This includes both the stories we've committed to the pages of history and the stories we tell ourselves. Louie has provided artwork and writing for venues and publications in Moh'kins'tsis, Tkaronto, and New York



Louie Fermor

Organization Partner: Calgary Rainbow Elders

Rainbow Elders Calgary is a volunteer-run organization determined to make a significant difference to the lives of 2SLGBTQ+ seniors. They work to provide support and address issues such as social isolation, housing, and loneliness. They also believe that they have a responsibility to connect with and be role models for vulnerable 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

Co-created Question: How might we create visions of queer futures in a way that demonstrates intergenerational resilience through optimism?

Primary Artistic Medium: Oil paint

Project Description: Louie uses two mediums, painting and community organizing, to create portraits of intergenerational queer connection. They were paired with Catherine Robertson from the Calgary Rainbow Elders. They met over coffee, rode motorcycles, and Louie painted her Catherine's portrait. Louie is also working with Pansy Club, a grassroots queer event organizer, to create a portrait that everyone can participate in; a showcase after-party where people (queer, trans, and not) can finally get together and spend time celebrating. Through both of these modes, Louie explored how intergenerational connection can be a way to save lives and generate collective freedom.

Purpose: “Portraits of Connection” is both a personal and political endeavor: queer and trans connection saves lives. Many queer people do not have the benefit of genetic family bonds. Rather, our families are chosen. If we are alienated from each other, it puts us at risk. We are a small community, but we are loud and proud. Stretching across generations and the forces that try to alienate or ‘monstracize’ us, we connect with each other anyway. It’s our greatest strength, and this project helps them celebrate it and do that.

Artist Stated Impact: This project helped me understand intergenerational queer connection both as a political concept and as a lived experience. Both kinds of knowledge are invaluable.

“Our role as artists is to envision our own capacities to change and redefine ourselves over and over again. The work of artist changemakers is implicit.”

Louie Fermor

“This program is brilliant. The social innovation courses have really informed our work. The organizations we work with focus so much on program delivery, this type of learning helps elevate the work into systems thinking so we see the program work connect to something so much bigger (the larger system).”

Jun Naraval, Action Dignity

Organization Partner: Action Dignity

Action Dignity's mission is to work together with ethnocultural, racialized, and equity seeking groups to create transformational changes in our communities and society.

Co-created Question: How might we transform the mental wellness of BIPOC communities through arts and culture in healing and constructive ways?

Primary Artistic Medium: Spoken Word

Purpose: During her residency, MelVee delved into the intricacies of mental health within racialized communities, drawing inspiration from her personal experiences as a Black queer neurodivergent woman. She utilized various artistic mediums to shed light on the challenges faced by racialized individuals, particularly focusing on the intersectionality of mental health and systemic barriers.

Project Description: MelVee worked with Action Dignity on her project Living in our Skin - a deep dive into the mental health of racialized people. Part reflection, part toolkit, Living in Our Skin explores how art and creativity are tools to understand our mental health and empower racialized communities to express themselves outside of oppressive systems that do not reflect our communities and concerns.

Artist Stated Impact: The impact of this work cannot be understated. The mental health of racialized people can be a life-and-death concern. The gap in mental health care for racialized communities will not be addressed overnight, and this is where projects like Living in Our Skin come in. In addition to raising awareness of these gaps in mental health care for leaders, decision-makers and policy experts, projects like these equip those not well served by current mental health systems with tools to express and advocate for themselves. When we take charge of how we express our mental health, we empower others to do the same and provide a lifeline to those feeling isolated.

MelVee is a queer Black (out)spoken word artist, burlesque performer and photographer who was born and raised in Mohkinstsis. Out of the muck of living in a hostile and racist society, the lotus of her unapologetic dedication to speaking truth to power and looking damn good while doing it emerged. She is dedicated to inspiring marginalized people to tell their own stories from their own perspectives.



“Community based art is more about what the message is and less about who I am as an artist and the ego that goes along with that. This program has been an affirmation of my own practice”

MelVee X

Organization Partner: Alberta Ecotrust Foundation
Guided by a vision of healthy ecosystems for all Albertans, Alberta Ecotrust is a long-standing and critical source of funding, training, and skill building for Alberta's environmental community.

Co-created Question: How might we fight the stigma of energy poverty amongst individuals living on a low income in Alberta?

Primary Artistic Medium: Traditional music performance, poetry, oral narrative, soundscape composition

Purpose: Energy poverty transcends mere financial strain or occasional missed payments; its impact varies widely depending on individuals' circumstances and lived experiences. Shumaila's involvement in this work stems from personal experiences related to how energy affordability disproportionately impacts communities of newcomers, particularly those from certain ethnic backgrounds. Through her project, she aspired to contribute to the alleviation of the burden of energy poverty for families and communities, fostering resilience, empowerment, and social justice.

Project Description: Shumaila's project, Energy Matters: Breaking Barriers to Combat Energy unAffordability in Alberta with Deep Listening Workshops, merged community-engaged and participatory music-making with a focus on climate and energy stakeholders and communities grappling with energy affordability. Through participatory deep listening workshops, she established a safe environment for dialogue on the issues affecting energy affordability in the province. Shumaila captured the soundscape of both domestic and external environments, sharing personal journeys in addressing energy affordability, and offered critical insights into the systemic barriers perpetuating energy injustice in our communities.

Artist Stated Impact: The impact of our work continues to unfold, extending beyond the workshops themselves. The series of workshops that we've facilitated has left a profound impression on climate stakeholders. This testament highlights the ongoing impact of the workshops and underscores the importance of innovative approaches in addressing complex societal issues such as energy affordability and climate change.

Shumaila Hemani



Shumaila Hemani, Ph.D. is an Alberta-based singer-songwriter, acousmatic composer and community-engaged artist sculpting with sounds of the environment and addressing the climate crisis in the world. She sings and writes songs in four languages: English, Urdu, Sindhi, and Arabic and her primary influence is Sufi sounds of South Asia and experiences drawn from her life and that of the life of the communities she is connected with.

“Social innovation learning alongside artistic practice challenged us to think about issues in a very holistic manner and in a very different way. I’m used to looking at things with a pragmatic policy perspective and often forget the emotion and human factors to systems change. Sometimes it’s easier to forget the hearts and minds that are a part of the change and that there’s many roads to change.”

Stephanie Rosch, Alberta Ecotrust

“There’s so much openness and freedom in this residency which really allowed me to expand as an artist. Things aligned for me in the residency in ways that I didn't expect.”

Shumaila Hemani

Stephanie is a visual artist, dancer, youth leader, community activator, advocate, craftivist, graphic designer and social change maker living and working in Mohkinstsis (Calgary), Canada. As an intersectional feminist and an advocate for various issues, she is influenced by early feminist and anti-oppressive movements in history using fiber, embroidery and craft to voice their opinions and make social change in their communities. She is passionate about empowering others with the opportunity to share their voice and make a difference through visual art, murals, digital art, craftivism and placemaking projects.



Stephanie Banzky

“This kind of approach is needed. It allows for such a different way to community that I just don’t think we can do in other ways, especially with a multicultural community. Art helps break down some of those barriers - we need to be able to continue this work so we can continue to see social change work.”

Jenna Pothier, Village Square Community Hub

“CADA and Trico are really prioritizing artist-led community based artistic practice, and we’ve been seen as less than for a long time. I really value the fact that we are seen and valued”

Stephanie Banzky

Organization Partner: City of Calgary, Village Square Community Hub

City of Calgary Community Hubs are welcoming and inclusive spaces where residents build connections, access supports and services, and work together to identify and respond to community needs, all of which contribute to stronger neighbourhoods.

Co-created Question: How might we weave a deeper connection with ourselves, each other and the environment?

Primary Artistic Medium: Fibre Art

Project Description: The Village Square Fabric Art Group emerged as a response to the growing disconnection observed post-pandemic across Calgary. The group aimed to address the disconnection from community networks, cultural practices, and traditional fibre heritages. Simultaneously, the project sought to tackle the ecological threat posed by the increasing fabric waste, emphasizing the urgent need for sustainable practices.

Purpose: The Village Square Fabric Art Storytelling Group endeavoured to go beyond the fabric itself, aiming to create a collaborative art piece representative of interconnected communities, empowered individuals, and a sustainable approach to artistic expression. Through the fabric medium, the project aspired to tell stories, revive traditions, and bridge the gaps that have emerged in our communities, ultimately weaving a deeper connection with ourselves, each other, and the environment.

Artist Stated Impact: This program fostered a sense of community by rebuilding bonds weakened by the pandemic. It promoted sustainability through fabric repurposing, minimizing waste. It also provided a space for empowerment, particularly for women and marginalized groups to express themselves creatively and be part of a community of art for social change.

Tito Gomez

“Figuring out all of the social issues the deaf and hard of hearing people face; understanding my privilege as a hearing individual. That’s been the biggest turning moment in this Residency. I’ve never thought about closed captioning in my practice; I’m really taking that into consideration.”

Tito Gomez

Organization Partner: Alberta Deaf & Hear

Alberta Deaf & Hear’s mission is to bring together Deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing Albertans with service and technology options to advance access and opportunity. Alberta Deaf & Hear envisions a world where the Deaf, hard of hearing, and those at risk of hearing loss are recognized and respected so they can fully participate in society.

Co-created Question: How might we understand the barriers of communication facing the deaf and hearing community?

Primary Artistic Medium: Film

Project Description: Tito worked with Alberta Deaf & Hear to better understand the barriers someone that is deaf or hard of hearing go through living the life in Calgary. As a filmmaker, Tito interviewed a number of participants and learned about some of the things hearing people often take advantage of.

Purpose: “Barriers” is a project in collaboration with the Alberta Deaf and Hearing Society. The project seeks to capture a visually captivating and emotionally evocative film that both educates and inspires viewers. “Barriers” aspires to foster enhanced empathy, understanding, and inclusivity within the broader community while shedding light on the resilience and challenges faced by the Deaf and Hearing community.

Artist Stated Impact: I just hope the impact of the work shows a side of Calgary that we never may see within our day to day life. I hope it starts a conversation and builds from there, creating a true grassroots change for the better.



Tito is from the Chippewa-Cree & Tohono O’odham nations. While living in Calgary for the past 10 years, he has worked in the communities in Dover and Forest Lawn helping out as much as he can at community events. He wrote and directed two short films called The Healing and Love of Two, which both could be watched on YouTube. When he’s not busy with a community project, developing film projects, he can be seen at Powwows and round dances all over Alberta. His vision is to change the way First Nations people are portrayed in film and media.

“The residency is like squash growing across the land (being held and nurtured and shown how to grow), and the fellowship is more like roots, the ability to go deeper, less about going wide and more about going deep. It helped be understand as an artist ‘how do I actually impact change in the community and what is my social practice?’”



Kevin Jesuino

Kevin Jesuino is a Portuguese-Canadian queer multi-disciplinary performer, facilitator, activist, somatic practitioner, movement arts coach, and arts educator. His work is oftentimes collaborative, site-specific, participatory, and process-oriented. His practice explores relationality, the stories within our bodies, and the magical realism that manifests itself in LGBTQ+ communities and the natural world. He draws from research in queer performance, ecology/biology, somatics, and site adaptive/responsive performance. His community-embedded projects engage participants in performative actions, discussions, creative interventions, activations, and other forms of organizing.

Project Description: The Root Food Project began as an exploration of food systems with The Alex Food Centre. Kevin focused on “root foods” and the intimate act of shared cooking and the powerful shared connection of food stories. Participants shared stories and recipes rooted to cultural and familial ties. As each person shared their story, a shared meal was cooked, and the entangling of metaphorical roots began to emerge. As these roots began to intertwine with each other, the participants began to experience nourishment, trust and support from those who sat across from them.

Artist Stated Impact: The impact of this work was in the community sharing and the transfer of stories between individuals. There was an increased level of compassion for one another and also moments of insight where one person's story erupted the table into excitement and joy because of what they said. It allowed us to come back to a place where we are nourished -- Earth. To dig our toes below the table cloth, below the table, below our feet, below the foundations of the building and into the things that provide us all nourishment. It gave us compassion for each other and the land.

Barbara Amos (aka BAMOS) is an interdisciplinary artist who has addressed social and environmental issues for the past 30 years. A background in various drawing and painting materials has evolved to include photography, video, sculpture and recycled textiles. Her public art projects have included a community centre, a healthcare facility, a park beside city street, in a junior high school and an international sculpture garden. Her work is documented in books and online press. She has served on various expert panels within the arts community.

Barbara Amos

Project Description: Barbara worked with The Calgary Association of Life Long Learners (CALL) Creative Projects group, a volunteer-driven organization primarily of aged 55+ adults. The Creative Projects group, centered around creativity, particularly drawing, embraced technology, developing a resilient and self-sustaining community. This project explored the group's development into a self-sustaining community, exploring how drawing, particularly Zentangle, has contributed to member well-being and creativity. The group, initially formed in October 2019, adapted to the challenges posed by the pandemic, transitioned to online platforms, and evolved into a thriving community with shared leadership, regular meetings, and a commitment to fostering creativity. Barbara also documented her process in developing an ongoing community through a daily drawing practice to deepen her research and practice.

Artist Stated Impact: A six-week course on pattern-based drawing was conducted, emphasizing concepts such as trusting the process, pattern-based drawing, the inner critic, imperfection, and creativity. Participants' responses were evaluated through a series of questions and analyzed for meaningful insights. There was a creation of a self-sustaining community with reduced barriers to connection. We identified and reduced blocks hindering connection, such as perfection/imperfection, doubt, and anxiety.



“Getting old isn’t ONLY about health issues. It’s about our life force energy transitioning from the material world. How might we open that place for well being and a sense of creativity that can flow / restore / inspire?”

Project Description: As a director and filmmaker, Melanee's project "Secret Society" involved working with youth on brainstorming, team building, ensemble work, improvisation, script readings, and screenwriting for a short film. The film's storyline follows ambitious college students vying for a place in a secret organization, learning the hard truth that not everyone gets what they deserve.

Artist Stated Impact: The youth have amazing sample reels for their careers in acting, they have writing credits and experience developing storylines, plots, characters, honesty and commitment to the process..

Melanee Murray-Hunt



Melanee Murray-Hunt is an actor, writer, filmmaker, director and activist. Her film *Race Anonymous* has won various awards including an award for Best Drama at the Edmonton Short Film Festival, along with her solo theatre show, *The Hoodwink*. She can be seen in various television episodes and films including: *Black n Blue* by Guerilla Productions, APTN's *Tribal*, *Jasmine Road*, *The Motherf**cker With The Hat*, and fiftieth-anniversary production of *To Kill A Mockingbird* at Theatre Calgary. She has written, produced, directed and starred in four other films including the short film version of *The Hoodwink*, *Do The Math* (the sequel to *Race Anonymous*), *The Trial of Miss Mudimbe* and *Looking Back* (written and directed by Stephen Hunt). *Our Canada, Our Story* produced by Action Dignity and Arts Commons is a story co-written and facilitated with youth actors and writers by Melanee to explore themes of race and racism.

“Working with the fellowship was amazing to connect directly with the community rather than be reliant on working with community through the proxy of stakeholders.”

Skye Louis



Skye is a Goan-Torontonian printmaker excited by experimental processes and material transformations. As an arts educator, Skye focuses on making complex ideas accessible through hands-on learning. Skye has worked with the Neighbourhood Arts Network, ArtBridges, and ArtReach. Skye's work focuses on human connection, empowerment, accessibility and globalized consumer capitalism.

Project Description: The Artist As Changemaker card deck was a new tool designed for artists working in the community. The deck is an open-ended tool that can be used for collaborative conversation, personal reflection, facilitation and more. Through artistic practice, they can influence mental models, build empathy, and support group processes. Skye built this deck as an open and adaptable tool for artists and groups who are doing changemaking work together. It can be used to build common ground, unpack ideas, get inspired, understand impact, and dream big. There is no right or wrong way to use these cards. Skye hopes the cards will help with relationship-building, dialogue, and developing collaborative, arts-based responses to complex challenges. At their heart, these cards are about creativity, communication and collaboration. The most important thing is that you use them as you move through a process together.

Artist Stated Impact: The impact is evolving and unfolding over time because this is an open and adaptable tool. But we hope that it continues to support better conversations and collaboration for social change.

“The fellowship has made the renewal of this project possible. Reflecting learning through the cards and also to illustrate artists projects. It's become a tool for communication...for artists to work with community partners.”

Key Areas Of Impact

2022 - 2024 PROGRAM

Trained Artists

Courses and workshops offered through the program increase the number of artists with enhanced skills to approach complex social challenges, thus expanding their employment opportunities.

- Artists feel more empowered and capable of addressing social issues through their work, and they are more confident in seeking partnerships both within and outside the arts sector.

Collaborative Networks

The program establishes an active network of artists and community organizations, fostering strong relationships that encourage collaboration within and outside the arts sector.

- Organizations are recognizing that artists are integral to social change movements, both at the community and organizational levels.
- A shift in attitudes and norms about the arts is occurring; partnerships between artists and organizations demonstrate the value of the arts as a tool beyond mere aesthetic value.

Public Showcases

The showcases successfully increased the visibility of socially engaged artists by inviting community participation in various social challenges through exhibitions, workshops, and performances. This also allows organizations at the front lines of change to gain more visibility within the community.

- Investing in artists as leaders encourages communities to become more engaged and invested in social issues through their participation in art projects.

Continued Support for Projects

The connection to MRU's Trico Changemakers Studio and partnerships with local organizations provide artists with additional legitimacy in their work, facilitating further external funding to support their projects.

- Artists' work is leading to tangible social change including increased community belonging and the flow of resources.



Learn more about the artists, organizations, and their projects here.



Program Analysis Across Three Iterations (2019-2024)

In the three iterations of the program, below are the key areas of impact we've observed:

Collaboration

Partnering with peers, organizations, and engaging in activism, and giving artists the freedom to choose their partners is vital for artists to broaden their influence and drive social change.

"Working with a non-arts organization has been a valuable addition to my resume. It broadens my experience and allows me to present my skills in new contexts, making me more versatile as an artist." (Artist)

Community Engagement

- While individual creativity is important, collaboration and engagement with a diverse group of people are essential for moving ideas forward towards changemaking.
- Artists can increase their impact by deeply connecting with the communities they serve, which helps them address social issues more effectively.

Continuous Systems Change Learning

- Ongoing education is crucial for artists to enhance their skills and expand their understanding of social justice and equity.
- Concepts like the iceberg model and adaptive cycle help artists organize their thoughts, research, and approach problems at a systemic level.
- This learning boosts artists' confidence in discussing and addressing social innovation concepts, systems challenges, and community work.

Credibility Through Certification

Obtaining a Social Innovation Certificate enhances an artist's credibility, and has proven to lead to more employment opportunities with at least one artist gaining employment as a direct result of the Residency in each iteration.

Creative Action

- Artists as Changemakers go beyond aesthetics, using their art to evoke emotions, inspire action, and offer new perspectives on social issues.
- The program emphasizes collaboration, experimentation, and iterative processes between artists and organizations, leading to unique approaches to social change.

"Creativity is essential in the innovation process. Without it, we miss the opportunity to explore new possibilities and approaches that could lead to significant breakthroughs." (Community Partner)

Experiential Learning

Hands-on experiences and applying knowledge in real-time is more beneficial for artists than standardized learning environments.

Embracing Change and Adaptability

Co-collaborative processes are not linear and take into consideration multiple perspectives. Shifting and adapting based on what is arising both within the program and on a global perspective is important to respond to social challenges.

"It's important to understand that ideas might change or evolve based on circumstances. As artists, we need the flexibility to adapt and shift direction as needed. This adaptability is key to how we develop and execute ideas, ensuring they remain relevant and impactful." (Artist)

Art is a Tool for Change

- Art can catalyze change by allowing people to imagine new ways forward, with artists playing a critical role in driving these conversations.
- Art itself can serve as a problem-solving tool, particularly in community-focused projects to address community and organizational needs.
- Art can be a key component of organizational strategy, with artists playing a unique role in its execution.

Well-being Support

Artists working with vulnerable communities need support systems to avoid burnout and manage the emotional demands of their work.

Organizational Dedication

- Support from organizational staff is crucial for implementing and sustaining the changes that artists seek to bring about.
- A deep, responsive relationship between the artist and the organization is crucial for the success of collaborative projects.
- Organizational buy-in is also important. Clearly explaining or demonstrating how art aligns with the organization's mission is essential for gaining support and ensuring project success. Additionally, while the work is emergent and based on collaboration, having clear goals and objectives in the partnership is beneficial, even if specific project goals remain flexible.

Value of Artists in Organizations

Organizations recognize the value of embedding artists into their teams to creatively address social issues, articulate narratives, and think outside the box.

"I view this program as a gift to the non-profit. It's an opportunity to bring a fresh perspective and creative energy to their mission, making a lasting impact." (Artist)

"I'm used to looking at things with a pragmatic policy perspective and often forget the emotion and human factors to systems change. Sometimes it's easier to forget the hearts and minds that are a part of the change." (Community Partner)

Support from Program Leads

Continuous support from program leads is crucial for managing relationships between artists and organizations, bridging communication gaps, and building strong partnerships.

Selection Criteria for Artists

Selecting artists who identify as social justice activists/advocates is important for ensuring their readiness and commitment to making change.

Financial and Material Support

The Residency and Fellowship pays artists to participate, in addition to artist fees, artists are able to access a materials budget. This continued investment in artists validates the value of the artist and allows them to focus on the work.

"It's nice to be compensated for our work, and having a materials budget makes a big difference. It not only supports the creative process but also validates our contributions, allowing us to focus more on our work." (Artist)

What's Next

Prior to the next launch for the Artist as Changemaker Program in 2025, we'll utilize the knowledge and feedback of past artists to present recommendations to Calgary Arts Development on how the program can be refined to continue driving impact. Details such as program timeline, artist application process, courses and workshops material and frequency, role of the Fellowship, and approaches to community engagement will be adjusted and modified to add more value to program participants.

In Conclusion

Artists serve as powerful agents of social change by harnessing their creativity to evoke emotions, provoke thought, and foster dialogue. Through their deep connection with human experiences, they transform complex social issues into accessible and relatable narratives, inspiring collective action. Participants in the Artist as Changemaker Program are committed to looking beyond mere aesthetics to explore the deeper layers of social challenges.

By integrating empathy, storytelling, and innovative thinking, artists humanize and personalize these challenges, offering a unique and compelling perspective. Their work aligns with social innovation by translating complex problems into engaging narratives that spark collective action and inspire innovative solutions.

Collaborating with community organizations and leaders, artists contribute to systemic change through their iterative, non-linear processes. These processes often reveal insights that traditional methods might overlook, leading to more creative interventions. As changemakers, artists challenge the status quo and engage people emotionally, which is crucial for driving social progress.

The artistic process brings fresh perspectives and challenges conventional approaches, transforming how organizations address social issues. Artists open important dialogues and foster curiosity and empathy, making art a vital tool for tackling nuanced challenges. Organizations that collaborate with artists unlock new potential for social impact, as the unpredictable yet insightful nature of the artistic journey drives meaningful change.

Thanks & Recognition

A special thank you to Calgary Arts Development, the impact of this work wouldn't have been possible without their unwavering support. Thank you to the passionate artists and organizations who brought their vision and talent to the program.

“In my head I knew this program would be wonderful, but I couldn't see how the vision would translate into something tangible. Trusting the process was a space that was reinforced for both artists and organizations. Trico amplifies the ability and capacity of artists and organizations to do this work.”

Jenna Pothier, Village Square Community Hub



