




Canada Council
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Conseil des arts
du Canada



V I S I O N S


AN INDIGENOUS-LED ARTIST-RUN CENTRE IN THE ATLANTIC



Talmawaknutama'titen nujo'tekemkewe'l aq talwe'jitesnu
klusuaqnn ta'n iknmuksitesnu wijey usku'tmnenu?

Taliksmoqja'tu'k ta'n tellukwatasîk militekewinuey
lukowaqn eliktuapsultimk kekina'matsuti,
apoqonmatultimk, keknuat'atultimk ta'n koqwey keitmik,
aq milita'mk? Talkelikatmu'k ten nimji'muaqn ta'n
L'nueye'k militekewinu'k kisilita'sultitaq msît tami
kutannak aq ta'n telki'kl kmîtkinal.

How will we engage with the institution and how will we
deconstruct it? How do we nurture creative practices
through learning, mentorship, knowledge sharing, and
play? How do we ensure support for a network of
Indigenous artists across many communities and
territories?



Atlantis is a networked organization that is hosted in the Atlantic regions of the unceded, unsundered lands of the Beothuk, Mi'kmaw, and Wolastoqiyik peoples, as well as the Inuit, the Innu, the Southern Inuit of NunatuKavut.

VISIONING AN INDIGENOUS-LED ARTIST-RUN CENTRE IN THE ATLANTIC

Coordinated by Brandon Hoax

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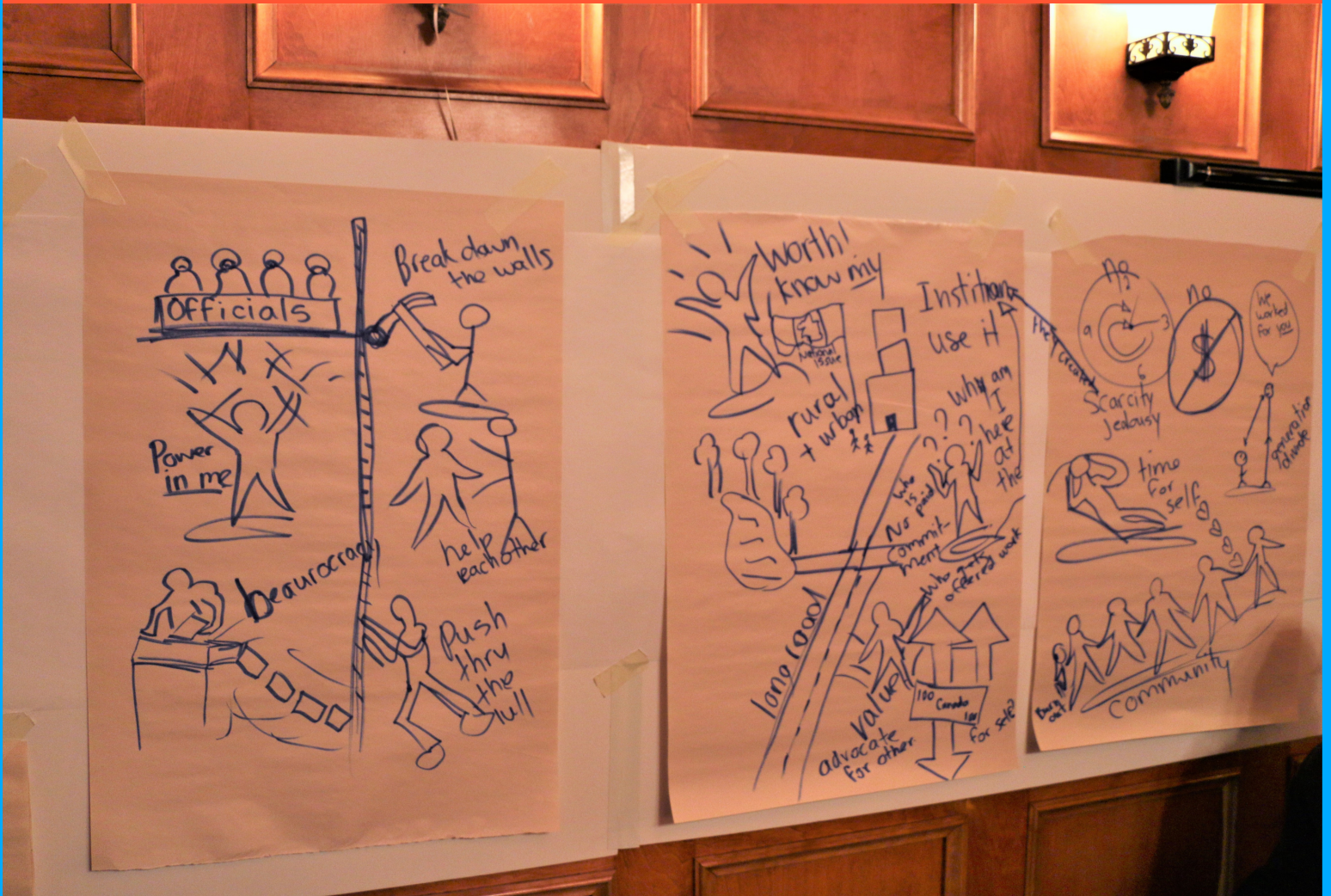
French translation by Colette Tougas & Maude Cournoyer

Report produced by Atlantis: The Association of Artist-Run Centres from the Atlantic

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In an effort to continue the conversations that began at Flotilla, we gathered a closed group of Indigenous artists and creators to discuss the question “What could an Indigenous-led artist-run centre look like in the Atlantic?” Brandon Hoax coordinated this two-day gathering which was collectively led and facilitated by Raven Davis & Leelee Oluwatoyosi Eko Davis at Art Bar +Projects and Khyber Centre for the Arts. Collectively, Raven Davis & Leelee Oluwatoyosi Eko Davis share significant expertise in facilitation, program design, board governance, policy creation, arts and HR management. They have significant training in community engagement and transformational and Indigenous teaching methodologies, and hold lived experience being both racialized, Black and Indigenous people, who also live on the 2-Spirit/Trans/Queer/Disability identity spectrum.

Over the course of two days, participants engaged in casual and organized discussions, and Indigenous artists from the four Atlantic provinces mapped the current landscape of Indigenous artist-run organizing in the Atlantic. This meeting activated the spirit of Flotilla, to envision, imagine, and mobilize Indigenous futures.



Facilitators Lee Lee Davis & Raven Davis collaboratively develop the space agreement and set intentions with the group. Photo: Glenn Knockwood.

Art Bar +Projects: is on ground level, with heavy cobblestones outside the entrance, and it will be a dry venue for this gathering. There are all-gender washrooms adjacent to Art Bar on the ground level, and although these washrooms can be approached by wheelchair, they are relatively small, and not wheelchair accessible. There are all-gender wheelchair accessible bathrooms inside NSCAD, which can be accessed by elevator on the second floor.

The Khyber: No doors on the Khyber's premise have buttons to press for automatic entry and all require a turn, push or pull. The main entrance to the Khyber is close to ground level but is 2-steps from the sidewalk on Hollis St. and weather permitting, this door will be propped open. The Granville Mall entrance further down the block on Hollis St. can be used for ground level entry before 6PM Monday-Saturday or outside of those hours if arrangements are made. There are gender-neutral washroom stalls, which include 3 toilets and a urinal located up a set of 10 stairs. There is a more private, ground level all genders wheelchair accessible washroom, which is located down a wide hallway which includes a ramp and requires key access. *Note* Wheelchair accessible bathroom is currently out of order.

PARTICIPANTS / SCHEDULE /

Rudi Aker
 Carrie Allison
 Darcie Bernhardt Meagan Musseau
 Lindsay Dobbin Cassie Packham
 Aiden Gillis Zeta Paul
 Gesig Isaac Melissa Peter Paul
 Misiksk Jadis Junior Peter Paul (by written
 Ursula Johnson correspondence)
 Glen Knockwood Calen Sack
 Megan Kyak-Monteith Natalie Sappier
 Cathy Martin (by written Erin Sutherland
 correspondence) Arielle Twist



Visioning an Atlantic Indigenous-Led Artist-Run Centre 2019

SCHEDULE (UPDATED)

Date: Friday, February 8th - Saturday February 9th.

Location: Art Bar+ Projects. 1873 Granville St. Halifax, NS B3J 3L6

Day #1 Friday February 8 - At ArtBat + Projects

9:30am - 10:00am - Coffee/Tea/Snacks/Arrival

10:00am - 12:00pm - Introductions
Space Agreements
Setting Intentions
Mapping the Meeting

12:00pm - 1:00pm - Catered Lunch Break

1:00pm - 2:00pm - Presentation by Erin Sutherland of
Ociciwan Collective

2:00pm - 3:00pm - Visioning Session #1

3:30pm - 4:00pm - Break

4:00pm - 5:00pm - Wrap-Up from Visioning
Session #1 and Day #2
Overview

(Optional Activities)

5:00pm - 7:00pm - Dinner

7:00pm - Opening of 'A Sense of Site' at the
Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

Day #2 Saturday February 9 - At ArtBat + Projects

9:30am - 10:00am - Coffee/Tea/Snacks/Arrival

10:00am - 12:00pm - Check-In
Recap
Visioning Session #2

12:00pm - 1:00pm - Catered Lunch Break

1:00pm - 3:00pm - The Future of Indigenous-Led Artist
Run Centres - Where Do We Go From
Here?

3:00pm - 3:15pm - Break

3:15pm - 4:00pm - Reflection
Wrap-Up
Closing

“It's important that we embrace Indigenous communities at large and not just band councils and cultural friendship centers. This is about art for community and overcoming colonial structures. There may need to be connection with state led reconciliation, however apprehension surrounds this.”

—ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT

At the gathering, Erin Sutherland presented on Ociciwan Contemporary Art Collective, a space-less collective who have been curating projects in Edmonton since 2015. In 2018, the city of Edmonton announced that with the support of a \$1.5 million federal grant, it would create an arts hub that would be home to Ociciwan and other community projects.[1] This new centre will include a community space, a resource library, meeting rooms, offices for rent, and a kitchen. Sutherland described an Indigenous-led space that has received support from multiple levels of government and other funding sources, and this prompted the group to consider the pros and cons of government funding. Participants were hyper aware of the histories of systemic harm, oppression, and violence caused by institutions, bands, and government structures. Feeling a lack of trust towards government funding models, the group was unsure whether it wanted to pursue an organizational model supported by public government funding.

In the Atlantic region where individual urban centres have limited arts funding, resource sharing across territories is essential in order to support new initiatives. The group expressed a desire to overcome colonial structures, and circumvent official state-led reconciliation initiatives in order to serve multiple communities. In order to prioritize self-determination in the process of development, government institutions and external organizations would not be central to the governance structure.

[1] "\$1.5M grant to help transform vacant buildings into arts hubs for The Quarters," *CBC News*, November 16, 2018.

The two day gathering was led by community engagement facilitators Raven Davis and Leelee Oluwatoyosi Eko Davis, who continually questioned “how we will engage with the institution and how we will deconstruct it?” Participants mapped a sprawling list of key players who would be involved in organizing and Indigenous-led artist-run centre, including Indigenous artists, friendship centres, band offices, universities, land trusts, all levels of government, Environment Canada, Heritage Canada, land elders, and Indigenous knowledge keepers. The group identified that funding, resources, spaces, and support would be contributed by multiple parties in order to create an organizational structure that is autonomous and accountable to community. One participant reminded the group to acknowledge the “communities within community.”

This acknowledgement is essential, given that in order to gather together participants travelled from the unceded, unsundered lands of the Beothuk, Mi’kmaw, and Wolastoqiyik peoples, as well as the Inuit, the Innu, the Southern Inuit of NunatuKavut.

This network of artists insisted that this centre would expand the definition of “the artist” beyond the colonially-defined boundaries of the Canadian arts system, by catering to aging artists, non-artist youth, elder artists, and 2SLGBTQ artists.

Participants agreed that an Indigenous-led artist-run centre in the Atlantic would focus on land in a way that goes beyond territorial acknowledgement, by engaging land elders, land-based knowledge, and environment Canada. Brandon Hoax expressed that the centre should provide “support for territorial practices” with an administration that knows the “extensive history of the region and language.” Hoax envisioned a space that is not only a gallery, but provides “cultural teachings that represent the regions they are housed in.”

The group identified an extensive list of barriers to creative practice, such as bureaucratic gatekeeping, isolation, burnout, and a lack of childcare, safe(r) spaces, funding, mentorship, and resources. Ultimately, these barriers cannot be overcome by an Indigenous-led artist-run centre which focuses primarily on exhibiting artwork. While exhibition space may become a key part of the centre’s mandate, the group identified a more significant need for services and resources which nurture creative practices. An Indigenous-led artist-run centre in the Atlantic must offer



Photo: Glenn Knockwood.

more than a white wall gallery space; it must prioritize learning, mentorship, knowledge sharing, and play. The intention behind this gathering was to ask initial questions and assess the needs of Indigenous artists in the Atlantic. Three key questions will determine the next direction of this planning process, and serve as guiding principles for the development of an Indigenous-led artist-run centre in the Atlantic:

Talmawaknutama'titen nujo'tekemkewe'l aq talwe'jitesnu
klusuaqnn ta'n iknmuksitesnu wijey usku'tmnenu?

*How will we engage with the institution and how will we
deconstruct it?*

Taliksmoqja'tu'k ta'n tellukwatasîk militekewinuey lukowaqn
eliktuapsultimk kekina'matsuti, apoqonmatultimk,
keknuat'atultimk ta'n koqwey keitmik, aq milita'mk?

*How do we nurture creative practices through learning,
mentorship, knowledge sharing, and play?*

Talkelikatmu'k ten nimji'muaqn ta'n L'nueye'k militekewinu'k
kisilita'sultitaq msît tami kutannak aq ta'n telki'kl kmîtkinal.

*How do we ensure support for a network of Indigenous artists
across many communities and territories?*

I SAT IN A ROOM, BELLY LAUGHING, FULL.

7

By Brandon Hoax

I sat in a room, belly laughing, full.
With Indigenous artists, creatives,
writers.

Art Bar +Projects is a small place in the Granville Plaza downtown K'jipuktuk where a gathering of Atlantic-based Indigenous artists met to discuss an idea that's always being discussed, talked about, or thrown around amongst ourselves, an Indigenous-Led Artist-Run Centre, out here in the Atlantic on this part of Turtle Island. At this two day gathering that was led by Raven Davis and Leelee Oluwatoyosi Eko Davis in February of 2019, I was not only a participant but also the coordinator, bringing in my contemporaries, mentors, friends, artists, idols, and students; whom all benefit, participate in, and exist within such arts spaces. We came together to discuss this idea of a place built by and for Indigenous folks, in their communities. I take this time as a coordinator to acknowledge and thank all those who participated, as well as acknowledge the voices and folks who were not at this initial gathering.

Together we shared our stories and opinions on prompts and topics, then someone would shout out a joke, and the room would share in laughter. Small meetings of twos happened, with people meeting each other, sitting side by side, talking, connecting, sharing pieces of themselves with one another, stifling giggles.

A flow of large communal discussions happened alongside individual intimate personal meetings.

This ebb and flow of communal and individual conversations allowed for: A more well-rounded discussion? Some strife? Active engagement? I'm not entirely sure, but one thing I know is that I spent a lot of time laughing aloud, giggling at a side remark, joking with someone, or bursting into laughter with the room. Laughter and play was an important part of this two day gathering. The days were long, and some discussions were hard. We even had to check ourselves and the play we engaged in, so to not detract from the topics being discussed in our little closed space.



Photo: Glenn Knockwood.

But laughter and play stayed throughout.

My take away from this was the importance of it—that idea of play and laughter. Get together a group of Native folks and belly laughter is bound to ensue. It felt refreshing, rejuvenating, even though the days in the dark wood paneled Art Bar +Projects were tiring. I think when Indigenous peoples get together, Play is important, because far too often the hardships, trauma, and struggle take over our discussions with one another, and in a way, this is the desired conversation we're guided into by the outside voyeuristic colonial gaze. Laughing and being playful was healing and fun, and it allowed for us to navigate through the discussions throughout the two long days.

Play and laughter are tools to connect with one another, and an Indigenous-led artist-run centre should be a space that allows for jovial carefree Natives and play, as a means to allow ourselves moments of rest from the colonial gaze that voyeuristically feeds on our struggle and trauma. Play and laughter becomes a method of gathering to circumvent the colonial gaze, and to heal from it, moments become entangled in laughter, undocumented, jokes



Photo: Glenn Knockwood.

become methods of communicating with one another, even if recorded, they can only to be understood and decoded by community—those in the know. The fluid in-and-out of communal and individual, seriousness and humour, allowed us to converse in a way that felt natural, and allowed for information, knowledge, demands, concerns, stories, and statements to be made and told. Things that we allowed to be shared were documented, and the things we liked to keep to ourselves were hidden in intangible laughter, and inside jokes known only to us.

Laughter has always been medicine, a useful thing to heal, but the idea that play and laughter also can be used as a methodology for gathering, or even an organizational structure, became an interesting idea that I only realized after the gathering occurred. Ultimately I can only reflect on my own experience and desires in this relation to laughter and play, and don't know what the application of it looks like in a further scope from just sitting with one another and having fun, carefree and chuckling. How do we bring the idea of play into our infrastructure of an artist-run centre? What is a play-based governance system? How do we employ play in an artist-run centre's physicality, or how do we make it a space that allows for such a response to occur?

But I'd like an Atlantic Indigenous-led artist-run centre to allow for play like that, to feel the way I did when I was sitting and belly laughing in a room full of other Indigenous peoples, feeling healed and full.



Photo: Glenn Knockwood.

Trickster child of a Stonecoat mother and Dullahan father. **Brandon Hoax** is a Haudenosaunee, Onyota'a:ka (Oneida), Two-Spirit artist from London Ontario, and Oneida Nation of the Thames. Currently residing in K'jipuktuk (Halifax).



Participants take part in a craft-based warm up exercise to create models of imaginary spaces. Photo: Glenn Knockwood.

“It would be based on sharing, respect for one another and pride for our traditional /ways, contem/porary ways; it would help /b oth /youth and elders to connect with one another, to /strengthen to disconne/cted relationships that have /been created through colonization impacts, it would offer a place for healing, for learning and a way to learn about importante of au/thenticity. etc./”

— CATHY MARTIN

“An indigenous ARC in my community would mean communicating, not only through language but also physically through creating together, learning history through techniques and disciplines, a place to learn and make. A space that is open and friendly, that makes room for people to not only have immersive experience in aboriginal culture and imagery but also to just be. I also believe the walls should be forbidden from being painted white, I'm sick of white walls haha.”

— ZETA PAUL



Left to right: Megan Kyak-Monteith, Darcie Bernhardt, Zeta Paul. Photo: Glenn Knockwood.

“There should be more than one centre.”

— **CASSIE PACKHAM**

“It's important that we embrace Indigenous communities at large and not just band councils and cultural friendship centers. This is about art for community and overcoming colonial structures. There may need to be connection with state led reconciliation, however apprehension surrounds this.”

— **ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT**



Photo: Glenn Knockwood.

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