



January 30, 2024

Eli Hirtle, Director of Programs  
The Indigenous Curatorial Collective / Collectif des commissaires  
autochtones (ICCA)

Dear Eli Hirtle,

Thank you for your letter. Letters like yours allow us to have discussions about the future of the AGO and how we can build a better way forward. We are committed to being as clear as possible, while respecting and honoring the commitments we have made.

Though we are familiar with Wanda Nanibush's career, we should bear witness to what she did at the AGO. When Wanda joined the AGO, we knew that she was a passionate social activist, brilliant curator and was called a word warrior by many. She knew about the nature of the AGO too – a complex art museum with over 600 employees, a massive collection and many different audiences and stakeholders. She had a vision and worked with the AGO to amplify it on a global scale.

Wanda undertook her work at the AGO with enormous strength, intellectual rigor, courage and humor. This resulted in accomplishments such as the creation of the Indigenous and Canadian Art Department, a new model for working together; numerous significant art exhibitions; innovative public programs; and important acquisitions that have deeply enriched the AGO's holdings.

For more than seven years together, Wanda and our staff created great exhibitions and publications, grew our collections and inspired audiences. Her exhibitions travelled. She made sure we included Anishinaabemowin on select wall text. Wanda fore fronted performances in her exhibitions. The accomplishments are vast, and we are a better museum for this work. It is hard work – often done in a difficult environment.

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We are deeply grateful for the years Wanda chose to contribute her vision and efforts to the AGO. As has been said before, her departure is a loss for the AGO.

Wanda's departure sparked a public response. At the end of the day, the AGO signed an agreement with Wanda that is and remains confidential. We believe that the AGO and Wanda both negotiated in good faith and worked to come to a mutual agreement. We made commitments to confidentiality in the process. We will honour that commitment; we won't be making further statement. While the AGO will not comment on Wanda's departure, it is inaccurate for the ICCA to describe her departure from the Gallery as a dismissal.

A question now emerges of how to move forward. We believe that it is time to go back to foundational values and principles. The AGO is an art museum. We fulfill our mission through art, learning, and engaging a diverse and large public audience. These are values that can help guide us. Key to this is that the AGO re-affirms and continues to work to have a deeper understanding of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission Report and follow-up on the key recommendation of engaging in UNDRIP, as asked of us in several of the letters we received.

We do not and cannot take Indigenous participation in the Gallery for granted. We are committed to supporting spaces for Indigenous artists and staff at the AGO and will engage in any needed conversations to move forward, hopefully, together. A committee dedicated to thoughtfully and carefully re-establishing relationships with Indigenous artists and partners will undertake this work. This committee's work will be guided through the participation and counsel, of an Indigenous Elder/Advisor or Advisors.

As pointed out in the Statement of Concern from Members of the International Indigenous Arts Community to Institutions Worldwide, there are very real challenges at multiple art museums across Canada. It is our hope that some of the paths forward might result in systemic change for all art museums.

We don't have all the answers, but we recognize we need to act. We started this process internally and are working on a number of different aspects of the challenge. A Joint Working Committee, with both AGO trustees and staff, has begun aligning our policies to support the AGO's mission to bring people together with art to see, experience and understand the world in new ways, while ensuring that the strength and capacity of the AGO continues to grow.

This is not a perfect or complete response. There is a temptation to move fast, but thoughtful reflection on the success and very real challenges of the past years will get us to a healthier place sooner. We believe in our collective ability to imagine a better future and in the power of art to bring us together and help us chart a better way forward.

Know that we are open to a conversation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephan Jost". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S'.

Stephan Jost, Director and CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rupert Duchesne". The signature is cursive and elegant, with a large initial 'R'.

Rupert Duchesne, President, AGO Board of Trustees