

Claire Hopkinson remarks– Mayors Arts Lunch May 28, 2015

From the very beginning, this Mayor's Arts Lunch has been about a conversation. A conversation curated between, and among artists, patrons, political leaders and city builders about Toronto, where we are now, where we're going and how we can work together to make this the best possible city.

This conversation is not unique to the arts community. I know that many Torontonians are having similar discussions in other dining rooms, in boardrooms, in community centres and of course, in Council chambers.

Art and artists make an important contribution to this conversation. We imagine possible futures, we envision creative solutions, we innovate and prototype, and collaborate. This is part of our DNA. And artists and arts organizations pay attention to welcoming and including the diverse peoples and perspectives of our multilayered society.

The arts are all about enhancement. There isn't a NIMBY movement against art. The questions I get are usually "how can we get more arts programs ... and can we get it in my neighbourhood, in my park, in my ward?"

Art lives in the public realm. Music rises to its potential when played, a painting when regarded, a play when it speaks to its audience. And, once art reaches the public it often leads to positive change...for the individual who experiences it and beyond that in a widening circle of understanding, of compassion and tolerance. Art connects individuals to ideas, to each other and to community.

Through research and evidence, we have seen the transformations that arts programming brings about in Toronto. We know that Torontonians value it greatly. On a large scale, the exceptional and world renowned festivals, museums and arts organizations deliver tangible, easily understood benefits to our economy and our viability as an international destination.

On the ground and in the inner suburbs, artists working in Toronto Community Housing, in libraries, in schools and settlement centres, sometimes on an outdoor canvasses under a bridge. They too, less visible perhaps, bring about critical transformative change in young people, in adults and in neighbourhoods.

I know from so many conversations, how many of you love this city. Really and truly love it. Most of you in this room are already contributing to city building through the arts. Corporate sponsors, developers, philanthropists and foundations are helping to support it. Policy and political leaders have chosen to fund it. Creative thinkers and institutions of learning are nurturing the next generation and inspiring solutions.

But building a creative city is not something that is ever finished. YES, we do see the success of increased investment in the arts. However the challenges we face today continue to be great.

Toronto is growing incredibly quickly. With that growth comes many accompanying challenges – strained infrastructure, income disparity, reduced public space, and some disengaged residents. As a sector that excels in building platforms to engage, connect and create, I believe that the arts are a real part of the solution.

So now, we come back to our conversation.

Here we all are, representing so many different aspects of city building. Potential collaborators. I have been thrilled in the past when I have heard that a discussion at a Mayor's arts lunch table has led directly to collaboration on a project, a commission of a work of art, a recording deal, or to new understanding of the ways in which we can work together.

From today, I hope you feel even more inspired. Inspired by the accomplishments of our amazing award nominees and inspired by the commitment and generosity of everyone here as we all work towards building a creative city. Thank you for coming.

Claire Hopkinson, Director & CEO, Toronto Arts Council and Toronto Arts Foundation

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