

## **Access Report: Onsite Gallery**

Onsite Gallery is OCAD University's professional gallery with a mandate to present contemporary, Indigenous, and public art and design to "advance knowledge creation and stimulate local and international conversations on the urgent issues of our time" (Vision, Mandate, Mission, and Values Statements). Located at 199 Richmond St. West, the gallery is publicly accessible and free of charge. Onsite believes in "the power of art and design to positively transform social relations" (Values) and works to enrich the learning experience of students. Their Mission highlights an active attention to their "relationship with Indigenous territories, land-based values and the Calls to Action put forward by the Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (Mission). The gallery stewards OCAD University's Permanent Collection of Art and Design and is in the process of digitizing their collection. Onsite is not OCAD students' art gallery but rather provides mentorship and training to student monitors regarding gallery operations. They are a mid-sized gallery consisting of four full-time staff members, occasional part-time staff, and student monitors.

Onsite Gallery's current approach to access as articulated in their Vision, Mandate, Mission, and Values Statements includes the following keywords, concepts and phrases:

- *Sustainability*
- *Land-based values*
- *Indigenous sovereignty and actively addressing their relationship with Indigenous territories*

- *Creating welcoming and accessible spaces*
- *Multimodality*
- *Community participation, education, and critical understanding*
- *Programming that stimulate dialogues towards unsettling racism and colonialism*
- *Advance social justice*
- *Experiential learning*
- *Diversity, equity, and inclusion*
- *Respect*

Onsite Gallery follows OCAD University's accessibility policy which can be viewed at <https://www.ocadu.ca/about-ocad-u/disability-culture-accessibility>. OCAD U's policy is in accordance with the AODA which is written through a Human Rights lens. The gallery lacks a written access policy which addresses Deaf, hard-of-hearing, mad, disabled, and neurodivergent communities beyond the AODA. Staff at Onsite practice additional accessibility measures and share knowledge in situ and through mentorship; however, because these practices are not written in an official document, they run the risk of being practiced by only some team members or not at all in the future.

## Access Practices, Tensions and Gaps at Onsite Gallery

### Physical Space & Exhibitions: Access Practices

- Onsite Gallery is built in compliance with the Ontario's Building Code and is a wheelchair accessible gallery space.
- Automatic doors at the entrance.
- Wide and unobstructed pathways within the gallery.
- Onsite Gallery provides seating in the gallery and ensures wheelchair accessible spacing between chairs.
- Two accessible all gender washrooms.
- Access to masks and hand sanitizer, and frequent cleaning of high touch surfaces (as communicated on their website).
- There are content warnings for things such as flashing lights (when needed) in the gallery. Signage with text such as, *if you're sensitive to flashing lights, you may not want to enter the gallery; or, Onsite can provide glasses to wear*, has been provided.
- Artwork is hung at an accessible height.
- Large print handouts and 14pt gallery labels are used following various accessibility guides such as The Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition and Tangled Arts + Disability's Accessibility Tool Kit.
- Trigger warnings are shared alongside some artworks.

- Plain language is used in public communications.
- Captioning and/or subtitles are used for media and video art. When captioning is not included, a transcript is provided via QR codes and printouts.
- For visitors who do not have access to a smartphone, a hyperlink is written and provided for use outside of the gallery.
- Onsite collaborates in advance with exhibiting artists in order to ensure captioning and to review language use before the exhibit.
- Graphic design follows OCAD's access policy. Staff have used the section entitled Disability Art, Design and Culture with the access policy for reference guides.

### **Physical Space & Exhibitions: Access Tensions and Gaps**

- The "staff only" entrance is not wheelchair accessible.
- The lack of accessible space between the two front doors is accommodated by keeping one door open during events.
- Artwork descriptions on non-verbal media and video pieces do not always include captioning and alt text, ie: "relaxing music plays in the background."
- Audio tours or audio descriptions of artworks for blind and partially sighted community members (BPS) could be implemented. It is unclear if the artworks are currently accessible for BPS.

- A lack of wayfinding signage and guidance to support neurodivergent people navigating the gallery space.
- QR codes are only accessible for those with digital devices.

### **Workshops, Events, Programs and Lectures: Access Practices**

- Onsite Gallery provides stipends for transportation for some workshops.
- For student-focused workshops, Onsite Gallery often provides participants with stipends for food to ensure a variety of dietary needs can be met.
- Workshop facilitated by artist jes sachse for the disability community.
- More chairs and stools can be added as needed.
- ASL is provided for events regardless of whether a Deaf/hard of hearing person has signed up. At a recent event, they provided a previously recorded ASL interpretation and two in-person ASL interpreters.
- Onsite Gallery has a list of professional ASL interpreters with whom they work.
- Interviews uploaded to social media are captioned. If the interview includes multiple languages, captioning is provided in both languages.
- For pre-recorded lectures, ASL interpretation is also recorded and played during the lecture.
- ASL captioning is sometimes facilitated with student monitors as part of their learning and mentoring. Students have asked for this opportunity in the past.

- If there are interviews uploaded to Onsite's YouTube channel that are related to the exhibition, QR codes are available to access them in the gallery.

### **Workshops, Events, Programs, and Lectures: Access Tensions and Gaps**

- A lack of clarity on how and when to ask questions during a talk can create access barriers for neurodivergent people's participation.

### **HR for Staff: Access Practices**

- Scent-free accommodation has been provided upon request.
- An arts handling guidebook, Onsite Gallery Art Handling + Emergency Protocol Guideline: Student Monitors, was internally created for the onboarding of student monitors. The guidebook talks about safety concerns during the installation and de-installation of an artwork and art handling. For example, it addresses risks around ladder use and affirms that students can ask for alternative tasks if not comfortable with the process.
- A permanent staff member supervises student monitors. Student monitors work in the gallery as the first point of contact and also helps with installation, captioning, and other gallery tasks. The student monitor supervisor routinely checks-in with student monitors to build familiarity with individual access needs and to encourage students to advocate for themselves during exhibition prep, arts handling, installing, and/de-installing processes. Accommodations, such as not using the ladders or working with tools, are provided to students who

experience any restraints or reservations in handling artwork. For example, if a student monitor shares that they are not comfortable handling arts during installation, they are provided with other options, such as office tasks.

- Training of student monitors involves learning about the artwork, the exhibiting artist, and the exhibition curation before the opening. This includes all accessibility features.
- Onsite Gallery worked with OCAD's Office of Diversity, Equity and Sustainability Initiatives (ODESI) to create a Statement of Respect to protect students from any harassment in their communications with the public.
- If there is a question pertaining to artwork or accessibility from a patron that a student monitor cannot answer, they are encouraged to ask leadership to provide answers.
- Feedback from those who visit the gallery is received by student monitors and staff. It is responded to immediately through weekly meetings and debriefs.

### **HR for Staff: Access Tensions and Gaps**

- Onsite follows OCADU's Access Policy. This access policy is updated and changed regularly without notice. This requires staff to check in with the meta policy on an ad hoc basis, which can create inconsistency and differing understandings of what current best practices are. The AODA becomes the authority on access.

- Staff and students are required to self-advocate in lieu of an official access policy for Onsite.
- The Onsite Gallery Art Handling + Emergency Protocol Guideline: Student Monitors guidebook includes visual illustrations, detailed information, and is color-coded for ease of access to information. However, highlighting some information using only colour coding could be a barrier to colour blind students.

### **Archive and Collection: Access Practices**

- During the collection and archive's digitization process, Onsite provides alt text by relying on current best practices within the museum and museological and collections management community.
- Intellectual property/copyright within the collection belongs to the creator of the work, which means that students retain copyright. This requires OCADU to seek permission and/or pay for the reproduction of work and when including thumbnails of work in the database.
- Open storage was built by Onsite Gallery which consists of a large window that bridges the collection room with the gallery. This is visible when an exhibition is not being shown. This is an access point to the general public.

### **Archive and Collection: Access Tensions and Gaps**

- The timeline for digitizing the collection and archive is decades in the future. This is typical of large collections because it is a time consuming process.

- Consider ways of accessing catalogues in the short term or other ways of accessing the collections.
- Look to innovative collections access practices, such as Touch Tours and design (i.e. The V&A East Storehouse) for ways to expand access to the collection.
- Read the Alt-Text as Poetry Workbook by Bojana Coklyat & Finnegan Shannon for more on alt-text practices.

### **General Recommendations**

- The creation of a written access policy that is specific to the Onsite Gallery.  
Could look at texts created by Tangled Arts + Disability for guidance.
- Tangible and actionable plan for sustainable access practices to be implemented.
- Yearly updates incorporating recent up-to-date information and resources.
- Create pathways to hear feedback from disabled people with lived knowledge about access and accessibility.
- Hire disabled people and artists to facilitate workshops about access, accessibility and disability arts and culture for the student monitors and staff.
- Create budget lines for research and production on access, including outreach and events.
- Consider creating a role for access coordination and development.
- An audio-guided tour.

- Create guidelines for implementing a “relaxed” gallery space.
- Learn more about the use of AI technology in the creation of transcripts including social and environmental impact.
- Headphones for sensory overload.
- If none are available, supply devices to access QR codes and links to captions and transcription while visiting the gallery.
- Ongoing consultation with access activators for proactive measures.

### **Recommended Areas of Focus for Access Activations**

- Create a written access policy for Onsite Gallery and consider multimodal approaches for sharing it. Implement a regular process for consulting with, updating from, and speaking back to OCAD’s access plan.
- Onboard staff and student monitors with the new access policy.
- Create an Access Guide on how to create a comfortable space for neurodivergent community members, considering different modalities, such as visiting an exhibition, participating in a workshop or attending a guided tour.
- Write a step-by-step guide on how to work with disabled artists in a sustainable way. Prioritize disability leadership and a disability justice orientation. This could include points on programming and curation.
- Develop a template for student monitors on how to engage with community members with access needs.

- Create an accessibility template, checklist, or process for staff members to use when starting a new project.