

Cultural renaissance

Change is in the air as a new crop of leaders take the helm of five key cultural institutions.

BY SARAH B. HOOD
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAIME HOGGE



Artistic vision

STEPHAN JOST AND

THE ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

Art doesn't stand still, and sometimes the galleries that house it have trouble keeping pace. But Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) has been evolving ever since it was founded in 1900. It's as recognized for its important collection of work by British sculptor Henry Moore as it is for its fine gathering of significant Canadian work. Even the building itself keeps changing, most recently with a daring overhaul by Toronto-born architect Frank Gehry.

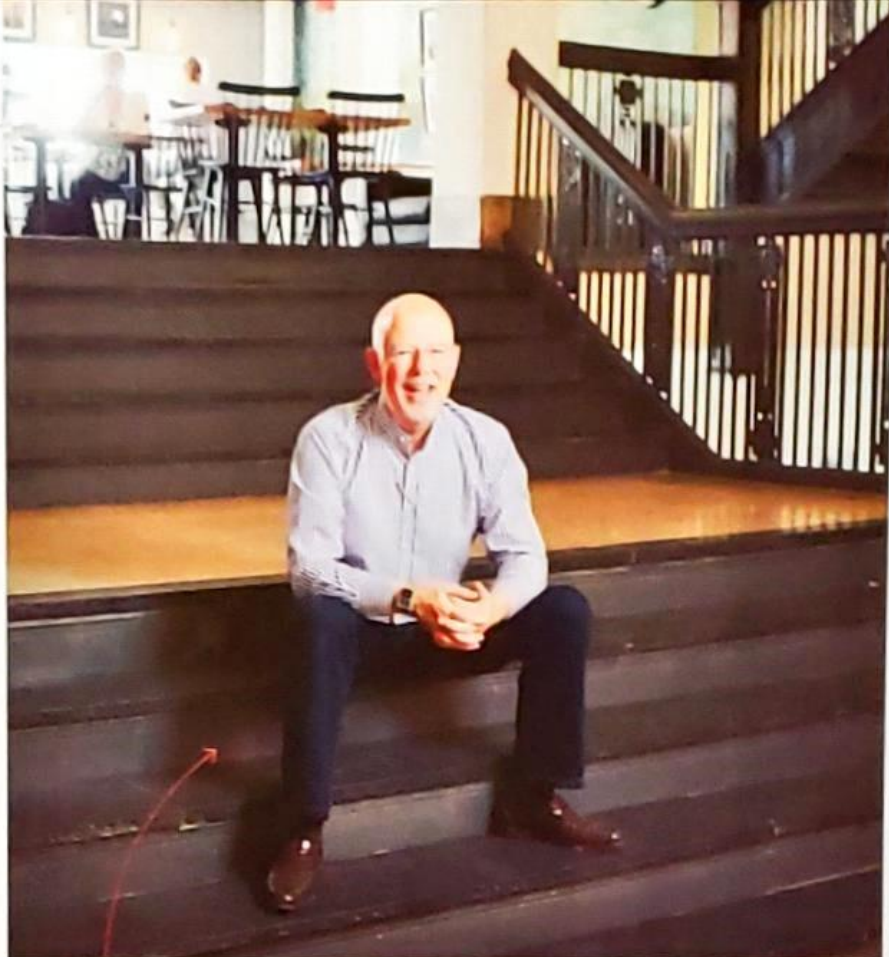
Charged with leading the gallery forward is Stephan Jost, the AGO's Michael and Sonja Koerner director and CEO. He arrived in Toronto last year following a five-year tenure as director of the Honolulu Museum of Art. He has also directed Vermont's Shelburne Museum and the Mills College Art Museum in Oakland, California.

On the agenda: taking the AGO global. "For our next several exhibitions, we're partnering with [Paris's] Musée d'Orsay, [London's] Tate Modern and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The AGO is a global player," he says.

Jost's outlook might surprise those who see galleries as solemn temples of serious art. "I'm a huge populist, so I love the free Wednesday nights. I love the First Thursday events," he says, referring to the hugely popular nightclub-like parties that bring pop-up events (and bar service) into the galleries.

"If you're a super-intellectual who wants to see conceptual art, you'll find that here. If you just want eye candy, you'll find that too. I don't think everybody has to like everything," Jost says. "Next year, we have the Georgia O'Keeffe show of a lifetime. And *Guillermo del Toro* [an exhibit on the filmmaker's work, subtitled *At Home with Monsters*]: it's fantastic and strange and surprising."

His favourite nook? "The Henry Moore Sculpture Centre," he says. "It's still the world-class moment in the museum. You won't experience great Modernist sculpture in a better way anywhere else in the world. They really got it right 40 years ago."



Illuminating ideas

ANTHONY SARGENT AND THE LUMINATO FESTIVAL

The summertime Luminato Festival (June 2017) was created to light up Toronto, illuminating the city with brilliant creative installations. As the festival evolves, the goal is to keep it shining brightly, says CEO Anthony Sargent, a Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

Sargent arrived last year from England, where he's led an array of dynamic arts and culture institutions, like Sage Gateshead (a music performance and education centre), London's Southbank Centre for the arts, Birmingham City Council's arts programming and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

He joined Luminato for its 10th anniversary season, which threw the

spotlight on the Hearn Generating Station, a cavernous, majestic industrial space that was transformed with innovative arts programming.

"We went to the Hearn three times, in 2014, 2015 and 2016, progressively opening it up to the public more and more each time," says Sargent. "We were extremely proud of what we did in 2016—it shone a bright light not only on the Hearn but also on the entire Port Lands. It created an experience that was probably our defining statement of that building."

For its second decade, Luminato will turn the focus to other parts of the city. "The Hearn experience opened doors and windows in our minds about working in other

found spaces in heritage buildings," he says. "I think its legacy is going to be a more ambitious approach to other buildings."

In 2017, Canadian creators will be in the spotlight (although international artists remain part of the festival's mandate). "What's really exciting about Toronto is that there is a constant breathless kind of activity and a real sense of ambition, of people wanting to introduce audiences to new things," says Sargent.

The best part? The festival never really ends. "Toronto is exciting the rest of the year [too]—it has that constant, wonderful, youthful jumble and cauldron of energy," he says.

Doors open at the ROM

JOSHUA BASSECHES

AT THE ROYAL
ONTARIO MUSEUM

Founded in 1912, the stately Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) was transformed in 2007 by architect Daniel Libeskind's extraordinary Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, a bracing glass addition loved (and occasionally loathed) for its angular modernity. Now a new development—the Welcome Project—will broker even more engagement between visitors and the ROM.

The project will rethink the way the entrance area and lobby interact with visitors and the streetscape itself. The goal, says ROM CEO Josh Basseches, is “to open the doors of the ROM even wider, to share even more fully our extraordinary exhibitions, collections and programs with Toronto and beyond.”

To that end, over the next few years, visitors can expect a street-level café, makeovers for both the original main entrance on Queen's Park Crescent and the lobby inside the doors of the Crystal, and a new window facing Bloor Street.

Basseches arrived at the ROM in spring 2016, fresh off a stint as deputy director at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. He says his status as a new kid in town gives him added insight into the ROM, seeing it as a newcomer would. He views the ROM as “a North American hot spot that tells the story of the world. Visitors will feel welcome here, as they do in all of Toronto. Their visit to the ROM will leave them wanting to come back to learn more about us—our collections and research—and more about themselves and our world.”

As for those blessed enough to have this anthropological, natural history and art history treasure in their own backyard? “The Welcome Project is an opportunity to build on the institution's strong foundation and make everyone in the [Greater Toronto Area] feel even more that the ROM is ‘my museum,’” says Basseches.



The lake effect

MARAH BRAYE

AND HARBOURFRONT CENTRE

Marah Braye didn't have the warmest of welcomes to Toronto. Arriving for an interview from balmy Australia, she landed on a chilly winter day. Nonetheless, she says, “I was very attracted to Toronto because I felt there was something happening here.”

Braye is the former head of the Biennale of Sydney and boasts a wide-ranging background in fine arts and publishing. She relocated to Toronto in August 2014 to take on the position of CEO at Harbourfront Centre, a 10-acre waterside facility that programs every imaginable type of cultural and recreational activity, from theatre, music, literature and food festivals to skating, canoeing and kids' activities—most of which are free.

“I was really drawn to the fact that there were crafts and design [at Harbourfront], and we have working artists here all the time,” Braye says. “I saw it for what it was and the potential that it had; I could see the rich and the deep history the Centre had in Toronto and the cultural life of Canada. One of the things that I would like to achieve is to link together the disciplines: we are multidisciplinary, but I want us to be interdisciplinary.”

For 2017, Harbourfront will be introducing what Braye calls “a new music strategy for both the festival program and Harbourfront Centre as a whole,” establishing it as “the place for the contemporary music conversation.” It will also celebrate Canada's 150th birthday with a summer-long music theme: Sounds of Home.

Braye is inspired by the location along the Lake Ontario shoreline. “When I first came here, I couldn't actually find the waterfront,” she says. “I think that should be one of our major roles—making Torontonians aware of the fact that Toronto is a harbourside city. We're central to the waterfront. The thing that's really nice about Harbourfront Centre is that we're the city's cottage.” And an artful one at that.





Double bill

DEANE CAMERON OF MASSEY HALL AND ROY THOMSON HALL

Deane Cameron has a music lover's dream job. As president and CEO of the Corporation of Massey Hall and Roy Thomson Hall, he oversees what he justly calls "Toronto's most iconic music halls."

Cameron would know: he's worked in the music industry for more than 40 years, including 24 at the helm of EMI Music Canada. Now he's the steward of an esteemed historic concert hall and the city's premier classical music venue.

Massey Hall opened its doors in 1894 as a meeting hall and cultural centre for the city. "It's revered by artists from around the world, and every Canadian musician aspires to play Massey Hall," Cameron says. It has hosted opera stars from Caruso to Pavarotti, Canadian icons like Glenn Gould, Rush and Neil Young, and a session considered by some to be the greatest jazz concert ever, featuring Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus and Max Roach.

Roy Thomson Hall's glittering façade opened in 1982 as a home for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO). These days, it also welcomes a diversity of events, including musical concerts, talks by notable speakers, and gala events during the Toronto International Film Festival.

The 2017 season will be special at both halls, with Canada 150 programming and a chance to pull out all the stops at Massey Hall before it closes for two years under its ongoing seven-year renovation plan. "Between now and then, we're really trying to celebrate a lot of the events that have taken place there," Cameron says. "We are really trying to have a blockbuster schedule."

Highlights at Roy Thomson Hall are the TSO's Canada Mosaic concerts and the free summer patio series. "Each week, we try to explore the different music from around the world," says Cameron. "When you take a look at the wide variety of programming that takes place here, I like to think that we're a unique piece of the overall cultural fabric of the city and the cultural neighbourhood that we're a part of."