Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (WAHC)

January 30-April 20, 2019

Opening reception:
Friday, February 8, 2019, 7-9pm

Artist Material Fund:
April 10-20, during gallery hours

Curated by Suzanne Carte

Basil AlZeri (Toronto/Guelph)
Rodrigo Barragán (Buenos Aires)
Ghost of a Dream (Wassaic)
Rodrigo HGz (Glasgow)
Alejandro Tamayo (Hamilton)
Division of Labour is an exhibition set across two institutions in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA): one in Hamilton and one in Burlington. The exhibition brings artists into dialogue on the subjects of class, race, and labour as they relate to cultural waste. Barter economy systems, critical discourse about community action around consumption, and circuits of solidarity exchange are more present than ever in the daily working lives of artists and cultural producers. The exhibition and ancillary programming help educate visitors about the scarcity of resources, labour rights, and the lack of living wages in the arts. Through the work of artists who utilize recycled material in their work, the exhibition illustrates the power and potential of reused material for artistic production.

We are living in a time of increasing economic uncertainty, wage gaps, and class divides. Division of Labour uses this moment to consider the true cost of artists’ labour and economic parity through their recovery of and access to excess material. The featured artists question who gets paid as well as how, and how much, they are paid. They also examine where artists’ production materials come from, and by whose hands they are made, manufactured, or fashioned.

Division of Labour is not a simple display of objects constructed from trash—its work supports the building of new networks of resources and methods for the sustainability of artists’ work. It goes beyond giving artists free material and providing decent artist fees—it opens up dialogue about the systemic issues inherent in class dynamics, underemployment, and labour exploitation that plague our cultural industry.

The first edition, held at the Workers Art and Heritage Centre in Hamilton, features the work of Basil AlZeri, ro Barragán, Ghost of a Dream (a collaborative project between Lauren Was and Adam Eckstrom), Rodrigo HGz, and Alejandro Tamayo. The follow-up exhibition will build upon the conversations that arise from this exhibition and programming series, and is set to open at the Art Gallery of Burlington in 2019/20.

Welcome to the first edition.
1 Rodrigo HGz
   *PHBMD(Totekiuh)*
   2015

2 ro Barragán
   *Artist Material Fund Poster*
   2017

3 Basil AlZeri
   *I Will Cook and Clean For A Fee*
   2019

4 Ghost of a Dream
   *Add another string to your bow*
   2019

5 Alejandro Tamayo
   *As solid as a word, as open as a door*
   2019
My father takes snapshots to document the work done at his job site. These photos are part of his routine; acting as traces of his proud hands’ work and proof of his skills; an invisible labour. Now that picture framing is part of my routine, I re-frame his snapshots in materials originating from my work. Totekiu translates from the Nahuatl language as our work; our service; our labour
Rodrigo HGz's (Rodrigo Hernandez Gomez's) project, *PHBMD* (*Totekiuh*), is a collaborative work with his father, Manuel Hernandez Morales. HGz and Morales utilize material from their places of employment to create new works. Morales photographs his work at construction job sites to document both the process and the final products created. Taking these photos is part of his daily practice on the jobsite. HGz frames his father’s snapshots using re-purposed scrap supplies that he works with in his day job as a picture framer. Together, he and his father have created a new body of work from material that would otherwise be expensive and unavailable to them as artists. The pieces serve to make visible an invisible labour, observe the divide between working-class and creative-class strictures, and highlight the value and contribution of immigrant workers in Canada.

**Rodrigo HGz** creates installations, artist multiples, and socially engaged performative projects. His installations explore non-dominant expressions of value through sculpture installation, wall texts, and video and photo collage. His civic-engaged projects deal with estates of migrant knowledge, value creation, and critical pedagogy. His artist multiples include goggles and small-scale sculptures. Implicitly and explicitly, HGz endeavours to create a space for a contemporary Nahua aesthetic in its diasporic expression. He was born in Anáhuac (Mexico City) and raised near Cuicuilco. He is of Nahua descent and now works in Canada, Italy, and Scotland. HGz graduated in 2010 from the Master of Fine Arts program at York University. His installations, new-media work, wearable art pieces, and performative projects have been presented internationally.
Upcycling—reusing raw material—is at the heart of Ghost of a Dream’s practice. The collective (Lauren Was and Adam Eckstrom) gathers detritus and images from cultural forums to construct sculptures and installations. They recognize that what passes for trash in cultural institutions is typically usable matter. Galleries, museums, theatres, and dance and film studios need to remove scrap quickly and in the most cost-effective manner. Because of the time constraints of exhibition and performance turn-arounds, waste matter has to be taken away right away to make room for new set pieces, display architecture, sets, and artwork. Lack of storage space makes it difficult to house fabricated, installation-specific items and building materials, so much of it ends up in the garbage.

In 2016, the collective created a full-scale cottage at Smack Mellon (in Brooklyn, New York) that was constructed entirely from discarded material collected from art fairs. *When the Smoke Clears:*

The Fair Housing Project saw the repurposing of shipping crates, carpeting, wall vinyl, plinths, swag bags, and packing foam from The Armory Show, New York; Art Basel Miami; Frieze New York and London; The Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA); and the SPRING/BREAK Art Show, New York.

For *Division of Labour*, Ghost of a Dream salvages refuse from the GTHA’s robust cultural industry to create a work that questions the ability of sharing skills and information in our current capitalist climate. *Add another string to your bow* uses standard building materials to create a quilt-like collage structure. As the title suggests, Ghost of a Dream is adding another skill to their repertoire and another course of action to their practice. Much like the construction of a quilt, building the work was a community effort. The acquisition of material required the collective gathering of many hands to stitch together a tapestry of remnants. Patterns were formed through
repetitive action, calling attention to the act of labor both in acknowledging the work that went into the material's first life and in the effort it takes to create its second one. It is about coming together as a team to assemble art while discussing shared interests and common goals around waste management and shared economies. The collective notes that the work both mirrors the exhibition thesis and their working ethos: “We keep our studio and practice fresh by trying to learn new processes, skills, and ways of working with each new material or idea.”

Ghost of a Dream’s work was included in State of the Art, a traveling exhibition that has shown at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas; the Telfair Museums in Savannah, Georgia; the Minneapolis Institute of Art in Minneapolis, Minnesota; the Dixon Gallery & Gardens in Memphis, Tennessee; the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville, Tennessee; and the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina. Recent solo exhibitions include When the Deal Goes Down at Standard Space in Sharon, Connecticut; A Devil to Pay at CES Gallery in Los Angeles, California; The Fair Housing Project at Smack Mellon; A Good Run of Bad Luck at Binghamton University in Binghamton, New York; and Gone the Sun at Galerie Paris-Beijing in Paris, France. Ghost of a Dream also recently completed a permanent installation for Facebook’s offices in New York City. The team is currently represented by Galerie Paris-Beijing and by Galleri Christoffer Egelund in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Ghost of a Dream has received the support of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Joan Mitchell Foundation, the Artist’s Resource Trust, the Jerome Foundation, and the Young Masters Art Prize. They have been awarded artist residencies in Berlin, Basel, Beijing, France, and venues throughout the United States, including the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, the International Studio & Curatorial Program, Smack Mellon, the Wassaic Project, and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Artist-in-Residence Program, in New Orleans. Their work has been included in publications such as The New York Times, Vogue Magazine, Hyperallergic, BLOUIN ARTINFO, Art F City, W Magazine, Interview Magazine, and World of Interiors. The team has also been featured on “Good Morning America.” 21c Museum Hotels and Southern Foodways Alliance have just completed a short documentary about the collective’s project Traveling through the Dawn of the Night, and VICE Media made a documentary about their work on the VICE Art Talks series.
In creating site-responsive work, artists are often asked to migrate from community to community and make sense of a place in which they do not belong or with which they do not have any history. As a new transplant to Guelph, where he completed his Master of Fine Arts at the University of Guelph, Basil AlZeri tries to understand what it means to respond to a new environment. So being a visitor to Hamilton through Division of Labour isn’t unfamiliar territory, either. AlZeri wrestles with the notion of being a tourist by offering himself, his services, his labour, and his body to Hamiltonians. Rather than seizing resources from a community, or providing an action without an expressed need, he provides an essential, requested service to individuals who access the gallery space. He deliberately opens possibilities for giving—countering a settler mentality of taking.

In 2014, AlZeri began interrogating work and art, and labour and value, in his work You Do What You Love Because You Do One, Two, and More Than Two..., an installation piece that was part of the South Asian Visual Art Centre’s exhibition Work It at the former Gallerywest in Toronto. In this work, AlZeri acknowledged the daily labour artists expend to make a living wage outside of their art practice, to compensate for the income they can’t make from their art. The project invited artists to provide objects of their choice from their non-art–related workplaces. The objects were displayed in the gallery to highlight the efforts that allow for the possibility of being a practising artist in Canada. AlZeri noted that “almost every artist I know has one, two, or more than two ‘day’ job(s) to sustain their art practice. Therefore, what allows creative production to occur is hard work around the clock.”

In his work at WAHC, I Will Cook and
Clean, For A Fee, visitors can book a session with AlZeri to provide domestic services for them. It is based on a lateral value system, meaning that AlZeri is paid the same rate for all of the actions—no hierarchy is placed on cooking versus cleaning or repair versus gardening. He is an artist–worker—he does not provide free labour. Compensation for his services is remunerated by the gallery, not the people using them. The work redirects art funding so that it enters people’s homes and provides care for community members. Art as a social service has long been criticized for not actually doing anything, for merely pointing to an issue rather than addressing it in a real and tangible way by making change. AlZeri challenges this inactive element of social practice work in creating a concrete “deed” that provides relief to individuals who are in positions of financial precarity and exhaustion. He encourages an ongoing, constructive, critical dialogue about the reality of artists’ labour within and outside of art economies.

I Will Cook and Clean, For A Fee is built on a zero-waste model. A series of plinths are assembled in the gallery space. These objects have been moved from the gallery to the studio and back again as a support for many of the artist’s actions and performances. By reusing these structures for numerous events and projects, AlZeri recycles his own art-material output as the structural base for the service proposal. The re-used plinths act as stand-ins for the actions performed out in the community.

Basil AlZeri is a cross-disciplinary visual artist living and working in both Toronto and Guelph. His practice involves the intersection of art, education, and food through performance, interventions, and gallery and public installations. AlZeri’s work examines the socio-political dynamics of the family and its intersection with reproductive/unproductive labour, drawing on the necessities of everyday life and the (in)visibility of “work” as a site of exploration. He tries to facilitate a space for empathy through gestures of inclusivity and generosity. AlZeri’s work has been presented in Amman, Dubai, Halifax, Mexico City, Montreal, New York, Ottawa, Regina, Rome, Santiago, Tartu, and Toronto.
Artists and activists in Buenos Aires are at the forefront of communal models of solidarity exchange as a way to build sustainable economies. The city’s cultural centres have established a strong voice in reinventing economics outside of the neoliberal capitalist archetype. Many associations (grassroots organizations that became regional self-sufficiency programs, which provide resources to help people maintain an income that is sufficient to meet their needs) moved away from capitalist structures to embrace healthy, balanced economies based on barter, trade, and solidarity markets. Artist and printmaker ro Barragán’s studio is at the heart of this practice. Her print shop and gallery window are spaces where artists can collaborate and circulate ideas and new works.

In Argentina, there is a deep history of poster production as a medium for public political engagement that continues to this day. It has become the preferred tool with which activists and artists convey a message cheaply, effectively, and widely. Operating alongside master printer Juan Carlos Romero, Barragán honed her letterpress skills to produce the popular typographic poster used by activists, political parties, and workers’ unions as a means of public communication.
In keeping with the recognizable style of Romero's poster production, Barragán adds her own means of creation by printing on studio refuse and castoffs. When learning to typeset, she grabbed misprints left on the studio floor by other printmakers and then overlaid patterns of numbers and letters to make the original text indecipherable. The posters became new works of abstracted blocks of colour and imprints.

The Artist Material Fund wordmark was created by Barragán during her continued process of inexpensive image making and conscious recycling efforts. Her studio is filled with discarded sets of industrial woodcuts and used printed matter. Ontario artists can learn a lot from the Barragán’s ingenuity and collaborative force.

**ro Barragán** earned a Master’s degree in Aesthetics and Art Theory from the National University of La Plata, Argentina. She has been actively making work since 1994. Her work—using a variety of media including, painting, engraving, digital art, installations, and interactive art—has been featured in collective and individual exhibitions in Buenos Aires and other Argentinian cities, as well as Bogotá, Rome, and Miami. Between 2010 and 2013, Barragán worked with the Galería Carla Rey Arte Contemporáneo. She also develops art activities in the context of the street, through stickers and posters. She teaches Engraving and Complementary Printed Art at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the National University of La Plata and typography at the Museo de Calcos y Escultura Comparada Ernesto de la Cárcova in Buenos Aires.
Alejandro Tamayo’s work for Division of Labour was conceived of over numerous visits to WAHC, where he interacted with staff and combed through the historical refuse material of the centre. Tamayo came to understand this “stuff,” which accumulated over time, as an archive that speaks to a history of exhibition production and a legacy of critical discussions on labour practices. Yet in the construction of temporary exhibitions and displays, some objects are not considered salvageable ephemera, so they are disposed of—they are not viewed as functional or informative material. Tamayo sees these objects in the centre’s storage area as a way of telling a story about the future possibilities for the organization and its constituents.

Tamayo’s artistic practice “explores the possibilities of what constitutes an art object and examines its interdependency with the context of display.” The Division of Labour pieces align with his history of production with found and discarded materials. His works are formulated with everyday objects such as cardboard, plywood, rope, styrofoam, plexiglass, wood beams, cinder blocks, buckets, drills, ladders, tape rolls, and rubber bands. Tamayo places these objects into new situations to provide a secondary use, or life, for a limited time. The items are then returned to their original setting. These configurations are what he calls “temporally specific” installations. At WAHC, Tamayo built an installation dedicated to the history and future of the organization wherein the physical framework’s mandate—the architecture and its ideological/philosophical underpinning—is the modeling clay for a new work. The work has four components: a series of doors from WAHC’s storage area, which have been placed in an area that has been repainted with salvaged paint; a new library; frames from past exhibitions; and the (literal) reframing of the institution’s mandate.

In the first stage of the work, outside of the gallery space, Tamayo vertically shifts a stack of doors, rope, glass, and a Monopoly game from a hidden area on the third floor to an openly accessible place on the first floor. Displacing the objects creates a new scenario or situation for a public encounter. As solid as a word, as open as a door establishes a pre-exhibition moment within the centre, outside of the gallery space, for reflection on the ideas of time and work. The room itself is yet another component: once a dark-red colour, it has been repainted a neutral hue using salvaged paint. The
The room becomes a physical manifestation of a mental space that can be carved out in a physical space. Guests are invited to use the space as they wish. It carries the potential to hold a different idea of time, one that is not dependent on the punch clock or a 9-to-5 scenario.

The second stage of Tamayo’s proposition is found inside the gallery space. A series of frames taken from past exhibitions have had their images (their content) removed to reveal the structure itself as the information carrier. Two frames contain the organization’s mandate. The artist uses this institutional constitution as a building material to reuse and re-tool the future of work, or the future of non-work. WAHC’s mandate is, as it suggests in the title, a centre to hold space for the history of the working class in Ontario. Tamayo literally obliterates and dissects the document so that he can insert the future potential of the working class into the visioning of the centre—one that involves “Free Time.” The insertion of this phrase makes space for the future. It asserts time again, from the future to the present, rather than resting it within the usual scope of a heritage centre pulling the past into the present as a way of informing the future. It is a continuation of the exhibition within the fabric of the organization. Not unlike moving the gallery’s physical material from the storage area, repurposing it, and then returning it to the building, the sentence becomes a structure that can be moved and repurposed and later positioned in the architecture of the mandate.

The room also contains The on-going and open library: post-work economy, immaterial labour, art and work, work and play, a library of books gifted to WAHC by Tamayo. Books such as The Refusal of Work, esse arts + opinion’s recent Labour issue (Autumn 2018), and Art Work: A National Conversation About Art, Labor, and Economics, amongst others, are available to read. These publications give visitors an opportunity to reconsider work–life balance and to ask questions about the future of the working and creative class: Who is afforded laziness, and will there be space for it? What is the future for the working class? Will there be the ability to do nothing? Will the gesture of reclaiming material be important, so that one might reclaim time and shed the shame of doing nothing, or bask in its luxury?

**Alejandro Tamayo** is a visual artist based in Hamilton. His diverse practice encompasses sculpture, installation, drawing, and text-based works. He has produced work for different contexts including art galleries, artist-run centres, media labs, and public and domestic spaces. His work has been shown in Canada, Colombia, Spain, the United States, Mexico, Argentina, Finland, and the Czech Republic.

In addition to his visual and installation work, Tamayo conducts academic research and writes poetry. His PhD thesis, *The perfect, singular moment, when reality looks back at you to show, exactly, what she has been hiding all this time: Nothing*, compiles a collection of reflections derived from his studio work. He has also published two artist books, which are distributed by the Art Gallery of York University and Art Metropole.
Ongoing and open library works on the post-work economy, immaterial labour, art and work, and work and play


McKing, Bruce. “Calculate Your Value.” Creative Time Summit Workshop: No One Works Best on an Empty Stomach, 2016.


The most important element of Division of Labour is putting talk into action. The mission of the exhibition is to work toward a zero-waste outcome. As part of this, the Artist Material Fund will open right after Division of Labour closes. Materials collected from the artists’ construction and from surrounding cultural institutions will be given away to artists and individuals in the community, rather than finding their way into the local landfill. People will have the ability to take away any and all material from the installation as well as other items, including equipment and fabrications slated for disposal from other cultural institutions in the area.

The Artist Material Fund approaches recycling and trash collection as an artistic endeavour. Its mission is to relocate material and diminish waste that is produced from the art industry while providing resources to artists to produce work in a financially viable way in cities that are becoming increasingly hostile to individuals in lower-income brackets. The program seeks to actively cultivate an environment that supports and promotes the sharing of underused goods to exploit their full potential value. It also acts as a redistribution centre so that artists can “shop” for items they need to complete projects and build more efficient studios.
The exhibition includes a series of public events that will help create critical discussions about economics, art production, and a living wage for artists. From panel discussions to artists’ walks, the programs are built to enhance dialogue around issues of class while building audience awareness of the precarious, self-organized labour that is an integral part of cultural production.

**Programming**

**Socio-economic Status of Artists in the GTHA**

**Saturday, March 9, 2019**

**1:00-3:00 pm**

This roundtable series ties the two exhibition sites and cities together by addressing gentrification and the “creative flight” from Toronto to the Hamilton corridor. Hamiltonians have been openly taking aim at the issues of cultural resettlement in the face of their changing city by acknowledging the poor/working class/creative class urban mash-up that exists in the GTHA. The discussion at WAHC explores ideas around what an increased artist labour force means to the infrastructure, economy, and ecology of Hamilton, as well as the relationships between the existing art community and incoming artists. The panellists—Michael Maranda, Angela Orasch, and Sally Lee—provide an overview of the issues affecting the city’s mix of long-standing art community members, art-growth sympathizers, new-wave and first-wave artist implants, civic leaders, and youth organizers.

*Sally Lee* gets the conversation rolling by providing an overview of some organizations, groups, and collectives currently working on different fronts to improve the socio-economic status of artists. She describes the actions, activities, and initiatives taking place in organizations such as CARFAC Ontario, the Artists and Income...
Precarity Collective Impact Working Group (led by Work In Culture), and Arts Pond (research around artists and gentrification). She also touches on the work of larger advocacy groups such as Ontarians for the Arts and the Canadian Arts Coalition, and the importance of individual artists making their voices heard alongside organizations and institutions. Lee’s important work in arts advocacy helps build solidarity systems for artists so that they can know and feel their worth within the larger societal context and band together to effect change.

**Michael Maranda** presents a preliminary analysis on questions of home ownership and studio location for artists located in the GTHA versus the rest of Ontario as a way of indirectly gauging the effect of gentrification on artists’ lives. He discusses the implications of Toronto’s affordability crisis for artists and the potential direction of Hamilton through an analysis data provided in his research-advocacy survey, which focuses on the socio-economic status of Canadian artists. *Waging Culture* was published by the Art Gallery of York University (AGYU) in Toronto. In 2019, Maranda will compile the results of the final survey, drawing to a close a project spanning 10 years of investigation.

**Angela Orasch** will speak about the Gathering on Art, Gentrification, and Economic Development (GAGED), a public forum project that seeks to bring together various community voices in Hamilton to discuss issues related to the topics of gentrification, economic development, and the arts. These conversations, and the information brought forward, will become part of a working group devoted to knowledge creation on the topics. The group’s first event in October 2018 included a series of long-table discussions, working groups, and speakers. Orasch reports on action items that came out of the conference and will open the floor to further discussions. These conversations are being compiled and communicated to city hall, various community stakeholders, and McMaster University.

**Sally Lee** has almost 30 years of experience working at not-for-profit arts organizations representing a variety of disciplines and ranging from community-based artist-run organizations to large institutions. Most recently, she served as executive director of CARFAC Ontario, from 2015 to 2018. She has held management and leadership positions at the Toronto International Film Festival, Soulpepper Theatre Company, and the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival, where she also served as executive director. Lee has also worked or volunteered at the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto, the Images Festival, the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, Artists for Peace and Justice Canada, the Samara Centre for Democracy, Pan Am Path, Border/Lines Magazine, and the Women’s Press. She is a Fellow of the 2006 Toronto Arts Council Cultural Leaders Lab and currently sits on the board of Wavelength Music, the Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival, the Visual Arts and Media Arts Committee of the Toronto Arts Council, the Advocacy Network of the Toronto Arts Foundation, the Advisory Board of the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival, and the Nominating Committee of Access Copyright. An active member of Toronto’s independent music community since the early 1990s, Sally currently plays bass and sings in the band Long Branch.
Michael Maranda is assistant curator at the AGYU. For the past 30 years, he has been engaged with the visual arts sector in Canada as an artist, organizer, administrator, curator, editor, advocate, publisher, critic, and, more recently, a quantitative researcher. His Waging Culture survey has set the mark for advocacy-based quantitative research in the sector and is recognized as the go-to source for socio-economic information on Canadian visual artists. Maranda runs the publishing activities of the AGYU and is a prolific commenter on social media. He studied at the University of Ottawa (political science), Concordia University (photography), and the University of Rochester (visual and cultural studies). His work has shown internationally, primarily in artists’ book-related venues.

Angela Orasch is a PhD candidate in the Political Science program at McMaster University and the director of GAGED. She has published work in the field of Canadian social policy and intergovernmental relations. Currently, her research is situated within the field of urban/municipal policy and governance, examining the political economy of cities in North America. She recently developed and taught a fourth-year undergraduate course on Canadian cities, neoliberal urbanism, and technological governance. She also contributed to Evergreen’s mid-sized cities research collaborative, where her research examined governance models of Canadian smart city initiatives.

Repair Café

Saturday, March 30, 2019
1:00-4:00 pm

Bring your broken electronics, holey sweaters, and wobbly chairs to the Repair Café. Not only do you get to have a new(ish) appliance fixed, a wearable item patched, or a vintage item restored, but you also get to learn how to do it yourself as you work side by side with the repair volunteer to complete the task. Repair Café is a Toronto-based grassroots, volunteer-run organization that holds monthly gatherings where fixers help visitors learn how to repair items for free. It aims to build a more sustainable society and counter the throw-away mindset, and to place value on people who have repair skills and organizations that collaborate and innovate for the common good. The Repair Café is looking to expand beyond Toronto and establish new supports so that it can bring its model of the sharing economy to more communities in the province.

Artist Material Fund

April 10-20, 2019
during gallery hours
About the Publication:

Publications are useful resources and tools for artists and institutions. They extend the life of an exhibition, promote artists, engage in a national and international discourse, record knowledge production, build history, archive ephemeral practices, and provide space for critical dialogue and responses. Rarely do they provide an additional revenue supply for either artists or institutions, however. Many wind up in boxes rather than in people’s hands, and clog up artists’ studios and gallery storage spaces.

In keeping with the minimal waste ethos of the exhibition, the catalogue for Division of Labour, designed by Tetyana Herych, is a print-at-home or read-online exhibition resource.
About the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre

The Workers Arts and Heritage (WAHC) was created in the late 1980s by a dynamic group of labour historians, artists, and union and community activists who gathered together to discuss the need for a place where workers’ history could be celebrated. In 1996, after intense work by a volunteer board of directors, the then-Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Centre purchased the historic Custom House on Stuart Street in the north end of Hamilton. The building is ideally situated in the heart of a working-class neighbourhood.

WAHC aims to preserve, honour, and promote the culture and history of all working people. Their contributions—not only in Canada but worldwide—are showcased in art, exhibits, and performances at the centre. Their labour and advocacy has made this country a fair and vibrant place to live and work, and WAHC acknowledges their struggles.

The Custom House, built in 1860 to handle trade flowing through Hamilton Harbour and fanning out into Upper Canada, found itself in a long period of transition after the Customs Department left the building in 1887. Over the years, many different organizations have used it. It stood deserted until WAHC was able to purchase it in 1996. More than $1.5 million went into the restoration of this majestic historic building. It is a fitting backdrop for the pursuit of WAHC’s ideals in a number of ways: through research and development, educational programs, assisting with the documentation of histories, and by staging cultural events. WAHC is much more than a museum—it’s also a contemporary multi-disciplinary arts centre, working collaboratively with artists and the community.

Mission

To join our efforts and expertise with others in order to communicate and preserve, through artistic and creative expression, the historical, cultural and contemporary experience of working people in their diverse identities.

Vision

A Canadian society that recognizes, remembers and values the experiences and continued contribution of all workers, their unions, organizations, and communities to the quality of life we enjoy.
Acknowledgements

The Workers Arts and Heritage Centre acknowledges that the lands on which we gather are the original territories of the Huron-Wendat and Neutral, and later became the territories of the Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe, including the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, who all lived here long before the city we know as Hamilton was established. We are part of the “Dish With One Spoon” territory, which is a treaty between the Anishnaabe, Mississaugas, and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. Subsequently, other indigenous nations and peoples have been invited into this treaty of peace, friendship, and respect. As an organization, WAHC is committed to forging meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities, artists, and cultural organizations to facilitate and make visible, within the scope of WAHC’s mandate, the histories and cultures of the people that lived here before colonial settlement.

Suzanne Carte would like to thank all of the contributors and artists for their time and energy. A special shout out to Joan Carte, Wayne Carte, Su-Ying Lee, Michèle Pearson Clarke, Anna Carte, Barry Carte, Ingrid Mayrhofer, Leah Klein, Carol J. Anderson, Brett Bloom, Temporary Services, Residencia Corazón, Robert Steven, Rollin King, Nick Breton, Lexie Nelson, Sonali Menezes and Colina Maxwell—and would like to acknowledge all of the generations of steelworkers, textile-makers, and manufacturers, who built Hamilton and continue to fuel the local economy.

A big shout-out goes to the staff at WAHC—Hitoko Okada, Florencia Berinstein, Daniel Hill, and Tara Bursey—who went above and beyond to make this very time-consuming exhibition happen.

Thank you to all of the contributing cultural institutions and community members who believed in the project and want to create more spaces that minimize waste, including the Art Gallery of Burlington, the Art Gallery of York University, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Blackwood Gallery, Idea Exchange, Oakville Galleries, Trinity Square Video, Centre[3], Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, The Lettering Shop, Ryerson Image Centre, and WA&HC.

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Workers Arts and Heritage Centre

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#DivisionofLabour
#WagingCulture