

**Edmonton Cultural Capital of Canada**  
**Rapporteur Final Report**  
**Amy Fung**

**What is a Cultural Capital?**

I was asked to come on board as a Cultural Capital rapporteur after one of the original four resigned due to her impending move to Toronto. This in a nutshell captures the energy of Edmonton's arts community: at once flourishing and constantly draining. Artists are continually producing then exiting; and opportunities arise for those who stick around. My own disposition about staying or leaving Edmonton is a constant thought, weighing the pros and cons at every turn. The pioneer spirit of "anything goes" is a welcome challenge for those who stay, but the inclusiveness of the community's reach is greatly discouraging. We are mostly making art for our friends and neighbors, and although I believe this is better than making art for those we *wish* were our friends and neighbors, the most important lesson given during this past year is that art cannot be sustained within a vacuum.

From the beginning, the media (and in turn, the public's) perception of Cultural Capital was dismal. Arts coverage in general has been dismal, so this was no surprise, but the depth of resources, engagements, and achievements throughout the year did not justify its own worth. This may lend to the larger issue of what "Cultural Capital" really means when a new city is selected every year based on broad and seemingly arbitrary guidelines. The impetus by the Edmonton Cultural Capital team to create a lasting legacy through a body of projects accomplished an immense amount of work, but it is at this end point where I must honestly question the value of spreading resources thinly over a large area with bare bones infrastructure in place to administer and propagate full support.

**Capital Identity Crisis**

Edmonton is trapped in a regional dialogue with ourselves and within Western Canada. Compared to Canada as a whole, and to the international scene, Edmonton exists neither here nor there because we have yet to identify ourselves beyond the transparently contrived label of "a world class city." The Explorations grant was the perfect fit to explore Edmonton's identity through art as a way to explore insightful thoughts and give tangible shape to our city's elusive essence. Individual artist grants over organization support was a controversial statement, and it remains unclear as to what sort of legacy or contribution will come from these projects beyond this generation's life time, but it provided the opportunity for at least 282 artistic and creative Edmontonians to think and engage with our city's identity through their artistic practice. Although only 34 individual Explorations projects resulted in the end, the numbers externalized the possibilities

that exist within our city.

Unfortunately, there remains no infrastructure in place to sustain the life and work of more than a handful of Edmonton-based professional artists. Once again the momentum flourishes and drains. \$540,000 was awarded this past year, but what of next year? Especially in relation to the grant's initiative to support emerging artists, I can only wonder if the cultural capital program has done more harm than good by creating this temporary period of being able to live off the fat of the land with no sustained support for the future.

The community art projects show a greater promise in the city's future, and it can only be hoped that they continue, but greater investigation into the roles and responsibilities of community art should be clarified internally as well as to the applying artists and the public audience. (Please see my posting on the Community Arts Celebration at the end of this report.)

### **Creativity and Artistry**

A major issue we have yet to civically address is the consistent misunderstanding between what entertainment does for the city and what culture does for a city. We have conflated the two to the point where all entertainment is classifiable as culture and all levels of culture is watered down as entertainment. Edmonton is at a status quo, where the idea of art is to enliven the city and enrich diversity, only there is yet to be a distinction between the value of art and the essence of art. We seem to be more preoccupied with the value that arts and culture can give to our city, property, and economy than the logistics into how and why arts and culture becomes produced. We are using art, rather than letting it use us as a means of discovery and exploration.

In its truest form, the arts does not transform into an object or product or thing, but exists as a limitless idea that communicates itself through a tangible medium. In essence, art shows us who we really are. (And if we want to push it, "good" art is a barometer of what we are capable of.) Our province has revealed their acknowledgment that art is good for its citizens, but it doesn't seem to be fully aware of how this "art" gets created. It is an industry that has absolutely no system for its workers, has one of the lowest working wages, receives minimum subsidies, and for the most part is one of the most under attended and misunderstood business sectors. I cannot confirm that Cultural Capital aided this glaring issue within Edmonton's arts community with anything more than a band-aid, but this is a long term problem that we need to approach in a systematic manner.

There is a consistent dialogue here about how art is an outlet for expression, a point that at once exposes our city's repression of creativity and the collective confusion

over artistry and creativity. All art is creative, but not all creativity should be interpreted as art. Creativity is self-serving and explorative, but once it goes beyond exercises in expression and into an investigation with a larger issue does it enter the realm of arts and culture. Otherwise, we just end up with “bad” art, and it’s no secret that Edmonton’s culture scene is plagued with bad theater, dance, visual art, public art *et cetera*. Edmonton’s cultural community is ill due to the lack of proper nutrition in the quality and diversity of art, and we are at another watershed moment following the Capital year.

The greatest achievement was by far the injection of international speakers such as selections from the Art & Science Symposium, John Holden, and Rebecca Gratz. These minds offered valuable insights into ways of thinking beyond art, urbanity, and politics. However, their insights may have been lost on a majority of deaf ears observed from the Q&A’s which failed to engage in a larger dialogue beyond civic misgivances. Consistently from the floor there was no common interest in pursuing the theoretical and social intricacies of arts and culture, and I can only postulate that it is because we, as a city and region, are still preoccupied with what art actually is and what art is suppose to do in terms of quantifiable measurements. We have not been interested in delving deeper into who we are and what makes us tick through artistic explorations of our surroundings. The prairie aesthetic and our northern location are rarely acknowledged, and this ties into our elusive identity as a city, as after one hundred years we remain unaware of a real identity. We have created an excessive marketing strategy in avoidance of looking at ourselves and our surroundings, and perhaps Cultural Capital will prompt some of us to look at our city and culture with fresh eyes and honest reassessments.

Looking back after \$925,000.00 in funds have been doled out over 60 projects, and after a parade of internationally recognized speakers and community leaders have shared their knowledge with our city, I can only report on the state of our cultural capital with reserved observations. One observation I overheard that has really struck me was from a Cultural Capital funded artist who attended nearly every event, opening, and lecture. In reference to seeing the same faces at every event, he said, “I didn’t meet a single new artist!” And though I cannot honestly agree with that statement that may or may not have been facetious, I can easily relate to its sentiment of inclusiveness and sameness that dulls our quality and standards. The title of “Cultural Capital” overshadowed the simple fact that Edmonton has always had the potential to be a desirable city; instead of conforming and compacting the best parts from elsewhere into Edmonton, it’s time we do justice to ourselves and present a realized identity of Edmonton to the world.

Amy Fung

**Website Blogs by Amy Fung**

## **Scythe**

*Scythe*, choreographed by Amber Borotsik in collaboration with partner Jesse Gervais, Jason Carnew and Linda Turnbull had the audience pleasantly murmuring in between bites of pie during its post-opening reception.

Whether you see *Scythe* as dance-based theater or narrative dance, or whether if that should even be an issue, the work as a whole was firmly rooted in an organic creation process between Borotsik *et al*, who but for Turnbull, all move fluidly and frequently between theater and dance. In turn, Turnbull was in good company as she stepped up in the narrative moments of this largely movement-based work.

The need to categorize the discipline is only an afterthought it seems, as the piece undoubtedly touched the audience and expressed an original voice that was highly conscious of its prairie surroundings. Setting the stage at a bare minimal, with an intricate lighting design by Kerem Cetinel, Borotsik makes the experimental highly accessible and estranges the status quo standards of performance into high art. Prairie life as portrayed by artists is finally catching up with contemporary times, and perhaps our classification of disciplines can also catch up with our contemporary multidisciplinary era.

## **State of the Art**

As a collaborative exercise between muralist Ian Mulder, graffiti artist Clayton Lowe and iHuman (along with the help and coordinative efforts of Andrea Lefebvre and Mike Debruin), State of the Art wrapped up on October 6th, 2007 as the winner(s) of their graffiti contest realize their designs on the south wall of the new iHuman building on 102A Avenue and 95 St.

As two workshops held over two September weekends, the culmination of the activities ended with a disappointing panel discussion on "State of the Art" between ihuman leader Wallis Kendal, outgoing councilor Michael Phair, Vue Weekly News Editor Ross Moroz, Clayton Lowe, and another fellow graffiti artist who was well-versed in the Brazilian graffiti scene.

I say disappointing because:

a) The panel was imbalanced. If we are to talk about public art in Edmonton, it would only be appropriate to have the new Public Art Director, Kristy Trinier, on site. From the existing Art and Design in Public Places, any one of the participating artists or Linda Wedman herself should have been present as the talk ended up being highly skewered. As there was an obvious issue with the quality of public art

on display in our city, talking with the people who put it there (instead of talking about them) would have helped.

b) Talking about doing graffiti often came across as redundant. Graffiti happens. The paradox of these street artists asking for public sanctioned space to do their work, at the same time bemoaning commissioned public art works, seems at best, trite. I do believe graffiti safe zones would benefit the city in various ways, but I also believe first and foremost that the graffiti (along with the public art) in this city has to get better. We can have all the space we want for art, but at the end of the day, it should be thoughtful and challenging art for the public to view. As the lecture about Brazilian graffiti even stated, the aesthetic here hasn't developed and for a transient medium like graffiti, a lack of studio space and community is not to blame.

c) Kendal, who was first to speak, set the tone with a brash statement saying that there is a simple solution to improving public art. There are never simple solutions and the tone set from that overstatement resulted in many more off-the-cuff remarks that did not progress 'the state of the art', but let it continue to fester in a 'us' versus 'them' mentality that only exists so long as we continue to manifest it aloud.

A more balanced and thoughtful discussion is certainly welcome in your comments.

*Comments (1)*

*Re: State of the Art*

*Posted on 10/10/2007 by Ms. Popular*

*I agree that there could've been some rounding out on the panel, but after asking some questions, found that specific individuals were invited but decline- le bummer. I think that the panel event needs to be put into a little context. As an assistant for the event, I was pretty nervous about the panel. Our target group/ participants had had little if no artistic background, and the idea of a panel would be extremely foreign to them. As well, with at-risk youth, it is difficult to engage them, much less get them all in a room together to listen to other people speak. So, to have actually a full room full of these kids showing so much attention and respect to each other and the panel, whomever was on it, was a big success in our minds. I think the way we approached it was to expose the participants to discourse, with the hopes of a few of them getting engaged in it. It was also a way to reinforce that their work was something topical and relevant to people outside of their social group, people of some sort of standing in the local scheme of things.*

*As for attending a more thorough debate on the state of public art and the means*

*in which groups and the city are going to address the situation- I would be DOWN. The problem is that sometimes it just feels like a bitchfest hey?*

## **Yann Martel**

Promoting his new book, *A 20th Century Shirt*, which he carefully explains to be a flip book of a novel and an essay, Yann Martel weaved through what can only be described as an infomercial for his new illustrated copy of Man Booker winner *Life of Pi* before moving onto his digression on how the Holocaust is not fictionalized enough. There is certainly a gap between event and representation, but the denominator of experience was glossed over by examples of fiction versus non fiction, which Martel aims to conjoin once again--and rightly so. Only fiction takes liberties with a lived experience that non fiction can only investigate, and in applying that approach to the Holocaust, Martel seems oblivious to the problematic nature of fictionalizing an event that is simultaneously denied by some, never to be forgotten by others, and completely unimaginable to many of his fellow humankind.

A famed and celebrated author, Martel is undeniably a gifted wordsmith: intellectual, insightful, but ultimately and unfortunately he is also an extreme elitist. His push for reading as a path to wisdom and greater experience may be fair enough to believe, but his idealistic vision only reaches the converted, and even then, has the ability to alienate. Poignant and patronizing, his outlandish and at times outrageous insinuations of PM Harper left many laughing, but his asinine approach left others reeling at the dumbfounded assumptions of art's role in society. Art in all its levels whether it is pure entertainment of low brow nature or challenging experimental works from a prestigious canon coexist together and should be acknowledged in equal weight for different audiences. One is not greater than the other, perhaps more accessible or stimulating, but both should be proudly consumed. Prefacing his nonchalant admiration for mindless entertainment art and dividing art against itself for the sake of elitism (and not even merit), Martel and similar thinkers are only further marginalizing culture from our already-unsatisfied society. Quipping that the mindless art of television or thrillers as samples of childhood shame and are today ingested as "candy," Martel implicates high esoteric art as the equivalent of broccoli, condescending the issue to extremes. Simply needed to achieve balance, Art in its many formations needs to be consumed in order to expand the palette. Feeling shame or guilty as Martel admits when enjoying "moronic" entertainment does not expand the dialogue. Rather, this perspective only creates a greater divide between who should enjoy Art and who can enjoy Art.

Martel beautifully captures the notion that "life is interpretation" -- that art can

help us explore life and its capabilities, and that sentiment was important to share in a city like Edmonton, a city experiencing tremendous growth and transition and not enough reflection of where this boom is taking us as a community. Edmonton is still quite young, and our sense of legacy is dwindling with the grab for fast and easy cash, but once we realize the need to invest in our own legacy will we begin to invest in the arts. Edmonton needs art to reflect our changing city and culture, and the only real stipulation is that the art being created be interpretive and reflective of the real lives that are happening, and be challenging, pushing all of our boundaries, and be more than just intellectually satisfying, but a creation that reflects a grain of shared experience.

### **Art & Science Symposium**

The unnatural separation of art and science came to a head in various incarnations during the Art & Science symposium held November 9 – 10, 2007.

Kicking off with a keynote by physicist & novelist Alan Lightman, the packed Bernard Snell hall in the Health Sciences Bldg, U of A campus, was given a lot to disseminate over the nature of practicality in relation to aesthetics.

Broken down as science being the purification and identification of a “thing” in contrast to art’s purpose of reflecting and conjuring a “thing” – the common denominator, according to Lightman, is that both require imagination and compulsion.

It has been a pit between art and science since the very term “science” came into our lexicon during the 19th century, as historically, art does not deny the presence of natural truths and neither can be said of the reverse. Lightman advocates the extremes in his very self, being an accomplished physicist who loves the poetic undulations of language, but through his dual means, he argues for art and science as different tools, to be used in different ways, in our metaphorically toolbox of knowledge. To understand or to even exist as being in the world, we ultimately need to work with both together. Though our minds may prefer one strength over another, as do our economy and social values, he left off with his personal thought that I construe as: arts and culture needs to better translate their inherent value into capitalistic value in our day and age. This is the era we live in, and art as we have known it, must lobby itself as equally important as economic gain.

This thought was referred to throughout the rest of the symposium.

Highlights included Alan Bleakley’s presentation on Peninsula Medical Science’s groundbreaking work with bringing in the ambiguous and abstract to the repressed

scientific world. Estrangement, he and others have argued via Shklovsky, jars you from your every day experience into experiencing something richer. [At this point, I can't help but think of Sheila Heti's interview with Dave Hickey that blasts this all from inside out in Nov/Dec's issue of Believer . . . but carrying on] Bleakley presents that art's nature for complexity and unpredictability is cause-and-effect tamed by science who tries to control and distill information. Pushing for ambiguity as a resource for exploration rather than a hindrance, the separation of art and science, along with body and mind, is at the crux of our modern civilization.

Also exciting is news that Peninsula is now working with Turner prize nominee Christine Borland where "audiences" may make incisions into faux cadavers and stitch them up again. Though all agreed that there has been an issue over the medical world being easily fetishized by art, the issue also exposes interesting intersects of who is allowed to practice what.

Day 2:

Ellen Dissanayake argues art as an innate biological ritual. Though there's no denying that every culture and creature in the animal kingdom has a ritual that is construed as artistic or creative, there is a gaping hole between the creation of art and art as life lived. Anthropologically, art was certainly more integrated with our everyday life, and one audience question wondered aloud what had replaced art as ritual in our lives? Technology. Technology has replaced, but that's not to say technology is not artistic expression, as it holds possibilities many of us can never dream of. Graduating from cave paintings to nanotechnology in how we communicate should be embraced if we are to understand art as a biological trait. Interesting, but perhaps too broad in scope and definition of "art."

Sid Fels, from west coast Media and Graphics Interdisciplinary Center (MAGIC), brought along short videos much to the glee of many audience members. [If you missed, you can perhaps see them here: [hct.ec.ubc.ca](http://hct.ec.ubc.ca) or [magic.ubc.ca](http://magic.ubc.ca)] Revered for his human-computer interaction work, biomechanical modeling and intelligent agents, his work is one the most base level: cool. An interactive human sized kaleidoscope that was eventually bought by a centre for autistic children (some of the children, who have never displayed interest in playing before, were found playing in front of the machine); biomechanical gloves that "speak" on motion (I imagine it works similar to the theremin, but more acute and designed to hit the human vocal range instead). On another level, Fels body of work exemplifies the combination, and not opposition of art and science into the creation of an experience that is truly extraordinary to the human body and mind.

## **Roberta Brandes Gratz & Tim Jones: Creative City Conference speakers**

Brought in from New York and Toronto respectively to discuss the issues of urban revitalization and renewal, Gratz and Jones certainly gave us some food for thought.

(A week before the civic elections, Gratz's comment on how we shouldn't turn our cities over to developers struck a chord. We may not turn anything over, but is it okay if we vote them in? Similarly, Jones asked opening example of how the then newly elected artistic mayor of Tirana, Albania, painted the city's run-down buildings in different colours mattered in revitalizing the former Communist country . . . questionable as painting initiative was doubtfully on the election platform, and support of the arts does not resonate with the majority of voters . . . )  
At this stage, Edmonton needs further development, but that is re-development of a city construct gone awry. We do not need to build out any further, we need to fill in existing empty pockets and focus on density and expand the diversity of this city if we are truly to grow into an urban place.

Living in another boom time, the legacy left behind by any era is its culture; what will Edmonton be remembered for 100 years from now besides one of the worst urban sprawls in North America?

Gratz addressed issues from the root and up, honing in on the need to create for the local before attracting the global. The idea that creativity will lead to revitalization is a conclusion in and of itself. Stepping back, where are the creative folks in this city going to live and create to make this city so creative and prosperous? That is the first issue we should address before marketing the city's (completely unsustainable) creative culture to its citizens and elsewhere. A city does not become world class by catering to the fluctuations of global standards set for some metropolitan paragon; a city gains the world's respect by retaining and nurturing its local gems and thus attracting visitors from the world over. We are losing our gems one by one and we need to focus more on the capacity to produce culture rather than jumping ahead to how this end product of "art" is so great for a city.

Jones, on the other hand, who is the CEO of Artscape, pushes for "art" as a trigger for revitalization of cities and cultures. Diversity was a key word for Jones' speech, as was "innovation"--leading to an overall gloss of what these words could possibly mean in context. He is successful at what he does, but I question the cracks in approach and not the noble intent.

It is admirable that Artscape has successfully taken over abandoned spaces in major urban areas and turned them into functional art spaces to revitalize the surrounding neighborhood, but Jones points to the psychological barrier that he thinks has been preventing art and diversity from overflowing into the popular mainstream--and this is where the lecture crumbles.

The viability of economy may have more to do with the proliferation of art and culture than our mental barriers, which does not directly implicate economics, but really should.

There are often questions and comments concerning funding and privatization. Artists want to know how to access private funds to continue their craft, but if treated as a business, you propose a detailed plan and budget with a projection on the anticipated return on investment. (I do believe that is how the public funding bodies have been created?)

Jone's use of "psychology" gives an easy and unexplained out for the public, but it is the psyche of artists and arts professionals that needs conditioning on the economic impacts of their craft.

If we continue to segregate art as just "enrichment" to our lives, we will forever be at the suckle of government subsidies and living off the charity pot of those other successful businesses.

In conclusion, the city of Edmonton needs greater diversity and density to grow. Edmonton has a great number of empty buildings, often blocks at a time, privately owned. Developers are sitting on land waiting for the arts to revitalize the area. Edmonton artists need space to create and produce.

We're so close, so far away.

### **Ted Kerr's Towards Seeing Everything**

Gathered inside The Artery, the newest alternative venue in town, Kerr invited panelists from all of the non-profit organizations he has worked with in his photo-based project, *Towards Seeing Everything*. Representatives from HIV Edmonton, Changing Together, Chrysalis, Mile Zero Dance and additional reps from PACE plus Kerr and moderator Karen Lynch headed an open dialogue about the intersection of art, social awareness and how and what it is to be creative.

Kerr's impetus to put a face to the non profit sector is literally represented in the piece for Changing Together, a NPF for newly immigrated women in Edmonton. The piece stands as polaroids taken of women born outside of Canada, with a short self-written bio consisting of their first name, place of birth, and their "role" in society. By far the strongest piece in the set of four, which also consisted of a photodocumentary of a day in the life of someone with HIV, a three panel series of developmentally challenged individuals in the workplace, and an abstract collage of the body, the Changing Together piece at once calls on our categorization of race, but at the same time surprises and challenges our notions of Otherness.

The challenge of creating art to reconcile social issues is too great a task, as art at its best cannot reconcile anything, but only push and pull us into different directions. The overuse of the word "creativity" was thoroughly annoying; the badgering that we are all creative beings is one thing, but to use one's creativity in a succinct and applicable manner is completely another issue that was not discussed beyond "how to creatively stay afloat with a small budget." Whether we are to semantically rename non profits as "public profits" eventually comes down to the bottom line, an issue that is too deep and really calls for greater arts lobbying. Tax breaks, incentives to invest and endow, artistic standards that reflect the diversity of the city, and spaces to produce and exhibit are just the major tips of a disintegrating iceberg.

The segregation of Edmonton art from social issues, from business, and from science, is very troubling. Kerr's project points to putting some of these things back together, but why have they been separated in the first place? This is the foremost reason why art is not valued in a city like Edmonton, because the integration of art into our daily lives has been nil. There are spots of decorative art, but that does not speak about anything to anyone. Since when has art existed as a form wholly unto itself? Art is a barometer, a document, and an interpretation of society. Any form of expression is a direct reflection of our times. The work may not always communicate anything profound, but then that is the separation between being creative and being an artist.

### **John Holden: Culture and Politics**

John Holden breezed through last week and shared his model understanding of Culture and its relation to Politics.

According to Holden, there are three value systems of Culture, the first being an Intrinsic Value. Intrinsic Culture often eludes quantification and cannot be measured for statistics; it is created in and for itself and therefore has the specter of elitism and consequently alienates the majority of public audiences.

The second is Instrumental Value. The "using" of culture to regenerate an area, an economy, and to recover a loss. Richard Florida is its best salesman. 118 Avenue is Edmonton's best example. In an other city, the area may be just described as "in transition"; but because of city council's emphasis on pushing art and artists into the neighborhood in hopes of pushing drugs and prostitution out (to where remains to be seen), 118 Avenue is slowly becoming the shadow spokesmodel of its own Revitalization Plan.

The third is Institutional Value. This is culture's interaction with the community at large, such as the day to day operations of libraries, museums, and other public institutions where the public can visit and engage with culture. This is Culture with a capital Mandate, and culture created under this value often loses sight of its own purpose in fulfilling policies.

In short, Holden mirrors his model after the economic model of public, private and state operated corporations. For a healthy and vibrant economy, a balance must be struck between the three. There cannot be sole focus on any one facet, as that will debilitate future growth. It is a delicately intertwined system, and if applied to Edmonton's culture scene, what we find is a very ill imbalance of culture.

Culture has been poorly funded by institutionally sanctioned grants, creating art that must follow "project" guidelines and work towards meeting and achieving preordained and systematized guidelines. Holden's personal example was that the non profit arts organization he chaired could only receive a certain grant if they made the project, a musical performance, relevant to youth crossing guards. This and its many variations happens all too often under local, provincial and even national funding models, limiting artistic direction and challenging the integrity of artists as independent professionals. The result is that the quality and vision of culture declines to fit itself into funding models and rhetoric, and the works produced can be dull and uninteresting for everyone from artists to audiences, but satisfies clinical political and institutional checklists.

Privately funded culture keeps most of our buildings, festival, and organizations afloat. Sponsorships have become so natural that we must call it the Syncrude NextFest and people automatically think TransAlta owns and operates the ArtsBarns. Companies become dollar dispensers and are no more connected to the community and the arts then they were before the stamp of their logo; and artists must spend their time jumping through more administrative hoops than working on their work. Because creating art is work, and currently, making art and sustaining your art are strained as two separate occupations--each requiring full time hours and two separate skill sets. But culture is seen as a frill, with a cool factor for those who may invest a minimum, and the industry is not taken seriously as a business

endeavor by businesses themselves.

Instrumental and institutionally sanctioned culture often loses sight of the quality of art generated, conflating spurts of unprocessed creativity as a work of art if they meet and satisfy a guideline. The intrinsic value of culture, of art, is this: That it allows us as flawed and inexperienced human beings to experience the world through a lens slightly different from our own. That Art challenges our beliefs and questions our understanding of the world, and makes us look at things from another perspective, with hopes of making us understand something greater than ourselves. This is also the value of science (only science can be measured). A quality work of art that fulfills all of Holden's value systems can only be created under limitless circumstances, where artists can be trusted to create without project barriers and suffocating guidelines. Art is not democratic. Its end result may be for the people, but its process should not have to suffer under a dozen different hands.

One audience question asked Holden what he thought about graffiti. Smartly sidestepping the question but ultimately answering it, he replied that he has experienced uncomfortable graffiti (those that are thoughtless and unprocessed like crude defamations), but that he has also experienced the witty and challenging works of Banksy right by his office in London, and that it was brilliant. And he is absolutely right. Graffiti can be brilliant, but in Edmonton, it has become such a politicized issue of private space that the question was asked not even about the artistic value of graffiti, but more likely about the legality of public art on private buildings. There may be a lot of poorly made graffiti in the city, but there is also a lot of poorly executed public and privately sanctioned culture. It is not just about throwing money into funding (which has just happened) and it is not just about throwing tax breaks at businesses (which has also just happened), and acknowledging the importance of culture in our society from leaders (ditto), it is about breaking down those barriers that view graffiti as harmful to a city (how can public art made out of free will and time be harmful?) and to begin valuing culture as so much more than a charitable hand out, a decoration, a quantifiable block of expression, and to begin understanding that culture is an investment of a community's well-being and long term identity.

### **Community Arts Celebration, Winspear Centre, March 15 and 16, 2008**

The Community Arts Celebration was an apt end for Edmonton's year as Cultural Capital of Canada. Apt in its sense and standard of community art as the benchmark for what constitutes as culture in this city. Edmonton very much favours the community spirit of artistic excellence, often conflating the two into one, and the weekend revealed many new questions into our city's identity.

In Paula Jardine's presentation as part of Saturday's morning symposium, the ex-Edmontonian showed slides from her heyday during the glory years of creating civic art. Rice Howard Way filled with 20 ft puppets created by Peter Field surrounded by towers of backlit dancers in office windows during an era of extravagant parades, alley art bombs, and fire sculptures against the city skyline. This was nearly 25 years ago, and yet, the Edmonton in those slides is almost unrecognizable to anyone who has ever tried to do anything publicly artistic for a civic audience. The freedom, support, and creativity initial to those late 70s-early 80s projects were rooted in a community spirit, a spirit that has been quickly weighed down with a funnel bureaucracy and stayed down.

In comparing the era in those slides with present day, it becomes obvious that all existing artistic projects have come into existence by trying to fit into a system that once set up, has not been updated. All day Saturday, I felt the fatigue and exhaustion of drifting from one project to the next, wondering where this was all leading and why these are individual projects happening within set time frames and what or if these cultural projects will even leave a legacy. To get some fresh air, I ended up taking a bus tour that went from point A to B to C as a prepackaged tourist would instead of an active citizen, culminating in the five person audience for "Words of Exposure," a sample of readings from Edmonton's first ever queer arts festival. At that point, I wondered if this umbrella of community arts wasn't segregating communities in the long run. The artists performing within Exposure's showcase were by far the most professional artists I had seen all day, yet their audience was one of the smallest turn outs. Perhaps the ideal would have been a huge turnout coming out for each community, and in so doing each community would have seen each other's communities, and it would really have been a celebration of each other, only then it wasn't until Sunday evening where snippets of each group were offered did this point almost realize itself.

Sunday in general was far more energetic than sleepy Saturday. The morning symposium on how outreach with non-mainstream communities can propel social change was a blunt dose of reality starting with Wallis Kendal of Edmonton's ihuman, the uplifting and eye opening changes of art's empowerment with UK based Michael Etherton, and the spiritual journey and congregation of Xstine Cook and Stephanie Hawking's White Buffalo project with inmates from a Southern Alberta correctional facility. The transformative power of art was the basic thread, and in the context of marginalized groups such as incarcerated individuals and oppressed youths, the healing power of art and culture shines a little brighter.

The next bright moment came during Linda Goyette's "The Story that Brought Me Here," where women writers and poets read aloud their first generational Canadian stories in several languages. The brightness was not just in their readings and their

shared experiences, but in the interruptive flow of other communities and cultures wafting through the Winspear Centre. From below the third floor of the Winspear, Cree drumming and chanting echoed up; on the other side of the room African drumming drowned everything else out as we before and behind the podium all waited obligingly for their song to subside; and the overall commotion of the building and people within the cluster of community arts shined through crystal clear.

Mention must also be given to Old Earth Production's "A Must-Be: Maskihkly Maskwa Iskewew." Putting forth the harsh reality of the institutionalization and its affects on Aboriginal women handed down from residential schools to the cycle of the penal system, the hurt that continues was felt strongly with the presence of one and others who is living and being within the damaged cycle. As the entire audience began in a communal prayer ceremony, and the off-mic performance/story telling began, the trauma of our collectivity, afflicting one, afflicted all.

The one question that consistently came up over the weekend, often posed by the same person, was the aesthetic standard of community art. True, community art differs in aesthetic and presentation from institutional art, often for a certain lack of professional polish, but the Community Arts Celebration presented a mixed bag of professional and community artists. At the end of the weekend, the overarching theme seemed to override the artistic merit or professionalism of any of the artists, but the connection and impact arts and culture has on our lives and communities. Our culture will go on as the legacy and memory of our times, and a city's cultural output is its greatest achievement to the outside world. This point has been hammered home many times, but we seem to suffer from a reoccurring short term memory. With the new hype of Richard Florida's latest book, "Who's Your City?" buzzing through the lips of all urbanites, the argument that a city's cultural diversity and open-mindedness is not just why people drift to certain cities, but why people stay and live and produce in those cities.

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