



Canadian Association for
Conservation of Cultural Property
Association canadienne pour la
conservation et la restauration
des biens culturels



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Françoise E. Lyon
Chairperson, Board of Trustees

National Gallery of Canada
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To the attention of the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada,

The Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property (CAC) and the Canadian Association of Professional Conservators (CAPC) are deeply concerned about the recent loss of the Director of Conservation and Technical Research at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), closely following the loss of the Chief of Restoration-Conservation Labs position in 2021.

Risks to the NGC Collection

The NGC is specifically mandated by the *Museums Act* to “document, record, preserve, conserve and restore works of art and other museum material”. The preservation of art and objects of cultural heritage requires conservation professionals who develop their skill and expertise over many years of specialized training, mentorship, and experience. Conservators not only provide interventive conservation treatment to stabilize damaged artworks, but also identify and mitigate risks, preventing damage from occurring and slowing deterioration of collections. We believe that such significant cuts to the conservation department will ultimately place the NGC’s collections in peril.

Furthermore, the newly instated reporting hierarchy under Exhibitions minimizes the role of conservation to the service of exhibitions rather than as an overarching principle in the museum culture in order to preserve the collections, and further technical material knowledge of the collection. It is the role of senior conservation staff to represent the interests and wellbeing of collections to museum leadership. The elimination of these positions results in a lack of knowledge and understanding of conservation needs at the upper management level.

NGC's Role in Conservation Training

The NGC is specifically mandated by the *Museums Act* to “share the expertise of its staff by undertaking and sponsoring programs for training and apprenticeship in the professional and technical skills involved in the operation of other organizations with purposes similar to its purposes.” The NGC has historically been one of the premiere training institutions for conservators in Canada. For decades, NGC has hosted advanced internships and fellowships for emerging professionals specializing in conservation of sculpture, paintings, contemporary art, paper and photographs from Canada and abroad. Emerging professionals pursuing art conservation in Canada depend on the NGC as an institution championing post-graduate training in the conservation of art and cultural heritage. Moreover, the NGC's Director of Conservation has been instrumental in offering advanced training to mid-career conservators at the NGC, and in partnership with other Canadian art and heritage institutions.

In addition to these long established educational partnerships, in 2021 the NGC Conservation Internship Program for Diversity was launched to support students from diverse backgrounds in the field of conservation. The Director of Conservation and Technical Research had a leadership role in the implementation of the program, identifying and securing funding, organizing activities, and mentoring students involved. It has been inspiring to witness the NGC leading the nation promoting and facilitating diversity in the heritage field. We are deeply concerned about how the restructuring of leadership at the NGC – specifically within the conservation department – will affect both the diversity and skills of future Canadian conservators.

NGC Transparency and Commitment to Conservation

We wish to express concern about the lack of transparency in the termination of qualified expert conservators, who are highly regarded not just in Canada but internationally as well. There is an impression of disregard of the relationships and trust built over the years with other museums, institutions, donors, and lenders. Concerns from the conservation community have been pouring in to our own Boards, expressing feelings of dismay over the lack of respect and transparency surrounding this situation, particularly by government and Crown Corporation employees who fear the negative repercussions associated with speaking out.

We are requesting a response from the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Canada that addresses the following two points:

1. Transparency about succession plans and goals for restructuring within the NGC, specifically related to the Conservation and Technical Research Department.
2. A commitment from the Board of Trustees at the NGC to the ethical stewardship of the artworks in your care, which includes nationally and internationally set standards for conservation of collections.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding your future commitment to more transparency and conservation of the NGC's collections. We are available for consultation at your convenience.

Respectfully Yours,

Board of Directors of the Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property, and the
Board of Directors of the Canadian Association of Professional Conservators,
on behalf of the community of conservation professionals in Canada.