

## news



Claude Robinson, a Quebec artist who has been fighting, for more than a decade, a production company for allegedly plagiarizing his ideas, will be the keynote speaker at the forum on the professional status of the artist in Shippagan and Lamèque on May 31, June 1 and June 2. Contact Louise Gauthier at 852-3313 or [louise.gauthier@aaapnb.ca](mailto:louise.gauthier@aaapnb.ca), or visit [aaapnb.ca](http://aaapnb.ca), for more information. PHOTO: ADRIAN WYLD / THE CANADIAN PRESS

## No more status quo

At the largest meeting of artists organized by the Association acadienne des artistes professionnel.le.s du Nouveau Brunswick in more than 25 years, artists across the province gather, May 31 to June 2, to discuss the status of the artist legislation in the province. Story by Mike Landry

For more than 30 years, the New Brunswick Employment Standards Act, a 69-page document of pin point defined, labyrinthine legalese, has guided labour law in the province.

The legislation works in conjunction with other acts such as the Human Rights Act, Industrial Relations Act, Pension Benefits Act and the Public Service Labour Relations Act, just to name a few.

The laws work to defend the rights of employees, like Patricia Donnelly, a Fredericton woman who was laid off from her job as marketing manager at Kings Landing Historical Settlement shortly after she gave birth to twins. After taking her case against the provincial Crown corporation to the Court of Queen's Bench, a decision was delivered in her favour, strengthening the rules New Brunswick employers have to follow when laying off women who are on maternity leave.

But, in the first clause, under the heading "Application," the Employee Standards Act states, "All employers and employees whose relations are subject to the legislative authority of the legislature are bound by this Act." And New Brunswick artists are not employees, they are independent contractors and employers, and not subject to legislative authority, making the law inapplicable to them.

"The artists in New Brunswick want nothing else than to have their profession recognized," Carmen Gibbs, the general director of the Association acadienne des artistes professionnel.le.s du Nouveau-Brunswick, "and the legislation, as it is right now, doesn't recognize their profession."

**WE WANT TO TALK ABOUT NOT JUST A LAW; WE WANT TO TALK TO ABOUT MEASURES."**

CARMEN GIBBS, AAAPNB

There would have to be changes to the existing legislation or a new legislation written explicitly for artists, as is the case for lawyers and doctors in the province, in order for artists, who are technically employers and independent contractors, to share the same minimum labour rights as employees.

Gibbs calls the lack of recognition for the artist in the province a disgrace, and the association is now making the status of the artist, and possible legislation, its number one goal.

In partnership with the New Brunswick Arts Board, ArtsLinkNB and the provincial government, the association is hosting a forum on the professional status of artists from May 31 to June 2 in Lamèque and Shippagan. Artists from every background and medium have been invited, expenses covered, to the forum to express their individual needs and challenges in regards to their professional status.

It's the first time in more than 25 years the association has organized such a meeting, and the event will be simultaneously translated. There will also be workshops on various other laws that exist for artists around the world and the social programs for artists in Canada.

After the conference, the association will select the most important needs of the artists to highlight in a report to the provincial government. The hope is this report will be used to inform a government committee on the status of the artist Gibbs hopes to see established.

"This fall, the Premier's committee on the status of the artist has to be announced. We hope the government takes the forum as a moment to come and announce the date of that committee," Gibbs says. "If it's not happening this fall, I think there's going to be a movement that's happening."

Premier Alward made a campaign promise that he would address the issue of artist status in his four-year term, and the province has made a \$70,000 investment in this weekend's forum. But when asked about legislation to establish the status of the artist as professional in law, Trevor Holder, minister for Tourism, Heritage and Culture, defers to the

cultural policy renewal his department is undertaking.

"We want (the status of the artist forum) to be working in parallel, in respect to the work going on with the cultural policy renewal," Holder says. "The cultural policy is going to layout a whole blueprint."

So, while Gibbs is adamant for a separate committee on the status of the artist, Holder wants to wait until he sees the results of the coming forum before deciding. He does not want to get too far ahead of cultural policy renewal.

But Holder admits his department "certainly got the message," during meetings held last fall across the province for the cultural policy renewal, that legislation to establish the status of the artist was important.

Not that the importance of status of the artist legislation is really of question any more. Every professional arts organization has come out in support of some kind of legislation, and even Nova Scotia's cultural minister has said legislation should be "top of the agenda." The Association acadienne des artistes professionnel.le.s du Nouveau-Brunswick has known it to be a priority since they held a forum in 2006 in conjunction with its annual general meeting.

"The fact that government is sponsoring this (forum) should be a pretty clear indication to the artists that this issue is being taken seriously by the government," Holder says. "This is very important to the artist and that's not lost on us."

"But I still think the two (status of the artist policy and the cultural policy renewal) are one-in-the-same, even if there is immediate suggestion around dealing with the status of the artist. I still think the cultural policy should be in sync."

It's unclear how legislation will make a difference for artists. The New Brunswick Labour and Employment Board is clear about the current limitations self-employed workers when it comes to benefits. And that won't change for artists unless changes are made to existing laws or there is a new law.

Marie Cadieux, the literary director and general director of Bouton d'or Acadie, an Acadian publishing house, spent 30 years based in Quebec as a filmmaker and screenwriter. Quebec's status of the artist legislation made an impact on her career. The unions and associations to which she belonged made sure she could access tax-free royalty payments. She also was able to access vacation pay, and training programs during unemployment.

In Quebec, due to status of the artist legislation, groups representing professional organizations can ensure its members have the same rights as any other employee in the province, while bargaining for amendments to existing legislation to better work for professional artists.

Last year, Nova Scotia passed its own Status of the Artist legislation, though it's more intended to guide future decisions, and it's too soon to say what impact it's had.

Such a wait-and-see approach is something Gibbs says, "is the last thing we need."

"The statement is good, but, I mean, if it's not accompanying concrete measures and an action plan, it's worth as much as the paper it's written on, except philosophically," Gibbs says. "We want to talk about not just a law; we want to talk to about measures. A law can be one thing, but the measures are often what makes your life different."

Gibbs says she knows artists have been waiting a long time for their status to be improved in society, and her association will work on the issue until they get what they want.

"Government would have been pleased for us to adopt a law like they did in Nova Scotia. That's exactly what we don't want. That's why we want to wait to do our work well. We don't have the luxury to fail. We're not going to do this every year," she says. "When we dream of the status of the artist we want something more." ☺

Mike Landry is the Telegraph-Journal's arts and culture editor: [landry.michael@telegraphjournal.com](mailto:landry.michael@telegraphjournal.com).

## When in Rome



TOM SMART  
the curator

In the cramped, dank basement storage room full of old plaster models and moulds used to cast bronze sculptures, there is a cowboy on a bucking bronco. This is the exact form used as the original model to make hundreds of the now famous Frederic Remington sculptures that adorn boardrooms, art galleries and private collections around the world.

Looking around, through faint light, shelves are piled with similarly prime models and moulds used to cast other sculptures, famous and recognizable even after all these years. There is the model for college football's the Heisman trophy and, next to it, running all the way across the cellar, are portrait busts, headless effigies of famous and eminent people staring lifelessly in front of them in this strange crypt in a New York City borough.

I am told that Andy Warhol liked to lurk in these same dingy storage areas, some barely high enough to stand up in.

This is the plaster model storeroom of one of the 20th century's most important bronze art foundries, Roman Bronze Works. In its heyday, and at the height of its production more than a century ago, Roman made most of the decorative bronze art for buildings all across New York City and much of the Midwest. A gargoyle looking down from a perch on a skyscraper's corner, the incredibly delicate relief work surrounding a bank's doors on Wall Street and even refreshing water fountains in public parks and gardens around the city – these all trace their birth back to Roman's hot forges here in this now dilapidated industrial building.

Beyond the many historical American pieces that Roman made, it also helped to advance a golden age of decorative bronze work in Canada after the First World War. It is for the purpose of learning more about this relatively obscure chapter of Canadian art that I was crawling on my hands and knees, pawing through the shelves of plaster casts looking for work by the Canadians.

The prosperity that the railway brought to wealthy Canadian engineers based in Montreal and Ottawa, gave them a thirst for the gilded age splendour their American counterparts enjoyed a generation earlier. Copying their southern neighbours, the Canadian magnates set about collecting art, and the older its pedigree the better. Thus, their parlours and

rooms started to fill up with whatever so-called Old Masters they could lay their hands on.

Pickings were meagre because most had been snapped up by the wealthier New York families at the turn of the century. However, the dark tones of the 19th century Dutch and French masters satisfied the Montreal collectors' appetites for work that had to look old, even it was only a few decades away from the artists' easels. Through the gloomy glazes of many an oil canvas, one might just be able to make out a moody landscape, a farmer sowing seeds, a battle scene or a sinking ship. These gave the newly-wealthy classes an aura of refined taste and old-world authority.

Bronze sculpture also fit the bill for these acquisitive men. Artists such as Sherbrooke's Suzor-Côté, turned his formidable sculpting talents to describing the familiar Quebecois types in many popular tabletop-sized sculptures. The quaint grandmother and grandfather on rocking chairs, the Habitant farmer, moose hunter and characters from the folk novel *Maria Chapdelaine*. Suzor-Côté had the facility to create enduring symbols of pride and cast in medal emblems a way of life that was vanishing quickly in post-war Montreal. Bronze gave the impression that these types and the values they embodied would endure for centuries.

My art hunt in Roman's bowels was directed to finding the work of a now nearly-forgotten Ontario artist – Jacobine Jones. This diminutive woman, who died in 1976 at the age of 79 was dwarfed by an immense imagination and ambition to decorate public places with carvings and bronzes that had few precedents in English Canada. A trained stone carver, Jones's work is seen today decorating many Toronto public places, hospitals, banks and parks. She had a particular gift for giving stone and bronze a lightness, and this is due to the sense of humour and joy she was able to inject into her materials, whether incredibly hard Belgian marble, wonderstone or the softer media of red sandstone and clay.

I wanted to find the original plaster maquette for a sculpture of a proud pony with a bobbed tail. This piece shows all the hallmarks of a singularly sensitive sculptor who was able to combine a very keen eye for realistic depiction of the animal, but also an uncanny ability to give that same precise rendering a human character.

At the end of a long chilly day in the crypt, I recognized the strangely animated shape of my pony staring through a maze of broken and strangely distorted plaster pieces on a bottom shelf in a forgotten corner. In an instant, Jacobine Jones' unique magic caused this miniature horse to spring to life.

In a dirty grotto, about as far away from the pristine cleanliness and austere purity of an art gallery as you could imagine, I saw how the spark of human genius can make stone dance and bronze breathe. ☺

Tom Smart is a writer and curator living in Toronto: [smart.telegraph@gmail.com](mailto:smart.telegraph@gmail.com).

## letter

### Good-bye Georges

It is with dismay that I learned of the closing of Galerie Georges-Goguen, in keeping with Radio-Canada management's decision to close to the public its building on Archibald Street, in Moncton. It's a huge loss for the Acadian art world. This gallery, over the years, has become an institution that was honouring Radio-Canada, considering the neglect that our Crown corporation has shown for the visual arts compared to other forms of art.

This gallery has exhibited an amazing amount of artists – some known, some lesser-known, but who have all benefited from the publicity and the promotion of their work by the messages of public interest that Radio-Canada would air about those exhibitions on TV.

But even more worrisome is the decision to blockade the building.

This is a signal of sorts, informing us that we are not welcomed in a building and an institution to which we are largely contributing. It has been said that Radio-Canada, as are the arts in general, is an enterprise devoted to communication. To lock – not to say condemn – a building is surely not sending the right kind of signal.

In closing, I want to thank and congratulate Georges Goguen for the interest, generosity and devotion he has invested in that gallery, allowing it to exist and pursue its mission. The loss of such an institution is a sad sign that the cultural milieu is getting poorer. For those of us who have seen modernity come to age here in Acadie, and for those continuing to pursue this adventure, it is even more sad to consider that such a decision is making us lose ground. - HERMÉNÉILDE CHIASSON, Grand Barchois