

**Owens**ArtGallery  
MountAllisonUniversity

## Land Acknowledgement

Oel gegnoaatelneg Ola espiginamatingeoôgoôm Mount Allison, na eteg magamigeo taan menaag Migemag igenemoetotigosep. Taan teleiatoltimg ag taan tel egpemitteetmeg taan teloigoltieg ola magemigeo na eloitemasigsep Oigatigen Saageoei 1725eg glapis 1752eg. Na ogtjit ola oigatigen, amotj getjitasig ag emset oen na teleiatoltigo egstigee neoteetjoltigo Ag amotjpa gepmiteetemoog ola magemigeo.

We would like to acknowledge that Mount Allison University is located within the traditional territory of Mi'kma'ki, the unceded ancestral homelands of the Mi'kmaq. Our relationship and our privilege to live on this territory was agreed upon in the Peace and Friendship Treaties of 1725 to 1752. Because of this treaty relationship, it is to be acknowledged that we are all Treaty People and have a responsibility to respect this territory.

Nous reconnaissons que l'Université Mount Allison est située sur le territoire traditionnel Mi'kma'ki, les terres ancestrales non cédées des Mi'kmaq. Notre rapport à ce territoire et notre privilège d'y vivre découlent des Traités de paix et d'amitié signés entre 1725 et 1752. En raison de cette relation par traité, il faut reconnaître que nous sommes toutes et tous visés par ces traités et que nous avons la responsabilité de respecter ce territoire.

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## Mandate

The purpose of the Owens Art Gallery is to promote knowledge, appreciation, and enjoyment of the visual arts on the part of the Mount Allison University community and of the general public. It is intended to have an international scope with a Canadian focus. The Gallery serves the University community as a whole, and also serves as a public gallery for Sackville and district. The Gallery makes a contribution to artistic life in general, with an emphasis on the Atlantic Provinces and Canada.

—Mount Allison University Board of Regents, 1989

↑ Visitors spend time in Racquel Rowe's video installation *Sea Bath*, 2022, part of the group exhibition *falling through our fingers*, curated by Emily Critch, 3 June-17 September 2023. Photo: Owens Art Gallery

## Overview

In practical terms, the story of this strategic plan begins during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when I was asked to produce a statement of impact under circumstances that were far from ideal. There followed exchanges with funders, former interns, local educators, and faculty who use our services; a series of internal discussions concerning the gallery's current mandate, mission, and vision, including an important conversation led by facilitator and graphic illustrator Rach Derrah; and, finally, in May 2023, a community consultation process. To facilitate the latter, we transformed one of our exhibition spaces into a studio where community members could give us their thoughts on two important questions: **What is the Owens to you now?** and **What could the Owens be in the future?** Visitors added words to a word cloud, wrote short notes, made drawings, and left longer messages in the gallery or online. This communal activity was in keeping with our institutional culture, and it was designed to be accessible, while also encouraging fun and creativity. Additional feedback was also obtained via a series of online surveys. Student interns played an important part in this work, and we were grateful for the assistance of Sophia Patrell (Lassonde Leadership Intern, 2021-2022) and Ranz Bontogon and Sophie Giese (Community Engagement and Access Assistants, 2023).

One of the most gratifying aspects of this undertaking was having the work the Owens has done to be a safe, welcoming, inspiring place to gather, make art, and do research reflected back to us by our community. A consistent refrain among the feedback we received was,

"Keep doing what you are doing." At the same time, we were given a strong and clear message concerning the poor physical accessibility of our building and how it can sometimes feel intimidating to enter. The six areas of commitment contained within this document are designed to reinforce the Owens' strengths—education and community outreach and art that inspires visitors and challenges the status quo—while also tackling weaknesses like physical accessibility. It sets out in clear language the work that needs to be done over the next five years. It is the product of an incredible team of professionals, otherwise known as the Owens staff, and the input of people living, working, and studying in the wonderful rural community now known as Tantramar.

**—Emily Falvey, Director/Curator**

## Our Purpose

The Owens Art Gallery is where art meets community and inspiring connections are made. Our purpose is to:

- Present diverse contemporary and historical art and craft practices, with a particular emphasis on the Wabanaki Confederacy and Atlantic provinces.
- Support artists in the realization and presentation of their work in a professional context that includes fair compensation.
- Foster creative social space and create meaningful opportunities for people to connect with art and each other.
- Challenge and work towards dismantling white supremacy, ableism, patriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia.
- Train the next generation of museum professionals.
- Preserve, refine, study, and extend a unique permanent collection of historical, contemporary, and applied art(s) objects.
- Support academic engagement with our exhibitions, public programs, permanent collection, and professional expertise.
- Undertake and publish original research and writing on art.
- Promote visual and cultural literacy and remove barriers to art.



## Our Aspirations

The Owens is a place of inspiration, safety, and welcome. Together we strive to:

- Support and nourish creativity and different ways of thinking.
- Foster a sense of belonging and create an environment of openness, compassion, and forgiveness.
- Center connection to land and territory, while raising awareness of the history of colonialism in the region.
- Repair the damage caused by colonial, racist, and patriarchal museum practices.
- Prioritize access and work to identify, remove, or lower all barriers to our programs and physical space.
- Promote intentional, slow, and deliberate ways of working.
- Place partnership, collaboration, and mutual aid before hierarchy and competition.
- Allow for imperfection and learn from our mistakes.
- Communicate clearly and directly with respect, openness, and good faith.
- Respect our personal and team capacity.

# **Our Commitments**

## **1. Clearly define our academic and civic roles**

We will update our mandate to reflect our current purpose and activities.

**Action #1.** Using the information obtained during the strategic planning process, as well as the Owens' own professional expertise, we will revise the gallery's mandate to better reflect our current activities, as well as changes across the entire sector, including the expansion of art education and community outreach, digital engagement, social wellness, research creation, art publishing, and equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization.

**Action #2.** Present the revised mandate to the Mount Allison University Senate and Board of Regents for consideration and approval.

**Action #3.** Reconstitute the Friends of the Owens Art Gallery Committee. Revise its terms of reference so that it plays a greater advisory role and serves to advocate for the Owens both within the university and in the broader community.

**Action #4.** Continue to support arts sector research and advocate for arts funding in New Brunswick.

**Action #5.** Develop a plan for making academic engagement more sustainable, including adequate staffing.

## Community Perspectives

"The Owens is an incredible resource that meshes extremely well with academic programming to help demonstrate the expansiveness of learning and the connection to creativity and culture."

"The Owens is part of the reason I moved and am living here. Sackville is a small town with big culture and the Owens is part of that."

↓ *MAKER MAKER: DIY Buttons with Melissa Morris, hosted in the Salon Hanging, 2017. Photo: Owens Art Gallery*



## **2. Invest in the sustainability of our community programs**

We will ensure that our education and community outreach programs are securely staffed and resourced.

**Action #1.** Secure philanthropic investment in the Curator of Education and Community Outreach position, so that it becomes a permanent, full-time position.

**Action #2.** Create a membership program unique to the Owens, one that reflects its purpose and aspirations.

**Action #3.** Continue exploring ways to build community engagement using digital platforms.

**Action #4.** Continue finding creative ways to centre community outreach programs within our existing physical infrastructure.



## Community Perspectives

"As much as I like the exhibitions, the most important thing to me is events like openings, MAKER MAKER, and SLT that allow the community to gather. I love that it is always free. This is so rare."

"The Owens is part of Sackville, an integral part, connecting the academic community with the wider Sackville/Tantramar community."

↓ *MAKER MAKER: Little Books with Laura K. Watson, 20 September 2023.*  
Photo: Owens Art Gallery



### **3. Continue making meaningful systems change**

We will continue to centre social justice and anti-oppression work in our activities.

**Action #1.** Find external resources to turn the part-time, contract Adjunct Curator position into a full-time position for a Mi'kmaw curator.

**Action #2.** Produce annual exhibitions and publications that centre the art and histories of Indigenous and Black communities in the region.

**Action #3.** Improve accessibility and visitor services for neurodivergent people, who are often multiply marginalized.

**Action #4.** Continue to present exhibitions that offer critical perspectives on our shared past, present, and future.

## Community Perspectives

"A place to understand our past, a place to embrace and experience our now, and a safe place to be open minded for the future. The Owens shows us that everything in one way or another is connected."

"[The Owens] could make room for a bit more of a critical lens or more diverse perspectives in exhibitions surrounding its own collection and history, especially surrounding Colville."

- ↓ Letterpress banner installation by Tara Bursey, *Owens Free Space*, 12 March-10 April 2022, installation shot, Roger J. Smith



#### **4. Develop accessible infrastructure**

We will improve our accessibility by investing in our physical infrastructure.

**Action #1.** Redefine how the Owens uses its Lobby, making it a more permanent social space, and invest in accessible furniture upgrades.

**Action #2.** Explore creative ways to make the Owens' façade less intimidating, while still respecting its important heritage status.

**Action #4.** Replace the wheelchair ramp and add door-push buttons to the Quad-facing entrance doors.

**Action #5.** Repair or replace the concrete steps leading to the front entrance on York Street.

**Action #6.** Conduct a feasibility study for a major accessibility renovation, including a passenger elevator and gender-neutral washrooms.



## Community Perspectives

"The Owens could be more accessible. Have the bathrooms on the main floor. Also coat racks on main floor. Perhaps, if not an elevator, a stair lift."

"To me the Owens is this mysterious place on campus that I am not really sure why and when to go to as a non-art student."

- ↓ The front entrance to the Owens, with John McEwen's public sculpture *Salt/Marsh*, 1995, in the foreground. Photo: Owens Art Gallery





## **5. Promote careers in art galleries and museums**

We will be a holistic training ground for the next generation of museum professionals.

**Action # 1.** Continue to use our professional expertise to support the development of a Museum and Curatorial Studies major.

**Action #2.** Re-evaluate and reinvigorate our post-graduate internship program so that it meets both student needs and the Owens' capacity.

**Action #3.** Continue exploring new professional internship models that connect with a wider range of disciplines.

**Action #4.** Develop a career map for Museum and Curatorial Studies within the context of a liberal arts education.

## Community Perspectives

"I look back on my internship as an incredibly rich and rewarding experience. It was a full immersion in museum work that set the foundation for my future studies and work in the field."

"After meeting with other conservators and conservation students in the past few years, I realized how lucky I was to get a conservation internship position in Sackville."

↓ Intern Ranz Bontogon makes a "four-flap" archival folder for work in the print vault. Photo: Owens Art Gallery, 2023



## **6. Strengthen the permanent collection**

We will continue to improve the stewardship and growth of our permanent collection.

**Action #1.** Update our Collections Policy to ensure ethical growth.

**Action #2.** Refocus our acquisitions process on artists from communities that are absent or underrepresented in our current holdings.

**Action #3.** Upgrade the Collections Management System (CMS) to a more secure, user-friendly platform.

**Action #4.** Update the Disaster Plan to include pandemics and climate change.

**Action #5.** Create a plan for replacing essential infrastructure, such as the Owens' HVAC system.

**Action #6.** Solicit resources for an HVAC replacement and a vault renovation.

## Community Perspectives

"The Owens Art Gallery is a place of learning and discovery. Every visit here was eye-opening. Learning about art history and how it relates to current art was interesting in this space."

"I've visited the Owens quite a few times in my life and each time is better than the last. I've been down to the vault twice and it's incredible to learn about the different stories behind the pieces."

↓ The painting vault, *Owens Open House*, 12 May 2023. Photo: Owens Art Gallery



## Review Cycle

This plan will be reviewed regularly by the staff of the Owens Art Gallery, who may make course corrections based on external factors and changes in the gallery's context. Once it is reconstituted, the Friends of the Owens Art Gallery Committee will conduct reviews of the plan every two years to identify ways it can better support it. It may also make recommendations to the Director/Curator at that time.

Cover image: *Plotter Jam: Vinyl graphics workshop with Tara Bursey, Owens Free Space, 21 March 2022.* Photo: Owens Art Gallery