

Art and Wellness Speaker Series  
9 October 2020 Transcript  
Agnes Etherington Art Centre

Before we begin, I wish to acknowledge that Queen's University and the Agnes Etherington Art Centre are situated on traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory. To acknowledge this traditional territory is to recognize the longer history. One predating the establishment of the earliest European colonies. It's also to acknowledge this territory's significance to the Indigenous peoples who lived and continue to live upon it. People whose practices and spiritualities were tied to the land and continue to build the relationship to the territory and its other inhabitants today. The Kingston Indigenous community continues to reflect the areas Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee roots. There is also a significant Métis community and there are First Peoples from other nations across Turtle Island present here today. This beautiful land, the trees, the three water ways nearby, the animals, and birds are an inspiration and solace during these difficult times. And we are grateful and privileged to play, heal, and celebrate on this land. I welcome you all to spend time researching and reflecting on the land you are coming from and consider your own positionality and how you can contribute to your institutions, your bodies, and minds. Welcome, everyone. My name is Shannon Brown. I am the programmer coordinator at Agnes Etherington Art Centre. And we're just thrilled to have you here. We're also thrilled to present two wonderful speakers, Stephen Legari and Melissa Smith. The speaker series will start today with me presenting sorry, me introducing Stephen with his bio and then we will go to Melissa for her presentation. And then we'll have about a half an hour or 25 minutes or so Q&A. I do encourage you to think about your questions. Please put them into the Q&A chat box as soon as you can so that we collate all those questions for Melissa and Stephen. Alright. Let's begin with Stephen Legari. Stephen Legari holds a masters in Creative Arts Therapies from Concordia University and a masters in Couple and Family therapy from the School of Social Work at McGill University. Legari is the Program Officer for the art therapy, for art therapy at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. This comprehensive-based program creates specialized projects for diverse groups including neuroatypical adults, adults with disabilities, and those living with long-term illness, trauma and grief. Legari is in constant search of new ways for the fine arts to be a source of connection and recovery. Welcome, Stephen. We're thrilled to have you. Thank you so much, Shannon. And thank you everyone for being here. I'd like to say a special thank you as well to Maddi and Charlotte for all of the support getting to this moment. I am going to launch into my presentation fairly quickly. I'd also like to acknowledge that one of my colleagues is here today. At least one of my colleagues is here today. It's really nice to see them in the virtual audience. Let me just bring up my presentation. Let me bring up the beginning of my presentation. You can see where I was scanning through. One moment please. Thank you for your patience. Good. Alright. So in responding to the theme of art and wellness, I'd like to focus sort of specifically on what we've been able to practice at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. In the case of my colleagues for the better part of 20 years but then also what I had the privilege of learning over the past few years from other museums and how those practices have collectively helped us inform what we hope is a consistent, a consistency striving towards best practice in museum wellness, museum art therapy, and in museum inclusion programs. This is a sight that I miss very much. I think for everybody working with museums right now, those with who have closed doors, there's a great sense of longing and missing both of our institutions of how they can

be supportive to us. But it really comes down to missing the publics, missing the groups. That's what I'm really hoping to share with you today is that the connection that we are able to make with people in the museums, in our relationships to the fine arts is at the fulcrum of how arts and health can be appreciated in a fine art museum context. And it's in the absence of those groups that we really feel one, the impact of maybe what we had accomplished up until moving into virtual formats and also how to think critically on how to return to working with them. I'm going to be pausing at the end of my presentation to look at some of the works that I picked out from the Agnes collection. The way that we use the fine arts at the museum, there's a myriad of ways they are used. Both in more traditional education perspectives but working both in therapy and in wellness we're often working in a perspective of eliciting story. What we really hope is our participants are going to respond to the works in a way that is personal. And sometimes, that's actually irrespective of the art history information that comes with a work. We invite people to tell their stories, to take wanderings to like, to dislike, to project. The way that I use that specifically in our therapy is often, as a precursor, to the more deport that we're going to explore through art making and through therapeutical reflection. This one is for me. I'm I'm starting with this one because it caught my attention immediately. There's a beautiful word in French, which is, its not [French word]. I'll remember it in just a second. But this caught me because I'm from Ottawa. I grew up in the Ottawa valley. And the title of this work is October Ottawa valley by Sarah Margaret Armour Robertson. This is where I would long to be this coming weekend is with my family. So in identifying a personal story with the work, I allowed myself to take a little bit of a pause in the business of both preparing for today and the things that are going on in relation to working at a museum during this time.

And I took a walk through the hills and I paused under the kind of peach-colored leaves that are falling and tried to imagine where in the valley this might be. But perhaps more importantly where in the valley it reminds me of being. When we come to the end of the presentation, I have a few works that are mostly based around nature and I'll invite you to do the same thing. So welcome to our front door. Again, a sight that we miss very much. The heyday of summer, times of exciting, big exhibitions. So as I said I'm going to be mostly focusing on the different kinds of programs that we have that are focused around wellness, art therapy, and inclusion. This is a sprawling museum. If you haven't visited it, there are five pavilions, we have encyclopedia collection. And we have a beautiful facility in the international [speaking in French] where we have more than a dozen studios where we get to do education and wellness programming in. So a lot of information that I could share about either the history or the current activities of the ensemble. This is a large team we're talking about. But I'm going to try and give you a little bit of a visit. Almost like we're visiting little different islands throughout the museum. And then if you have more specific questions, I'd be really happy to answer them later. I would also like to make my own acknowledgment that I am speaking to you from the unceded territory of Tiohti:áke. This is not from this part of our country, this is however a totem that is erected and remains in front of our museum. For me, it's a daily reminder to listen and to learn and quite an incredible testament it's called a residential school totem, so quite a testament to the power of art not only communicate a very personal and shared traumatic experience but also the healing potential of the arts. Some keywords. Again, this is mostly for myself because I like to talk and I get off topic easily. So we are talking about how the fine arts in a museum serve connection, empowerment, empathy, compassion, mindful presence

the building of trusting relationships and the communication of care. I'd also like to start by paying tribute to other museums. We have a big and robust program that we're proud to boast about. It's really important to pay tribute to all those museums that are inspiring our programs that we can collaborate with and share with. And this is sometime I've noticed particularly since we've gone virtual, is the sharing between museums has become a little bit more organic. The opportunity to meet with colleagues in different educational wellbeing departments has really bolstered my appreciation and understanding of what's out there. So this is our friends and colleagues in Dallas who we've collaborated with specifically on a project around neurodiversity. This is the contemporary museum in Athens, Greece. And my friend Elizabeth runs the arts psychotherapy program there. They're a museum that opened not long ago in the new year and then subsequently had to close, adjust, create virtual content, and then in the anticipation in reopening and relaunching their therapy programs. This is the ROM. This is their commitment to diversity and inclusion particularly to the response of George Floyd as many museums made important statements of their own commitments. This is part of their action plan moving forward. So when we think of health, wellness, well-being, we're not only talking about physical health, not only talking about mental health, also talking about social health and the respective responsibilities to our communities. This is in Bergamo, Italy where I had the great fortune of visiting last year. Bergamo as you may know was particularly hard hit in the earliest phases of the spread of COVID. Overwhelmed would be a word. This is a local hospital called [word in Italian] who did a collaboration with [words in Italian] just down the street. And the entire hospital staff was involved in choosing their favourite works from the museum so they could be in very beautiful reproduction reproduced in mural format throughout the hospital thus making it a museum as well for patients, for visitors of patients, and for staff. You have a, you get a little map when you go there and actually visit the different wards and appreciate the works that have been chosen. The use here of St Jerome taking thorn out of the lion's paw is particularly poignant as it greets you coming into the hospital as if to say here, we take care in the most careful and sensible ways no matter how distressed you may be. This is a great graphic novel project that came out of the Gulag history museum in Russia which I recently learned about. And they also run therapeutic programs with people who have survived the Gulags. A fascinating number of different projects and I encourage you to visit their website to learn more about it. This is the National Gallery in Ireland. Also a great inspiration for different kinds of sensory programming. I got to visit them on holiday last year and greeted with the most wonderful Irish hospitality. The Louvre Abu Dhabi is a recent collaboration identified as a mindful museum. It's a young museum with quite an incredible collection and also the most awe inspiring architecture built right onto the edge of the sea. As we identify as a humanist museum in Montreal, I find these words are not only ways to brand ourselves, of course, but they are invitation to integrate what that means. So one of the things I was able to do with the teams there is have conversation this about what does mindfulness means across a museum. And not only as an orientation to help visitors. And then right here at the Agnes. This is just one of your initiatives moving your Hive online and keeping people connected. Not only through directing people to the collections we have available, the educational activities we have available. But an increasing, happily to say, an increasing amount of community-oriented work in our museums. This was really a heartwarming picture for me to see and screen grab for the presentation. And if all the things I'm sharing aren't enough to convince you even the WHO has evidence that the arts supports health and well-being. They released a scoping review in 2019 that looked at the best of the best of research to

support our interactions with the performing arts, the creation of arts ourselves. And museums are also included in this first review as well. And I like this quote, bringing art into people's lives through activities including dancing, singing, and going to museums and concerts offers an added dimension to how we improve physical and mental health. That from the Regional Director. They are currently working on a second review that will include a lot more focus on the creative arts therapies which I am looking forward to. I take a big breath when I look at these images because they remind me to breathe. I'm really interested in how design, light, and architecture particularly with some of the more recent constructions. This is our most recent pavilion, Pavilion for Peace. How those elements support the experiences that we're trying to share with our audiences, publics, participants, whether they've come to us as patients or they have come to us as tourists. And there's some really interesting research into what's called therapeutic architecture. This is a space that people have gone through many different kinds of reflections from reposing themselves on the cushions below the [word in French] sculpture or taking careful steps down this is in the main pavilion but taking careful steps one at a time in this kind of displaced fashion. The steps encourage you and even force you to be present in what you're doing. So the physical relationship to a museum is a really interesting place for occupational therapists, for people that are interested in mobility issues. But our museums are about once having an encounter with the fine arts and each other and also they're places where our bodies move through space and encounter each other. And then the conception of galleries. If we look at the top image, this is the gallery that houses our romantic collection. And it's a room that we use in a variety of ways. When I'm using it with therapeutic groups, we try to get in there early in the day before any of the crowds get in. And again it's a room that breathes. It's a room that have been conceived to support and bathe us in nature. And this has been a really interesting motif that's come back almost relentlessly since the imposition of COVID which is people's connections not only to the literal land but through the fine arts there has been this ongoing demand through the groups I'm doing to connect with images of nature. Any time I ask for feedbacks from

groups, what would you like to see more of? It's an almost an insatiable appetite. So this is a very special room. It includes sounds of birds and they're used with a lot of restraints as well. So you can feel that you can immerse yourself in the environment. And it's definitely one of the places that I love to visit. The tree from which all of our programs spring and it really reached out with this initial question of who isn't coming to the museum and why aren't they coming to the museum? And what projects can we build together? And that very simple very straightforward gesture of invitation is what allowed us through a couple of decades of practice and reflection to have as robust program as we do. There's a long, long list of partners we owe a great debt to that have taught us so much and have helped us become a better team, a more efficient team, and helped us learn about best practice. And there's something like 450 of them in our rolodex. A lot of those relationships continue to be maintained today in various frequencies. And this I believe is an image from one of the number of different groups of people living with Alzheimer's and dementia which was originally inspired by Meet Me at the MOMA and it was adapted both to the culture of our museum and to the culture of Montreal. And it's definitely a long running and successful program today. Beautiful Thursdays or Les Beaux Jedis, is a program that's been running literally for years now and opens wide the doors every Thursday. There's now two groups every Thursday for free for seniors, art making, stretching, yoga for some movement, exploration of works of art and really to give a privileged place to our elders, our sages, and our seniors. For them to

have a place at a table that's just for them and then also to reinforce a part of the mandate of our department which is really to have intergenerational programming Louise can say so much about this programming as well. In writ large there are programs for children with adaptive learning needs that have been running for many different years. One of the things I want to underline is our model is based on one co-creation. Whether it's co-creating partnering with a special educator, a clinician, a nurse, a psychologist, a parent, a volunteer. We're never really sure who our next partner is going to be and what professional or life experience is going to lend to us being able to expand or even specialize in what we do. But all of those projects invariably involve the collection so the connection. So the connection to the museum's collection is essential. And then often, it has a connection to a creative activity so that hands-on physical work, of play, of exploration, of discovery, of enjoyment, in the case of my own program, of being able to explore things that are sensitive, difficult, problematic, and traumatic as well. Another great project is working with Parkinson's au Movement. Louise have been taking care of for a couple of years now. Again to imagine that our gallery spaces are not only for looking but that they are for moving. That our bodies have an important role in responding to the works as well. That the way that art can reflect back our experience is not exclusively intellectual and in fact getting that dimension out of the way is some of the hard work that we do so that people can have a sensory, sensual and embodied experience in interacting with the visual and fine arts. And then our dear friend and colleague Moridja heads up the togetherness and diversity program. He's currently working with several organizations that bring together communities that have either previously participated in the museum or are coming to the museum for the first time. Again, in that same spirit of co-creation of visiting, of discussion, and to with the ongoing objective of this image which now hangs in the atelier, in the grand atelier and where we all work. So that this actually one day will be the image we strive to look like. One of the more interesting developments that came out of, again, all these years of work and working specifically with hospitals, clinics, and health care workers was we gained the interest and attention of an association of mainly family doctors, L'Association des Médecins francophones du Canada. This is an association that brings together family doctors from across Canada who are working towards either supporting or proficiency in offering the best practice medicine in the French language. And they loved the idea of creating, or cocreating a museum prescription with us. We run a pilot project in 2018 and saw 350 prescriptions filled for individuals, their families, or couple, or you could come with your friends as well. It was really about underlining the autonomy for the patients to decide for themselves what kind of experience they want to have but mainly be able to trade in this prescription for access in a way that allowed them to become a museum participant and leave the label of patient at the door if that was their choosing. And also to connect with the different programs we were mentioning earlier and I'll mention in the Art Hive later which is a place that a number of people who have used their prescription have found their way to. Specifically in art therapy, there are a number of projects that I would love to tell you about in great detail but I'm going to stick to a few. This is one that I ran for two years and is under now what I would call an evaluation phase. We were approached by a local organization that supports people through in-home, end-of-life care. And there were looking to start a bereavement program. And this was something I specifically had done before at the museum. Some of the works of people living with long-term and terminal illness we certainly are encountering issues of mortality and existential questioning but to really focus on a project that would welcome and embrace peoples' grief process was something new to build. So I started with the collection. Looking for works that I hoped

would inspire people to open up about their experience of grief. This was co-created and co-facilitated by a social worker and we met eight times biweekly with a group of eight adults. We did it once, we evaluated it, and launched the program again. And now, it's informing a new project that I hope to start in the new year with a local palliative care center. We've been working now with into our third year with the Centre for Restorative Justice. The work we do with them is to support people who self-identify as victims of criminal violence. This is what we might call a semi open group of self-selecting participants as opposed to being referred participants. And they're able to come mostly on a monthly format. And I say mostly because we're now moving to a biweekly format virtually. But mostly in a monthly format. We focus our visits on a single work of art. We then go back to the studio and we have a nondirective artmaking session. And then invite people into a reflective process where they dialogue with their art work and with each other which often leads to them disclosing about different traumatic experience they've had in their life but then also being able to be of cosupport to the other members. And this is really something to be underlined. We really emphasize group work because the group dynamic is what often is the primary healing factor in what people are deriving from the work we do. Working with a local clinic that supports young adults with different communication problems. Sometimes, that's deafness, sometimes that's stuttering, sometimes that's aphasia. We've now moved into year five of this project and its now becoming a research project which we're quite excited about. So we've got the interest both of researchers at UQUM and Right in the clinic itself is cofacilitated with a psychologist and a speech therapist. It has a presence of an interpreter. It's a project that Lee's worked on as well. And it's mainly focused on helping these young adults have a supported experience in a museum environment where they can practice interacting not only with the art works, with people who aren't living with communication problems, but also having that shared-lived experience of hearing their stories through others. And because I know the Agnes is a centre that is really invested in research, I thought I'd bring out a few examples to share as well. So a project that we're now turning into a chapter on group art therapy. We ran a series of groups since 2017 in collaboration with the Quebec Breast Cancer foundation who helped us with recruitment and helped us by understanding the needs of their membership which is something we always ask our partners to do. This is a collaboration with UQAT Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue and the lead researcher there is Jacinthe Lambert. And we were looking at once again, the lived, it's 100% qualitative. This particular, more of a phenomenological study. But two of those groups got followed through a series of ten sessions. Art sessions typically lasts about three hours each. That includes a visit, that includes art marking, and the includes therapeutic reflection. This one was co-facilitated by an art therapy intern and by one of our veteran mediators. In Quebec we use the term, médiateur, as opposed to an educator. Not in opposition to it but it's a term that we borrowed its more prominently used in Europe and in France. Appreciating the dynamic of our educators as being that medium between the visitor experience and the art works to strive towards that horizontality of relationship in their role. So this group again benefited from a number of custom-made visits to select art works, to invite the reflection of the eight women that were in each group. All of which all of whom, I should say were at different stages of their treatment. They could have been in treatment or in remission for several years. We had a broad recruitment criteria. And I'm going to share with you just some of their reflections. Themes that would include a sanctuary. So we would have again visited that romantic collection gallery earlier and invited each of them to

reflect on what does a sanctuary mean to you? And we would have explored themes of body image and doing body traces. We would have also explored themes of finding a place in the museum that feels like a safe space to you in that given moment which can be quite a bit of work at times. And then they would come back. Here's an example of the work around sanctuary and they would be given a variety of materials to be able to express their reflective process of that visit, the theme, and then also just what's present for them that day. In art therapy, particularly, people are free to reject the themes, they're free to reject the directive, they're free to reject the materials even. They can really explore what is most important for them but there's often an appreciation of that frame around how we're exploring the work together. This is working with the breath. This would have been in relationship to the sculpture that I showed a couple of frames back where you're finding your spot and then doing a mindful exercise in relationship to the work. I'll just through throw up a few examples of research that we've done. This is done by Ellen Smallwood a recent graduate of our Concordia Art Therapy Program and did a pilot mixed methods study working with young adults are living with epilepsy. Some of our projects were really interesting in that they've been able to address underserved publics, or sometimes what we in clinical terms what we call populations, I prefer the term publics and we tend to in the museum as well, that don't previously have either an association or a group. And that's sometimes the interest of researchers to use the museum as a novel environment to create a group and then go off into their own partnering location and continue that work. But then also continue to have a relationship with museum. That's an example we had with a young group of adults living with cancer. Its an ongoing group now at the Canadian Cancer Foundation but they still make periodic visits in the accompaniment of their art therapist. This past year we did a pilot study for adults living with stroke in what's called the chronic phase so post six months. We already knew that art therapy was a good idea and was helpful in the early stages post stroke. And we wanted to see what was it and also in combining it with the museum visits. What were the advantages for, and this was an ensemble of five different universities. People, everything from rehabilitation to occupational therapy. There's a whole host of researchers who were interested in their own research and their own perspective in working with this particular population. And so they're looking at the data right now and hopefully will have something in the next year to share. More in the wellbeing side of our program. This is a major study that's out of its pilot phase. Even though I'm still using this screen. Looking at the benefits of museum arts based experiences for older adults who are living with things like social isolation, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. And so building off our model of the Beautiful Thursdays, the head researcher who's an expert in gerontology wanted to look at that creative activity, that social activity. Its not going to surprise anybody that they got positive results. It turns out going to a museum, connecting, hanging out, making art, and being warmly welcome has a positive impact on all the symptoms I described. What's exciting though is its now being reproduced in more than five museums worldwide. One thing we don't do enough of, and I'm informed of this by Canadian researchers, Canada's great at pilot studies. We don't produce enough research. So that's an invitation to us all to borrow each other's research and launch launch our own our own reproductions of them. And then the Art Hive. I encourage you to watch the video of Janice Timm-Bottos to visit [arthives.org](http://arthives.org) to learn more about the hives, the international movement about where it comes from about hopefully where it's going, about the virtual adaptations, about Agnes's own Art Hive. We've had an art hive at the museum since 2017. It's a wonderful successful model of a community-focused studio.

We've had to move already to a larger facility within the museum because it's such a popular space. We see about, I just did some figures we see about 2500 people coming through the hive every year based on a twice weekly access. The other days of the week, that same studio can serve purposes to our other groups be they for closed therapeutic groups or for well-being groups as well. The art hive principles are fairly straightforward. Everyone is welcomed as an art maker. We practice what's called radical hospitality. We try to let people know within the first few moments of being there that, and that's mostly through presence and regard, that they are warmly welcomed if this is a place they choose to find safe for them. Materials are free. We underline and support the autonomy of everyone to make their own work and to make their own decisions about what that should look like but then to also celebrate them as teachers themselves and everyone has something to story be it story, be it craft, be it technique with the other community members that are there. In the museums, we're very lucky because we have both people that come every week, twice a week. We have families that come, thus creating a more intergenerational space but we also benefit from tourism. So our museum before it closed, was enjoying about a million visitors a year. That means that some percentage of them were just stopping by haphazardly to go hey what's in here? So you get to catch someone at the tail end of the holiday sometimes before they go back to the different part of the world and get to turn them on to the art hive for a couple of hours. And people often leave with a sense of having something done very different at a fine art museum than they would have anticipated. I'm going to run through the last few slides. I want to make sure I keep time. Something, I'll just scroll through these slides quickly. Something that I've been working on with some colleagues in the states is codeveloping a teaching model for what does it mean to be a trauma-informed or trauma-aware museum? We've had a lot of good research in education in what trauma-informed schools look like. But there wasn't enough for our museum art educators. And so that was a question that they came and I came together with to explore the different tools we can share to help support our teams and then to also support other museums that are asking this question. Speaking of research, the AAM has been busy polling museum patrons, asking them questions and about the role of the museum post-COVID. They have particular tasks for history museums and there are tasks for fine art museums. But they've kind of lumped in with botanical gardens and zoos as well is to remember that the work that you're already doing in the work that people are waiting for. Which is that these are seen as almost palliative environments. Palliative in the best sense of being cared for and cared for in a very sensitive and authentic way. The programs that we've had the great privilege are developing are what's being yearned for when we can physically be back in our museums once again. And now for a breath. Could I invite you, the audience, those that are in attendance, if you would be so kind to visit a few of the works that I've preselected from the Agnes collection that are mostly, that are all, actually, in in some way related to this this appetite for scenes of nature at this time. And I've intentionally not put the name of the artist, the date, the medium used which is not proper protocol when you're presenting art works in a formal capacity. But in a well-being or therapeutic capacity, I just want to invite you, if you would use the chat with a few words on what comes up to you. That can be feeling, that can be a colour. And if I can ask for some help either seeing those words or if someone would like to, that's facilitating this if you could just say the few words you're seeing come up in the chat.

Stephen, we have peace, wind, through the trees, calm, reflective, wander, patience, breath, a dream like noticing, warmth, reflective space, warm sunlight on the skin, slowness, calmness, stillness, beauty, sanctuary, chilling.

Thank you. I'm going to move into a couple of more. Because they're all quite remarkable. Again, whatever words first come to you.

Loneliness, silence, cold, slow, reflective, mystery, isolation, anguish, survived.

Thank you. I could stay on the image for half an hour, but I'm I want to be very respectful of time. I have two more images. This is the second to last. Any words that come to you.

Tethered, trauma, the United States now, death, predator, action, aggressive, complexity, chained, embrace.

Thank you, Shannon. And sorry the last one was resistance?

Yes.

Thank you, Shannon. I got one more.

Glow, hope, balance, orb, radiate, radiance, nature, many voices, positive vibes, equilibri, shine.

Shine. Thank you. And this is my own closing image. This isn't in our museum, but you can see it from our museum. It's one of our late Montrealers, Leonard Cohen. The often even overused phrase or overused quote of his is I can't help by repeat as often as possible at this time which is there's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in. Certainly, an important reminder to us of the role of the arts in the work that we're doing now but also in the grief and healing that we have to come. Thank you, all, so much.

Thank you so much, Stephen. Such a beautiful offering. You've really taken us around the world, you've taken us into our hearts and shown us so much potential. I know there are some questions coming in and we look forward to chatting a little bit more with you about your presentation. Thank you so much. Wow. I'm going to move on now to Melissa who will, I'm sure as well, have such a rich content for us. So get your notebooks ready, everyone. Melissa Smith is the assistant curator of the community programs of the Art Gallery of Ontario. Her responsibilities include inclusive public programs for adults and accessibility advocacy. Motivated by a sustained commitment in exploring the unique relationship between art and audiences, Smith was awarded the Royal Ontario Museum Visitor Engagement Award in 2014. And one of Smith's AGO programs was awarded the 2016 People's Choice for Quality Improvement by the City of Toronto Long Term Care Home and Services. She holds a Master of Arts in Art History from Western University and a Masters of Museum Studies from the University of Toronto. She's also a Sessional Instructor in the Inclusive Design Graduate Program at OCADU and sits at the Board of Directors at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre. Welcome, Melissa.

Thank you so much. It's always so embarrassing to hear your bio read something I think but thank you for that wonderful invitation, Shannon. Stephen, I'm absolutely blown away. It's also your energy and your presenting is so wonderful, too. And thank you, Maddi and Charlotte for your support as well. I'm so happy to be here with everyone. I'm going to start to share my screen. And throughout the presentation, awkwardly move between the slides. So we'll have fun today with that as well. I also wanted to acknowledge that I'm located in Tkaronto on lands that are the traditional homes of the Anishinaabe, the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Huron-Wendat, and the Haudenosaunee and I am grateful to live and work on this land. Recognizing this is a meaningful way to really make a commitment

to sharing and upholding responsibilities to all who now live on these lands. So just an important, I think, way to start. So I also thought just to give a little bit of context about what the Art Gallery of Ontario is. I'm going to move through some of the foundational information and some mission and vision stuff that I think is helpful and understanding how and why and we engage in the work of wellbeing. So the AGO is located in Toronto and it's one of the largest museum in North America. Attracting approximately one million visitors annually in pre-COVID days. The AGO collection of more than a 105,000 works of art ranges from contemporary art to masterpieces by Indigenous and Canadian artists as well as some European art. The AGO presents wide ranging of exhibitions and programs including solo acquisitions and acquisitions by diverse artists from around the world. And in 2019, I think is really important to note in this context the AGO launched an initiative to design to make the museum more welcoming and accessible. And we did this by introducing free admission for anyone who is 25 years old and under and introducing a \$35 annual pass so you can visit as many times as you would like. And also wanted to acknowledge just to understand how we work is that the AGO is funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Heritage Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. And then additionally operating in support is received by the City of Toronto, the Canada Council of the Arts and contributions from AGO members, donors and private sector partners. I'm always a little noisy about how things work. So that's why I thought I'd share that with everyone. I'm also going to switch into our vision and mission which, again, I think is just important to know where we're coming from as an institution. The AGO will lead global conversations from Toronto through extraordinary collections, exhibitions and programs, and by reflecting the people who live here. And our core values are really quite straightforward, art, audience, visitors and learning. And I'm going to dive even a bit further and share also what my specific department, so I work in the public programming and learning division. What we really believe is that we will generate meaningful, experimental and inclusive experiences connecting people, art and contemporary ideas. And also sharing some of our guiding principles because, again, feeling like this gets us on the same page. We seek to be relevant in our audiences and everything we with do. Be a platform in visual arts and culture. Shape unique experiences from multiple communities and cultures. Consider the full diversity of our visitors and generate experiences that embrace the communities we serve. Generate opportunities that engage and deepen relationships with all our audiences and ensure that we take risks while recognizing varied experiences. And I have to say that this is a whole team of people and we really work with community across our department through school programs, youth programs, performances, art talks, so I'm very lucky to work with some very amazing folks but yeah. Just to kind of get a sense of how we do. I also wanted to chat a little bit too about too about our methodology. So the Gallery takes on a constructivist approach to programming in order to really centralize the visitor or program participant. Theorist George Hines describes the philosophy from a museum perspective stating that constructivism accommodations personal meaning making and provides opportunities for visitors to validate and express their own interpretations. And this perspective really encourages visitors to participate rather than passively receive information, which is super super important to us. During all of our art-educator led programs, participants are encouraged to contribute to conversations by responding to open-ended questions with methodologies like Philip Yenawine and Abigail Housen's visual thinking strategy. So that's the one with the tree questions. What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? And what more can we find? And this really supports dialogue and creates space for varied perspectives which is so important. We do this because we know from museum visitor research and this

is the saddest thing that the number one reason people don't visit art galleries specifically is because they feel they need to come equipped with an art history knowledge. Which is again so sad cause we can all make meaning when looking at visual culture. We're surrounded by it. If not inundated by it. And for me the most important reason to undo this perception is that museums actually improve our wellbeing and health. And that really brings us to the point of why I'm chatting today. Also, and I want to identify and really lean into some of the things that Stephen also talked about. How health and wellbeing is not just the absence of illness or disease. Wellbeing is a dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going. So through the interactions between their circumstances, activities and psychological resources or mental capital. As the World Health Organization claimed more than sixty years ago, health is a state of complete physical and mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. And that's so important right. Health should be promoted more broadly by leaning into positive wellbeing and its origins and cultural value systems and maintenance through social processes. And these are outlined typically as the Social Determinants of Health. And again something that Stephen touched upon in his presentation. So the World Health organization defines Social Determinants of Health as the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Just about everything. And the Organization further states that these circumstances are shaped by the distribution which is important to acknowledge. Of money, power, and resources at a global, national, and local level. So examples of Social Determinants of Health include income level, educational opportunities, occupation, employment status workplace safety, gender inequity, racial segregation, food insecurity, and an inaccessibility to nutritious food choices, access to housing and utility services, early childhood experiences and development, social support and community inclusivity, crime rates and exposure to violent behaviour, availability of transportation, neighbourhood conditions and physical environment, access to safe drinking water, clean air and toxic free environments and last but not least, access to culture, recreation and leisure. There, like that is identified. And the reason I like to go through this, too, is because this is what I use as a means of encouraging programming. And it also underlines why access to our cultural sites is actually human right. Irrespective of cognitive, sensory, or physical ability really and this is all covered in the article 27 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And in Canada, we have the Canadian Rights Act and Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms It's super important to know because engagement with the arts can aid in tackling complex challenges. For which medical solutions are not adequate. So we can provide multiple health promoting factors in a single activity, connect with hard to reach groups, and foster preventive and promotional health behaviour. And evidence actually shows that engaging with museums provides positive social experiences, reducing social isolation, opportunities for learning and acquiring new skills, calming experiences leading to decreased anxiety, increased positive emotions such as optimism, hope, and enjoyment. Increased self-esteem and sense of identity. Increased inspiration and opportunities for many making. Positive distraction from clinical environments. If you're coming as someone who's looking to create a, or participate in service related to community health centres or hospitals, increased communication among families, care givers, and health professionals as well. And this is from a study done by Chatterjee and Noble. And to get even more specific and relate this to art galleries, Heather Steke and Jennifer Noble in a review of empirical literature concluded that in engagement with artistic activities either as an observer of the creative efforts of others or as an initiator of their own creative efforts can enhance mood, emotions, and other psychological states. And a more recent report, so that one that Stephen

also acknowledged found that art specifically has positive overall effects of mental and physical health at all stages of life. So with the research providing a strong foundation, we know that cultural institutions have begun to explore what their contributions can be to public health and wellbeing. And again thank you, Stephen, for running through all of those amazing programs. Because we can see that's happening around the world and in Montreal. All of these facts and findings are also what I share regularly, so I'm kind of going through my spiel, to encourage funding and priority setting in my institution. So that's one of the things I want to bring forward in this talk. Is how do you advocate them within your institution to make this happen? So pretty much I guilt people. I also wanted to talk about social prescribing as well. And really the AGO recently partnered with the Alliance for Healthier Communities in a research pilot for social prescribing. And social prescribing is an innovative approach to public health. It's a means of referring to a range of local, nonclinical services seeking to address people's needs in a holistic way and supporting individuals in taking greater control at their own health. In its core it supports elements of co-design, so cocreating solutions to accommodate needs. Good data tracking because health care organizations are really good at this. And then concrete referrals. You can either be self-referred or referred into programming to social goods that are available in the community. The movement actually began in the UK and has now become parts of conversations in Canada and Australia. And it speaks to the process that looks at the utility of non-medical interventions to address the Social Determinants of Health. Social prescribing is a simple and yet transformative way of supporting patients' health and wellbeing by responding to their need for social connectedness. Whereas community programs and other nonmedical supports have always been a part of the Canadian health care model which I want to acknowledge. Social prescribing breaks new ground by building intentional links between health and community services. Museums and galleries can offer a space that is not only creative and inspiring but safe-ish, supportive, and free from stigmatization often associated with health care. Providing visitors with opportunities to self-develop that are not available to them in other contexts. So that's all well and good. I've told you these narratives and shared these ideas. But I also want to be very transparent about what our challenges are. And it's wonderful in theory. But many museums identify as having a social role and have made great efforts to address the needs and interests of communities they serve including the expansion of activities to socially excluded populations. So Channic and Chatterjee proposed a framework whereby museums can develop strategic partnerships with health care authorities, community centres, and organizations to coordinate health and wellbeing programs. And such programs can offer an on prescription referral service designed and delivered with partnership with health and social care organizations. And methods have even been developed to evaluate the efficacy of such programs. So you can actually look at the museum's wellbeing measure which was developed by Thompson and Helen Chatterjee. Challenges for most arts and cultural organizations however really include how best to sustainably support outreach projects and partnerships with community organizations. Most culture sites can be innately colonial constructs and that are not always safe spaces as I previously acknowledged. So how do we engage with community groups so that they see themselves at our sites and feel comfortable? So for me, I have some key considerations for that. And I'm referencing the Tate Exchange which is a space in a program at Tate Modern that supports community debate and reflection by getting actively involved in thinking through what it means to make a difference with communities. They've shared key considerations from their research project presented by Dudeney et al. in 2013. Subjectivities of museum visitors are in constant

flux. And for the museum-y people on the webinar today, we know John Faulk a leading figure in free choice learning and understanding why people are motivated to visit museums, studied individual motivations and expectations. And his research showed that most leisure experiences aren't initiated by a desire to see something or do something specifically but as a desire to fulfill a specific identity-related motivation. And you don't live in that same motivation every time you visit. He identified five basic identity related categories and you kind of move between them. So there's facilitators which are often parents or grandparents, or me with my partner. Rechargers, so we know when we have gone to museums or spaces and felt just able to be calm and really, again, as the term says recharge. Explorers who are typically tourists or finding an exhibition that they would like to spend time in and maybe read lots of labels and then also experience seekers and lately, I've just been referring to them as the folks to come to the any Yayoi Kusama exhibition. And then professional hobbyists which are all of us who are on this call. So that's just an example of some of the subjectivities. We must reinvision relationships between museums and a public that is deeply embedded in the decline of the preeminence of dominant language and culture and nations. This is just something we just need to acknowledge. Practices of collection, interpretation, and engagement in art museums are subject to revisioning in a technological information age that offers radically different possibilities for communication and representation. And we're seeing this right now with COVID and digital programming too. The complexity and agency of audiences as individuals, consumers and communities and the ways in which audiences experience the museum will be increasingly important as the cultural value and authority of museums are destabilized. Museum practitioners are equally locked into a reproduction and professional, operational practices without end and with a few mechanisms and critical and reflective work. So I just want to acknowledge everyone's time and coming in this webinar. Cause we're actually engaging in a bit of that work right now which is nice. So we're going to move on to maybe some solutions. For me, that comes in the form of co-creation. Again, something that Stephen touched upon which was just really lovely to see in the programming. So co-creation is the collaborative development of new values. Concepts, solutions, products, and services. Together with experts and/or stakeholders such as visitors, community members, sky's the limit. And I love this cause Paulo Freire in 1968 p.s., that it is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in development with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of transformation. Freire sought to replace the traditional hierarchical structure of the classroom by helping the students to become, oh look at that. Don't you love when [phone ringing]. Max, they're all connected. So Freire sought to replace the traditional hierarchical structure of the classroom by helping the students to become equal contributors to the learning process. And we can see that in the free choice, learning environment of the museum as well. Similarly, by codesigning processes with the museum that are determined by people with lived experience, we have found that we can create more inclusive spaces and become more appealing for people who otherwise wouldn't experience the wellbeing benefits of the cultural site. Another person I like to reference too is Nina Simon who is really a museum visionary. And she references cocreative projects that give power the the participants, provide a place for community engagement and dialogue, develop skills that will support their own individual and community goals, and often the process is codetermined by the preferences and working styles of the participants. More than any other type of visitor participation, cocreative projects challenge institutional perceptions of ownership and controlled content. She designs, she defines a participatory cultural institution as a place where visitors can create, share and connect with each other around

content. Create means that visitors contribute their own ideas, objects and creative expression to the institution and to each other. Share means that people discuss, take home, remix and redistribute both what they see and what they make during their visit. Connect means that visitors socialize with other people, staff, and visitors who share their particular interests. And the AGO is really working to become a space for collaboration and discussion, building new relationships within and between communities as well. And one of the things I like to reference quite a bit for this work is Natasha Reid's Revised Framework for Active Inclusion which outlines how to explore collaborative processes and pedagogy in outreach community programming. And you can see here on this amazing visual so it's a circle with arrows pointing around and you can't really exit the circle. So it's ongoing. And the first point is more than one dialogue between community group and the gallery prior to the first visit. And yes. Oh, my God. This has to be done. And two gallery representatives visit the community centre prior to the first gallery visit. And this also reminds me of something a colleague Judy Coke used to say to use all the time, if you only ever invite someone to your house but never go to theirs, what kind of relationship is that? And then number three connections created with new visitors from the community group during the gallery visit is super key to also showcase that the gallery is a space to visit and use as a tool. Reflection on the process by the gallery and the community group after the gallery visit. And this is so important as far as debriefing and evaluation. And then I love that this table also, or this figure demonstrates that it all starts over again because it should be such an iterative process. I am going to flip down to this slide. And this is where I'm going to go a little bit more deeply into programming. So, I really could talk at length about our wellbeing support for doctors. You know, supporting caregivers as well as participants. Our senior social free programming much the same as what's offered at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Multisensory programming, mental health programming, deaf culture programming. And hopefully an upcoming partnership with Dancing with Parkinson's for our Studio 54 exhibition. Those are all really exciting things that I'm so grateful to be able to work on. That I feel that the co-creation process in action is sort of best exemplified by a program partnership with the South Riverdale Community Health Centre. And partnerships for me really grease the wheels of change. So with South Riverdale Community Health Centre working with peer ambassadors. So these were folks that were identified from the community and given paid positions in this role. Were paid community representatives with lived experience. In this case, with chronic pain. And we codesigned a program for building connections with the AGO. Identifying it as a resource to help support their wellbeing. It was very much built peer-to-peer. I really wanted to try and remove the authority of the museum and any facilitator from the experience. We really did. We removed that authoritative role and prioritized the peer-to-peer experience in the collection with art. Surkhab Peerzada who's the Regional Manager of Chronic Disease Management and I met multiple times to plan. We also offered a familiarization and facilitation training with food and drink that was sort of a day long for the peer ambassadors. We offered free visits for the peers as they prepared to launch the program and the program itself is free. But just to help prep in advance. We covered transportation costs. We co-created the one-hour gallery visit structure and art making workshops that happened back at the community health centre and those activities were based on the artworks that were visited during the peer-to-peer tours. We hosted a social event to thank the peers at the AGO and we cowrote a survey to capture some of that qualitative data and feedback as well as hosting a focus group to make sure that we were getting good feedback. And when we asked the participants what they thought about the program at the AGO, they shared they

had enjoyed themselves, they felt calm and relaxed which is just [blows kiss] beautiful. The felt comfortable, the peer ambassadors, they said treated them with dignity and respect. That the peer ambassadors also met them, made them felt comfortable and welcome in the gallery. And that the peer ambassadors helped them identify the AGO as a site they could return to on their own and have agency to use as a way to cope with their chronic pain. So through this cocreative community-centred process, we're trying to undo the enlightenment mono narrative. The authoritarian voice of the institution and prioritize personal meaning making instead. So by encouraging people to visit the gallery and make meaning of the art themselves rather than prioritizing art history or problematic colonial narratives, we're encouraging people to socialize, make personal meaning, encourage closer and deeper looking together, be creative all while participating in a social outing. And all of that coming back to wellbeing, all of that has health benefits. So I also wanted to address, and sorry, just to explain. This previous slide is an exhibition that we hosted in our community gallery of art works that were produced by some of our older adult participants in our senior social. And they were all inspired by art works in the collection as well. So you can see next to the label that it also drives you to go up in the collections to see the original works that inspired these artists. And then here, the image on this particular slide is of our multisensory program. So you can see, I work quite closely with the curators and the conservators to see what we can engage with in real life. Translations are always nice but we really try to engage with the art work if we can through touch. And so they are wearing nitro gloves as they encounter the sculpture. So now I'm going to talk about how all of this work has shifted since the pandemic. So we've really leaned into design thinking, being experimental and iterative. So this perspective helped manage change. We've been able to shift many programs to a digital platform in prerecorded Zoom videos. They've launched live on our social media platforms and live on the Access to Art resource hub. And over time, we hope to populate this with many more assets. Right now, there's definitely all of the programs that I previously mentioned showcasing when those events are going to be launched. But what we would really like to include as well is upcoming, that's what I wanted to flag, upcoming partnerships with Tangled Arts and Workman Arts. So they're not for profit community organizations in Toronto that support artists with mental health and different abilities. So we're partnering with them to create video content. And the resource hub acts as a central location for resources that support self-guided engagement and exchange be the gallery. This will eventually also include trails, skill shares, virtual reality experiences, visual descriptions. There are already one that I launched the other week there. Community labels that we hope to produce for our upcoming I Am Here exhibition and training modules for community organizations. There are myriad of opportunities for partnerships and cocreating best practices and I have to say that I'm actually really excited. So its been a bit of a silver lining in this very strange time. One thing I do want to acknowledge though is that the Internet and technology are not accessible to many marginalized folks. So going digital has increased accessibility to our programming, and increased our ability to reach beyond the GTA. But this is a challenge I just want to shout out and don't have a solution for really. So I'm going to leave that hanging, very purposefully. I also wanted to share some key takeaways for me at least for programming. And that's really that, and programming for wellbeing right to bring us, just to remind us of our topic. But partnerships to facilitate health and wellbeing work so well and can really solve some of the gaps in services. And I think if they're transparent and both organizations acknowledge what they can bring to the table but also what their challenges are, there's often some really beautiful things that can happen with honesty and really

trusting one another. Evaluation. So evaluate and capture qualitative and quantitative data. I'm a huge data nerd. So Stephen, when you were talking about all of those projects, I have to say that I was just chomping at the bits. So exciting. But also that can also take place as surveys, focus groups. But also, as we heard too from Stephen's presentation, university research partnerships are really amazing as well. And we actually did this with York University to study our older adults program. And it really gave not only lots of information and important stuff that I can reference and also share out but it also gave experience to the students. And really provided a rigorous study and they also negotiated the research ethics board with the City of Toronto which just was the best thing ever I'm so thankful for that work. I also want to acknowledge like taking on a role of advocacy in your institution. This is most of the work that I do and it actually really requires a lot of patience. I often have to remind myself that we often assume that people may know a thing and not everyone knows what inclusion can really look like because we're almost brainwashed by the systems and structures that we find ourselves in. Being able to apply that lens and help folks potentially see other alternatives is a big part of this work, I think. Innovation requires time, risk taking, commitment of resources. This is key. And building on strengths. When something matters, you evaluate and give resources. So that's also something I often reiterate to the folks that I work with as well. And finally, I have some final thoughts here for everyone. And these are things I try and think about in how to nurture a space that aligns with wellbeing. So here's the first one. Those entering public space to participate in activities, advertise for a specific condition, for example, eating disorder, learning disability, mental health issue, are likely to have an immediate sense of separation, one of being on an unequal footing with other visitors. This might subsequently result in changed perceptions of identity in turn impacting negatively upon confidence and self-esteem rather than building them. So something to be aware of, right. Also, I love this. Evidence from sports psychology literature identifies a phenomenon known as home advantage. And this is by a study by Karen et al., from 2005. This theory is helpful in considering how when visitors are asked to engage with the gallery, they are immediately placed at a disadvantage as they are almost always required to play away from home. So entering someone else's space they really seldom ever have the opportunity to have a home advantage right. Research identifies three factors that help to explain this inherent disadvantage. Those are a lack of familiarity with the site of play, uncertainty of the rules and nature of play within that site, and then the psychological impact of territoriality. So the strong subconscious desire of museum professionals to defend their space and rule within it as well. So the lack of familiarity of the gallery, the layout, collections, the personnel, rules, language and practices can inhibit facilitators or visitors from feeling able to engage. And this is also closely linked to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of culture capital which is the accumulation of knowledge, behaviours and skills that one can tap into to demonstrate one's cultural competence and position in society. So how do we start to think about that? And for me, it often looks like a lot of that familiarization work and co-creation, too. And finally, how we make assumptions about community needs sometimes. And that's particularly problematic and certainly I want to acknowledge that like as a cis-white woman that has a certain amount of privilege. That's why co-creation is so important because I don't want to be programming in such a way that is unwanted or not needed and certainly not in the kind of saviour-esque way either. So that, to me, is a real key final thought around this work. Really, also, the biggest point here is that museums can play a really powerful role in bringing about social change. We have the opportunity to enrich the quality of individual lives and to enhance our community's wellbeing by engaging a growing and diverse population in meaningful

art and social experiences that enrich their lives. So I want to thank everyone for listening and for coming here today. And again, thank you, Stephen and Shannon and Maddi and Charlotte, for this wonderful program. And I'll stop sharing.

Thank you, everyone. My brain is so full right now. I feel I feel like my life is very enriched hearing what you have presented and seeing these beautiful images. So my deepest gratitude for you being here. And I'm sure I'm speaking for all of the participants as well. There's been quite a few people saying thank you in the chat. So let's jump into some questions. And of course, what's most on a lot of people's minds right now is what's happening during COVID and this bringing things online. What are some of the challenges that you've had in terms of online programming. And what can you offer so that people who are watching who maybe want to jump into doing some virtual programming - what are some of your solutions or suggestions? Maybe, Stephen, if you want to start.

Sure. I'll also just start by thanking Melissa. That was great. So inspiring. I can't wait to steal all of your ideas. Thank you for invoking Nina Simon. That was really - it was a really, really helpful - reassuring. I was like oh, my goodness. I want to be a participant. This is what invoked me to is how much as facilitators we forget our own wellbeing that happens through the things we're trying to share. So this great question about what do we do virtually? I saw there was a couple of questions in the Q&A. Well one of the things that I've been able to do is use the most basic features of Zoom to connect with our partners that are able to continue supporting their membership at this time. Again, citing what Melissa underlined is that is always a limitation. There are lots of folks that don't have access to high-speed Internet or Internet at all. So there are technological privileges that are coming with the partners that we're able to continue working with. That in mind and respect. Much like we were doing in our presentations, we have the wealth of the museum's virtual collection at our disposal. And in fact I've been able to visit things, we don't have a photography gallery for instance but, excuse me I just have to move the cat, we have an amazing photography collection. So being able to explore, I'm very hungry to look for different advantages that Zoom offers. One, we get to visit parts of the collection aren't on display; two, we get to revisit exhibitions that have already left the museum; and three, Zoom that includes a creative component allows people to look away from the camera while remaining connected. So we invite them into a space that isn't once virtually shared but they're able to sort of negotiate that Zoom fatigue component by just indulging their own creative experience. So whether it's through an education format or through a therapy format, there are still ways we can stay connected. And it's kind of interesting that neither of us at the museum. I'm not doing this from the museum. We're kind of holding the museum, if you will, virtually. We're holding the museum as this bridge that connects us. It's a little piece. Melissa, would you like to say something about the virtual?

Yeah. I agree with all of that so much so. I love also the removing of time constraints. Your point of being - we were able to reexplore some of the things in our archives. My colleague Bojana Stanic that does performance created a lovely suite of reminiscing about performance and looking at them from the lens in which we find ourselves now. So it created additional meaning making. So again, so that's the crux for me is that a lot of the work that I'm doing is also directed specifically to the folks who won't have this access. So one of the things that I just want to put forward is a bit successful is actually working very closely with the community health centres across Ontario. So being able to have them safely engage communities and have them come to the site to then experience the digital digital programming. So that's been helpful. We've also launched Art Talks as you've said Stephen so they're live and there's

reciprocation there. Because you can tell I don't like hierarchy. I don't like authority or meaning being with one person. So that's also why it became very important. And then I can underline the notion of creativity. So we have action calls for everyone. We have synchronous, asynchronous. You're experiencing it synchronously which is what we're doing now. Somebody will experience this recording later which is asynchronous. So that we allowed entry point so it's live and recorded. So again that making encouraged. My colleague Tiana Roebuck did an amazing work with AGO Makes as well. But yeah the biggest thing around that too is I think just experimenting and leaning into design thinking, iterating, prototyping, evaluating, and then seeing what works.

And for us as well at Agnes, we've certainly as you've mentioned our online Art Hive and we're doing this program. Just some very basic things. Make sure you're you have had a number of meetings before you launch because it's like making a show. I keep saying this. It's like making a TV show. We're not making TV shows anymore, but these are shows in a way and they are being recorded. It's so different than being in the studio, being in person. The way that the camera works. We're all becoming filmmakers. I can show you my hands working away at my desk here in the Art Hive just by moving my camera. So it's really this radical rethinking of these programs and how we can engage with the community. So thank you for bringing that up. I wanted to talk also about potential partners. So I know that there are some people in our audience here who are from, as you were talking about Ontario Health Centres, people coming from different community organizations, how do you make that first move? If you're either somebody who wants to work with the museum or if you're in the museum and have some ideas about some potential activities and potential partnerships? So what would be your suggestion, Melissa?

Well, to me, it's so relational. That's the one thing I want to lead with. That's where - reach out to me. I'm going to actually put in my email in the chat for everybody to see. Because I think as we've said conversations before Zoom, conversations before programming. That's where I think the work is so rich because each program, each community, each staff person will have different things that they want to focus on and meet. So to me, that's the biggest thing. And I actually also think that ties into the little question - not a little question but a great question. But a question of the end where it's about emerging museum professionals, too. Reach out, connect, network. And to Stephen's point of sharing so much even more because I always talk about museum studies is kind of clandestine museology because you kind of share and borrow and take from one another. Cause our Art in the Moment was designed after Meet Me at MOMA. All of that I think is reaching out and having conversations and being people and building relationships.

Wonderful. So also what's another one that I had? Stephen, you were talking about radical hospitality. I love that term when people put radical in front of things. I think that's one of the mysterious terms. Can you just jump into that idea? What is radical hospitality and how can we as a museum be radically hospitable?

I'm hesitant to impose how I would embody or practice it on others. I'll share what it means to me. And then those pieces that make sense to others, they can appropriate them as needed or as desired. For me, radical hospitality begins in appreciating that people make decisions about whether a space feels safe-ish enough before they know it. And that encounter with another human being who is charged with welcoming them is often an underappreciated kind of connective tissue. So in your posture, in your - in the pace that you speak, in the choice of voice that you use, in encounter with your eyes, the questions

you ask and how you ask them with sensitivity, all of that - if we're kind of going back to some of the more basic humanistic practices of positive regard, nonjudgmental stance. But that these are not just attitudes or labels. They are practices. So greeting somebody at the hive for instance it may look straightforward and may even resemble your favourite restaurant in a way. But we're coming up to folks and saying it's really nice to see you or it's really nice to see you back. So you're not taking for granted their return. You're not taking for granted if they're coming back that you don't need to make that effort once again. How are you? What brings you here? Who told you about this space? Are you familiar? Do you have an art practice as this time? Is there something that I can introduce you to? Just those very very basic tools of communication that we sometimes underestimate. Can I put some tea on for you? Where in the room do you think you might feel most comfortable at this time? When we transpose that onto a museum visit let's say we're also being mindful of preparing people for the work that we're maybe going to see and being sensitive that work is provocative, work isn't neutral, our spaces aren't neutral. It's a busy day at the museum today, so is there something we can do ahead of time to prepare as a group together or to enjoy this to its maximum potential? So really using a basic empowered approach as well of eliciting feedback from the get-go as opposed to being, here I am being doing a monologue, but as opposed to being in presentation mode where I'm just going to impart information onto you. Developing tools so we get people on board so that they are cocreators of the experience. Yeah and Melissa was talking about not making assumptions about anyone. Years and years ago, I did work at the AGO and that was something we talked about a lot. Because we worked there and so much as apart of our life we assumed that everybody is comfortable in those spaces and everybody wants to come. But there's so many people that that's just so far from what they could imagine themselves being involved in because of whatever the circumstance is. So this term of brave space which, Melissa, you had mentioned is so important. We want to make of course make safe space but can we truly make a safe space? Can we make a brave space? Maybe you can talk about that idea, too, Melissa. I love this idea of the brave space.

Well it's definitely not my own. But I think that's something I often chat about with my colleagues because particularly in light of everything that's happened during COVID and how little action we've taken and how frustrating it is to have to get back into a mode of getting people to be just simply antiracist; right? Part of that is because we've all been indoctrinated into a system that it doesn't have to exist this way. It's all a construct of our own making. And when you come to a space like a museum that's designed very much with white walls, a white cube and there's a preciousness to all the art and objects. There's labels to tell you how to feel and think and interpret. And that's often from a colonial perspective. And there's often work in the museum and in a collection that's been taken in inappropriate ways. So I feel like I can't and that's why I said safe-ish because I think that we can try and make that work with programming but until we change the boards and we change who we get funding from and we change how we engage with the notion that we are the keepers of some notion of authority, then I can't really lean into it being a safe space. So it has to be brave. And when I'm having these conversations with community members, I'm transparent because I'm saying we're going to run into bureaucracy that is it may be a bit traumatizing for you. So my role is to advocate for you and to be the shield for that almost. We'll just need to agree in advance that we are going to have those moments where it will be frustrating. But this is about making the change and taking action. That to me is about talking about that and setting that up as braveness and working together.

I've also had been thinking a lot about slowing down. And you know if we really are truly going to make change - right now, we've had this opportunity forced upon us to change. But a lot of what we're saying right now is these kind of institutional values are changing and there are so many things that have to change. How can we in these positions we're in as programmers, as educators, as museum workers, and potential partners - I think taking a breath and slowing down and engaging with the medicine we are offering of art and going and being with those those pieces and doing our own healing and wellness experiences. That's what's going to have to change. Even having board meetings or advisory meetings. I've been invited to certain ones. Sometimes, I'll bring an activity, like what you've offered to us Stephen and throw something in the table. I'm going to ask everybody to do something. I have to be brave in asking these folks to engage in this way because it's not the same old, same old. Can we do that? Can we be brave ourselves as well as encouraging others to have that braveness in them? So I love talking about this. It is so wonderful. We have another question here. Someone is asking for an emerging museum professional. Do you have advice on how to get involved in this type of work? So whoever would like to jump forth and give some advice. Maybe Stephen?

I put my two cents in although I have come to the museum world fairly recently. I've only been working with our museum for the last five years and only working there for the last three. I have a very fortunate position in that I'm coming in as a mental health professional with a museum that had the ambition to open that as a position. So my particular story isn't necessarily going to be a point of reference for someone coming into museum culture. What I've been able to notice from my colleagues in education is that they really have quite dynamic backgrounds. But the fine arts seems to be that is the linchpin between all of them. So whether they've done museum studies, art history. Some have done some training in art therapy. Some have done some specializations in particular domains of the fine arts. They've studied certainly art education. Once they're in - I was just going to mention this earlier about starting new partnerships. Our teams, our staffs are like a wellspring of and museums love this word innovation. Let's put a nice slow, let's put some slow innovation, let's put the word slow in front of that so that we don't get too carried away too quickly again. But our teams have are so just rich in our own ambitions to work directly with people and work in less traditional ways. So if you find yourself working with a museum whether its on a contract or you land a position that having particular whether it's particular publics or particular societal issues that are of concern to you, advocating for those within your department is often, this all started in education. Museum education is the wellspring of where all of this came from. Long before, I was still in high school when some of this was happening. So that's the root of how we have Helen Chatterjees, how we have art therapy in museums. It comes from the ambitions of what was classically underfunded, under regarded departments in museums that are now getting some of the attention that they're due. So advocate for what is important to you within your team. And as Melissa said, providing such a careful example of that of offering to be the shield as well for your partners.

That's so perfect, Stephen and I think that's also the thing that stands out to me most now that I think, as I said, museums are a tool for change and I feel very strongly about social justice. I'm kind of just tired of the way things are. And I think that more so now than ever different skill sets, so certainly like Stephen's a perfect example. We also have a colleague who works at the ROM, Christian Blake, who is an Occupational Therapist for instance. So bringing and Tomabas Jay was from Engineers without Borders. So bringing these different skillsets to what has become a structure that just wants maintain.

So how do you get in there? I think that's about the radical welcomes. I think that's about sticking to your core values and beliefs. I think it's also really important as I've said important to connect and network. To me in museum world - I've seen Louise Giroux and I've also seen Andrea Gumbert. Like these are people that I know well and respect and love to work with. And so knowing them has been through connecting and asking questions and emailing. And I, myself, whenever someone is an emerging museum professional or someone who's interested email me. I'm always happy to take some time and talk specifically about your experience. Because it is again relational. There is no one way of doing it. And for me, certainly, like I thought I was going to go into academia. I did an art history masters degree. And then I was like what's this for? Oh no and then I went back to Ottawa where I'm from. So shout out to the Ottawa people. And then struggled to figure out what to do. And it was kind of through getting through getting contract positions at Library and Archives Canada, Diefenbunker Cold War Museum, the National Gallery of Canada and being interested in this work and particularly because of a lived experienced in my own family dealing with mental health and different disabilities, that it was important to me to make space in galleries. And that was my passion. So that manifested then when I went to Toronto to get another degree cause - maybe don't do that though. Cause I think we should start hacking our education. And then, when I was able to start working at the AGO, that became kind of a passion project for me. Network. Connect. It's about relationships.

I also - I wanted to see if you could just give any advice or thoughts. Stephen, I loved how you started off and showed us images of your museum in the therapeutic architecture of it and the lighting and the positions of sculptures in those spaces and seating spaces. I'm just thinking a lot about space right now because the Agnes is going to be moving into a rebuild in the next couple of years which is really exciting for us. Bader Philanthropies has just donated a large sum for this redesign and rebuild. So I would love to use this experience to get some insight. What advice could you give to me to then bring to those decision-makers on spaces? So if we had carte blanche to create spaces to make these sorts of changes happen, spaces for social justice, spaces for decolonizing the museum, what would your recommendations be?

Wow. What a question. Melissa, do you want to design a museum together?

I would 100% do that. Because I was just writing in the chat, my one thing I want to say and then Stephen take it away. Large elevators.

Large elevators okay.

I'm going to site Christian once again and what he's taught me about the importance of community consultations. And community consultations not just how we build our partnerships in education in wellbeing and therapy but community consultants in how we experience our spaces and having folks that are experts in their respective communities come in and reflect on designs before the first two by four goes up. But and I should say and. In the spirit, and thank you for invoking slowness Shannon, in the spirit of slowness, some of the beautiful things that were put into our latest pavilion was that all the galleries were organized of course once supporting the art but supporting around the flow of human activity. All over the galleries open up from this quite cocoon-like spaces whether it's the choice of colour or lighting etcetera. They all open up into these atriums and are connected through the natural light. So every time you're leaving a space you're entering in some ways back into a relationship with your environment. In this case, we're looking at Concordia University, we can see the mountain, we can see the river, we can see Leonard Cohen, we can see the totem. But those interconnected spaces are

often the places where people gather. And if you can, get yourself a neuroscientist as well. Because they have wonderful things to say about how we on a neurological level are experiencing spaces that we're in. And even our now playing a more deliberate role in how exhibitions either support or don't support our tuning and attentional experience. How much work can we take in in a given exhibition? How many places of rest do I benefit from in the different sections of an exhibition and etcetera?

Love it. Thank you. I wonder how you would feel about asking each other a question. Is there anything, Melissa, you would like to ask Stephen or, Stephen, that you would like to ask Melissa? I'm looking at our questions here as well. There is some wonderful feedback. Is there anything you would like to ask each other? Stephen, please.

Melissa, I'd love to ask you a question both about your role at the museum but also as someone who has an influential role as an educator at a university. What is it, and also just listening to the theorists that you were citing that are clearly important to you, this is an unfair question because it's kind of a summary. What is it that you're so - what's this word? It's not anxious to impart. What is it something you're so passionate about to impart to your students particularly at this time?

That is such a good question. This is just such a great experience today. It's just filling me with joy. I think it really does - it's the co-creation. It's connecting with community and it's connecting with relationships. I was chatting with us before we started the webinar and I think I'll just tell a little bit of a story I had from Wednesday to exemplify the work that I do. And that framework of teaching is bringing in all of these bright minds who have a range of experiences. And you know, you can develop design fixations. So that was one of the things that I called out that we need to realize, when working with these kinds of constructs you can get kind of brainwashed and you can get caught up in the system and structure. The class is often just probably more rewarding for me because I'm speaking with folks from a different perspective and bringing their lived experiences. So I was sharing a story on Wednesday, we had a co-creation session. And it was hosted by one of my previous students. And really what that involves is getting people to brainstorm through a series of activities and the goal of the class is that students create translations that are multi-sensory. So we learn all about the senses and how those are perceived. And then have to kind of brainstorm a translation. And I was saying that on my screen there was a row of people. And someone was calling in from Beirut, someone was calling in from Hong Kong, someone was calling in from India. And it was just incredible that it was just all of these folks from around the world. And in the session, they all created parts of a whole. And to see that come across on the screen I got a little farked up then that is - and I still am because it's really beautiful when you're able to connect in that way and think about solutions that may not hit everything but certainly we have to move away from this notion that there is one person that has the authority or the power or the knowledge to answer things. And so the more we integrate connecting with multiple voices into how we design and how we program, the better all of that will be and the more we'll break down the toxicity that is part of our culture.

I'd love to hear more about the sensory programming you've done. We were so fortunate enough to bring Carmen Papalia who I'm sure you know of. Carmen! Shout out to Carmen Papalia, who led our gallery visitors on a what he calls see for yourself tour. Carmen is a man who lives as a blind man. He considers himself a nonvisual learner. He doesn't want to say that he's blind but he's a nonvisual learner. And so for us to bring him in I think it was one of these moments where life was thrown up on its head because people thought I'm coming to take a look at some beautiful art works with my eyes. And

actually, we asked our visitors to close their eyes and to experience the space. And so they all reported that it was a life changing - not all but many people felt it was a life changing experience including myself. So Melissa, can you speak a little bit more about some of the sensory programming you've done and some of the outcomes you've seen?

Absolutely. Yeah. And I'm just putting in one of my favourite publications from Carmen Papalia. We have never actually met. And this is also my role has switched quite a bit just in the new year. So I'm able to lean more into community programming so it's coming. I feel it. But I think, really the work I've done also originates from the National Gallery of Canada. I know Andrea's on this call. I just want to shout the incredible experience and training that Gary Goodacre and the team, Beatrice Jardin all of that originated there with the stimulating the senses program. But for me, it's about acknowledging that we are so ocular centric, even more so now that we're in this space of screen everything. It's changing our brains, it's changing our eyes. Literally our physiology. And I also feel very strongly about part of decolonization is about being embodied. And I remember doing this workshop with Peter Moray who is also an instructor at OCADU and does really important work advocating for Indigenous ways of knowing. And he had us at a Canadian art gallery conference try and stare into one another's spaces and this was when we were in real life. And it was virtually impossible for people to do that for any extended period of time. And he also had us to make sounds loudly. And it was really hard. I physically felt a barrier to be able to make sounds loudly in a space. And that is capitalism. That's colonialism. That's constructing how we engage in the world; right? And so to me, part of us to remember our senses, the Tate Sensorium another great example of where they set up an exhibition where there are things you can taste and smell and hear and feel. To kind of liven up their artworks. That's an experience that we know by doing that means folks will remember it better because our senses actually imprint that memory on our brains. And it also means that you form a different relationship then to the space. Like museums have a smell even. So when we're not actively trying to get you to think outside of that white box, there's still an experience that's relevant to just going to the site. We launched a multisensory digital program. Because I know it's going to be like at, in the program on site what we would do is we had digital representations of things we could touch because unlike history museums and ethnographic museums we usually have like one of a thing and it's flat, if we're thinking of a Picasso. So we really worked with 3-D imaging and digitizing those to make those 3-D prints of that so you could feel, for instance, the brush strokes and bringing up the forms that are in the painting. We work on visual descriptions. Cat Germain, I'm also shouting out her name because she's fabulous on how to do that. We engage with scents that are contained so you can smell when you're around certain works as well. And so that people can opt into or opt out of as well. We have sounds. One example of that is where we were in, oh Picture the Americas was the name of the exhibition. And there was a painting of the Iguazu Falls and a painting of Niagara Falls. And what we did there was play the different sounds of the falls. And that was actually very moving to the group because and it anecdotally or I can it anecdota, they were like - that really gave a sense to the size that we couldn't visually describe as well. I mean I just, anything at all. And then the students through the course I teach, come up with a myriad of different solutions. We've had people create sound narratives because their background were film students. We've had people who were artists reproduce these crazy - you know not even 3-D versions of something. What's the word I'm looking for? They were made out of like model clay. So they used resin to remodel. In the particular painting I'm referring to - never do this. Because the first rule of interpretation is never talk about

something that's not in front of someone but I'm going to do it for time sake. There was a suitcase in the painting. So when you open, they found a suitcase that resembled the painting and when you open it, you could see the figure inside. So those were the things and then for the digital version what we've done is we've called out household items that you may have around you that you can use to get scent or touch that would be similar to inspire you to get engaged with the painting in an embodied way. I'm talking too much. You've got me started on multisensory and obviously I love it. Absolutely, I loved what you were saying about just being able to make noise. Where can we do that? And everybody shooshes each other at a museum. And when you're making noise, you're learning. So I don't know.

I know. And that's why I have always loved being an arts educator because I would go into school rooms and children were so excited that the art teacher was there. Because they could talk when they were learning. Talk to each other. It seems like uh, that's how people learn; right? When we share and emote and grow in these ways. So, before -

Well and sorry. No I was just going to say that's our opportunity right now. We're in the midst of almost a reset. That doesn't have to be the way. We can all work here as the community that's come together to make sure that we undo those constructs. Like so silly. We have the power to do that. Again, I thank you so much, Shannon, for bringing us together to have these important conversations.

It's my pleasure. It's -- I was just going to say about making noises. How great. We can just mute ourselves. [Laughter]. So I can look at this beautiful painting behind you, mute myself, and scream because, sometimes, that's the type of joy that comes through my body when I see art. I want to emote. So I love that, that's what digital - this new digital world is allowing us the potential to do this. We have two more minutes. I would love to just wrap this up with what is your vision for wellness? What if you could imagine anything, what would be your vision for wellness and how can art play a part? If you can just wrap it succinctly in like one minute. Let's start with you, Stephen.

I think that art is going to be - I think that art is currently an undervalued tool for us to have the most uncomfortable of conversations we need to have. And that is going to contribute to all of our wellness. Yay. Thank you.

I would say radical empathy. Radical empathy around trying to understand what an artist is trying to achieve and also radical. Kindness. Kindness with ourselves that we are powerful. We make meaning. And to just highlight that and that what an amazing thing art is as a conversation starter just to Stephen's point.

Wonderful. Well we are now just about to flip into 3:00 o'clock. Again my biggest gratitude. I'm so thrilled to have had this conversation with you. Thank you, everyone, who's joined us today. We will be putting this recording up, unedited version. All of those wonderful resources that both Stephen and Melissa have been sharing with us will be available. We will most likely have a transcript as well. Do stay tuned. We'd love to see you again as part of the Art and Wellness Speaker Series the next two Fridays coming up in October. Thank you again, Stephen and Melissa, and all the best. I will most likely be reaching out again soon. Let's keep this dialogue going.

Yes. Bye, everyone.

Thank you for being here.