



**THE AGO'S WOMEN'S ART INITIATIVE**  
7<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Impact Report



# THANK YOU FROM STEPHAN JOST

As we celebrate the AGO's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary—and even more importantly, look towards the future—I am mindful of the role of our community and philanthropy in the museum's success.

The AGO's Women's Art Initiative (WAI) is a shining example of how a dedicated group of supporters can make a bold vision a reality. This extraordinary group of women have helped audiences at the AGO and beyond discover women artists whose work stands with the best the world has to offer. I am deeply grateful to Founding Chair Michelle Koerner for her commitment to this remarkable initiative—and to everyone who has been a part of WAI.

As a WAI donor, your support for women artists helps the AGO to lead global conversations from Toronto. At a moment when we are reflecting on the museum's history, I am more excited than ever about the history we will make together in the years to come.

Thank you.

**Stephan Jost**

**Michael and Sonja Koerner Director, and CEO**



# A MESSAGE FROM MICHELLE KOERNER

The 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the AGO is an opportunity to reflect on the impact of women throughout the museum's history—including all we have accomplished at the Women's Art Initiative. Since 2017, this committed and passionate group has galvanized support and recognition long deserved by women artists, and helped move the AGO Collection towards gender parity.

Women have played a key role in shaping the AGO, from Harriet Boulton Smith's bequest of the original building to the generations of women who have given their time and expertise. WAI has expanded on this proud tradition, supporting several major exhibitions featuring women artists and developed by women curators—and helping acquire major works by Rebecca Belmore, Haegue Yang, Hito Steyerl and Denyse Thomasos and others for the museum's permanent collection.

We have been a catalyst for change and strong advocates for women artists. We have moved the dial. There has been a shift in the internal conversations at the AGO, with increased commitment to women artists. Over the last seven years, an average of 50% of our exhibition programming has featured art by women, and acquisitions of work by women artists have increased across all collection categories. As we move towards our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2027, we will continue to build on the success of our innovative model to cement a lasting legacy at the AGO.

With enormous thanks,

**Michelle Koerner**  
**Founding Chair, Women's Art Initiative**



# WAI PHILANTHROPY MODEL

The AGO recognizes the need to correct the underrepresentation of women artists in public art museums and collections throughout history. The museum has pledged to move our exhibitions and collections towards gender parity, and the Women's Art Initiative is a vital partner in this important and ongoing work.

WAI donors make a philanthropic commitment to provide sustainable, multi-year funding to support women artists at the AGO:

- \$15,000, payable over three years (\$5,000/year)
- Funds are used to support one major project each year that showcases women artists
- Major project support often includes research, exhibitions, publications and acquisitions

WAI donors also have access to unique events and engagement opportunities with artists, curators and other leaders in the art world, while building meaningful connections with women who share their vision.



## WAI: IMPACT AT A GLANCE

**56**

Current WAI members – and counting

**\$1,500,000+**

Committed by WAI to date in support of women artists and their work at the AGO

**8**

Major projects featuring women artists—  
and organized by women curators—  
supported since 2017

**5**

Works of art acquired with  
the support of WAI since 2017



***Please see the following pages for more details about projects supported by WAI since 2017.***

# WAI SUPPORT: 2024/25

## MAKING HER MARK: A HISTORY OF WOMEN ARTISTS IN EUROPE, 1400 - 1800



Visitors in the *Making Her Mark: A History of Women Artists in Europe, 1400 - 1800* exhibition.

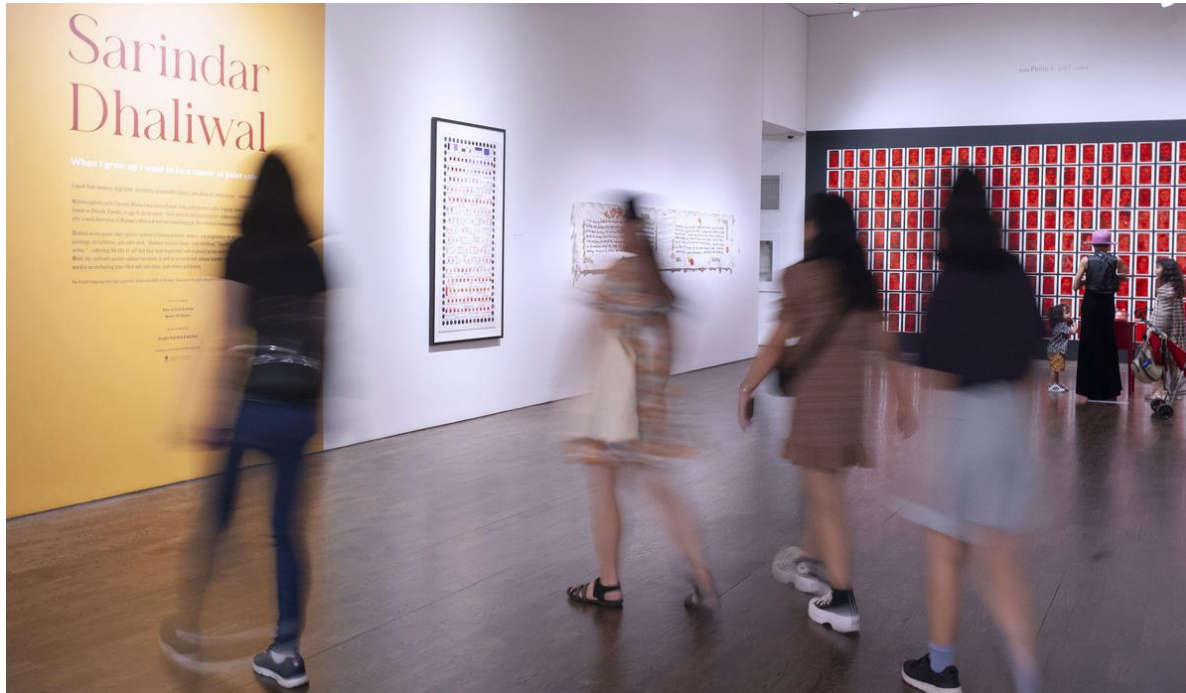
This extraordinary exhibition celebrated the central role of women's creativity in European culture over four centuries. In doing so, it shone an overdue spotlight on women artists and prompted a meaningful reconsideration of how audiences view this period of art history.

The 230-plus objects on view—including ceramics, cabinetry, embroidery and more—demonstrated the creativity and craft of well-known figures such as Sofonisba Anguissola and Judith Leyster, as well as amateur artists and anonymous factory workers.

Co-curated by Dr. Alexa Greist, AGO Curator and R. Fraser Elliott Chair, Prints & Drawings, and Dr. Andaleeb Banta, Senior Curator and Department Head, Prints, Drawings & Photographs at the Baltimore Museum of Art, the project yielded important research, engaging public programs and a beautifully designed catalogue. The publication sold out its first print run in Baltimore and earned prizes from the Alcuin Society Book Design Awards and the Independent Publisher Book Awards, as well as the Canadian Museum Association's honour for Outstanding Achievement for Excellence in Research.

## WAI SUPPORT: 2023/24

### SARINDAR DHALIWAL: *WHEN I GROW UP I WANT TO BE A NAMER OF PAINT COLOURS*



Visitors in the *Sarindar Dhaliwal: When I grow up I want to be a namer of paint colours* exhibition.

A senior woman artist born in India and raised in the U.K. and Toronto, Sarindar Dhaliwal explores notions of migration, identity and feminism in her art. These themes engaged visitors throughout her first major solo exhibition at the AGO, which spanned the artist's 40-year career and showcased her virtuosity in a variety of media.

The product of five years of close collaboration between Dhaliwal and Renée van der Avoird, Associate Curator, Canadian Art, this exhibition succeeded in introducing diverse audiences to her stunning work and honouring her immense contributions to art and culture in Toronto and the world beyond.

# WAI SUPPORT: 2017 – 2020

## Rita Letendre: Fire & Light (2017/18)

For WAI's inaugural year, the group committed its support to *Rita Letendre: Fire & Light*, the first major museum retrospective outside of Québec on the acclaimed artist. The exhibition featured close to 30 of Letendre's paintings, several of which are held in the AGO Collection. In addition to the presentation, WAI helped enable the publication of a stunning exhibition catalogue.

## Rebecca Belmore: Facing the Monumental (2018/19)

The *Rebecca Belmore: Facing the Monumental* exhibition and catalogue were presented with the help of WAI in 2018. The exhibition showcased more than 20 sculptures, installations, photographs and performance-based works, including many that were on view for the first time in a Toronto museum. The AGO's first acquisition with WAI funds, Belmore's sculpture *Tower* (2018), also marked the group's first foray into bringing a significant work by a woman artist into the AGO Collection.

## Hito Steyerl: This is the future (2019/20)

In 2019, the WAI supported *Hito Steyerl: This is the future* which included an exhibition and publication, as well as the acquisition of Steyerl's multimedia installation *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die* (2016). The artist's boundary-blurring practice, which blends sincerity and satire, sparked important conversations about globalization, power structures, technology, politics and other relevant contemporary issues.



Top: Rita Letendre observes a dance performance by Tanya Lukin Linklater in the *Rita Letendre: Fire & Light* exhibition space

Bottom: Visitors in the *Rebecca Belmore: Facing the Monumental* exhibition

# WAI SUPPORT: 2020 – 2023

## Haegue Yang: Emergence (2020/21)

WAI's generous support of *Haegue Yang: Emergence* helped the AGO introduce the dazzling work of the unique South Korea-born artist to our audiences. Yang, a former AGO Artist-in-Residence (2019), explores themes including migration and displacement in her use of everyday domestic objects and materials. Though the exhibition's run was interrupted by the pandemic, her ideas continue to resonate through a catalogue publication and the commissioned work *Woven Currents – Confluence of Parallels* (2020), which still hangs above the café in the Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Sculpture Atrium.



## Fragments of Epic Memory (2021/22)

For the first time since its inception, WAI chose to support a project focused on multiple creators rather than a single artist. *Fragments of Epic Memory* was the first exhibition from the AGO's Arts of Global Africa and the Diaspora department, led by Dr. Julie Crooks. In addition to the presentation and its associated catalogue, WAI also contributed to the commission of *Feeding Trafalgar Square* (2021). This work by Toronto's Sandra Brewster was displayed alongside art by a variety of artists of Caribbean heritage, including women Ebony G. Patterson and Nadia Huggins.



## Denyse Thomasos: just beyond (2022/23)

The full potential of WAI's impact was evident in its support of this extraordinary presentation, which was recognized as one of the world's Defining Exhibitions of 2022 by [ARTNews](#). Thomasos's monumental canvases—including *Arc* (2009), acquired with WAI funds—enthralled our diverse audiences, while the extensive research shared through the exhibition catalogue helped the late Trinidadian-Canadian artist assume her rightful place in the contemporary art canon.

Visitors in the *Fragments of Epic Memory* (top) and *Denyse Thomasos: just beyond* exhibitions

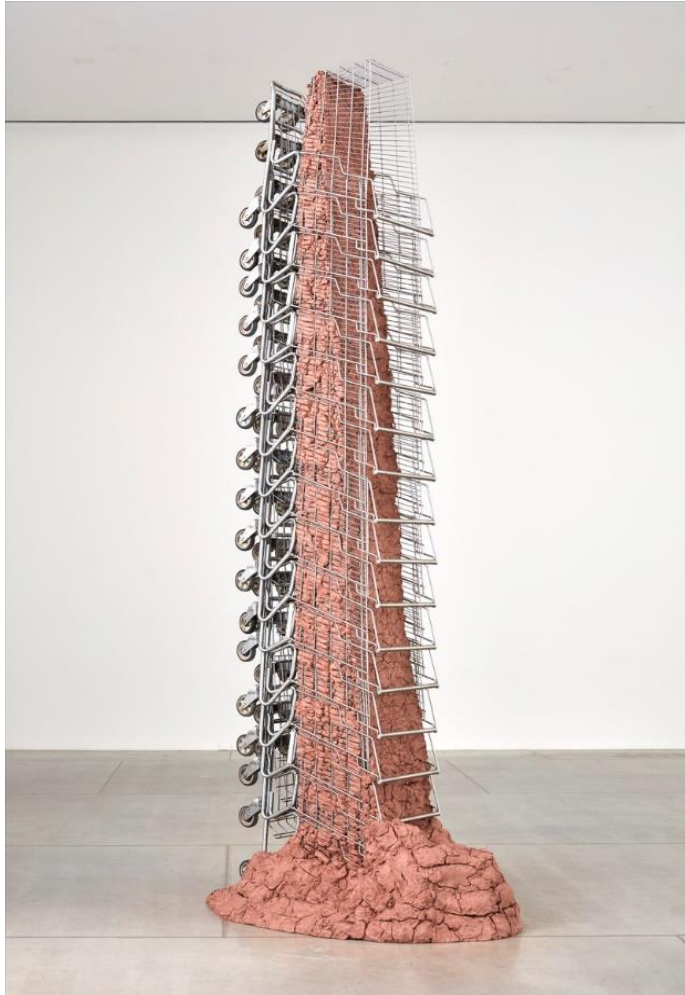
# PROJECT SUPPORT SUMMARY

Over the past five years, WAI support for major projects has included funding for exhibitions, research, publications and acquisitions, and helped audiences at the AGO and beyond discover important women artists.

PROJECT	Exhibition	Research	Publication	Acquisition	Tour
<b><i>Rita Letendre: Fire &amp; Light</i></b>	•	•	•		
<b><i>Rebecca Belmore: Facing the Monumental</i></b>	•	•	•	•	•
<b><i>Hito Steyerl: This is the future</i></b>	•	•	•	•	
<b><i>Haegue Yang: Emergence</i></b>	•	•	•	•	
<b><i>Fragments of Epic Memory</i></b>	•	•	•	•	•
<b><i>Denyse Thomasos: just beyond</i></b>	•	•	•	•	•
<b><i>Sarindar Dhaliwal: When I grow up I want to be a namer of paint colours</i></b>	•	•			
<b><i>Making Her Mark: A History of Women Artists in Europe, 1400 - 1800</i></b>	•	•	•		

# THE AGO & WAI: COLLECTING WOMEN ARTISTS

The following pages showcase the significant acquisitions supported by WAI since 2017, which have enhanced the depth and breadth of works by women artists in the AGO Collection.



Above: Sandra Brewster, *Feeding Trafalgar Square*, 2021. Photo-transfer on wood. Commission, with funds from the Women's Art Initiative, 2021. © Sandra Brewster

Above left: Rebecca Belmore, *Tower*, 2018. Shopping carts, wire mesh and clay. Overall: 475 × 114.3 × 182.9 cm (187 × 45 × 72 in.) Purchase, with funds from the Women's Art Initiative and AGO General Acquisitions Fund, 2019. © Rebecca Belmore. Photo: AGO

# THE AGO & WAI: COLLECTING WOMEN ARTISTS



Above: Hito Steyerl, *Hell Yeah We Fuck Die*, 2016. Installation view from *Hito Steyerl: This is the future* exhibition at the AGO, 2019.

Above left: Haegue Yang, *Woven Currents – Confluence of Parallels*, 2020. Aluminum venetian blinds, powder-coated aluminum hanging structure, steel wire rope, LED tubes, cable. Art Gallery of Ontario. Purchase, with funds from the David Yuile and Mary Elizabeth Hodgson Fund, Eleanor and Francis Shen, the F.P. Wood Fund, Women's Art Initiative, the Ivey Foundation Contemporary Art Endowment Fund, the Elcy Wallace Fund, the Janet and Michael Scott Fund, the Contemporary Circle Fund, funds from Sandra and Leo Del Zotto, the Jay Smith and Laura Rapp Contemporary Art Fund and the Molly Gilmour Fund, 2020. © Haegue Yang. 2020/22

# THE AGO & WAI: COLLECTING WOMEN ARTISTS



Denyse Thomasos, *Arc*, 2009. Shopping carts, wire mesh and clay. Acrylic on canvas, 335.3 × 609.6 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario. Purchase, with funds from the Women's Art Initiative, 2022. © The Estate of Denyse Thomasos and Olga Korper Gallery. Photo: AGO. 2021/356

## THE AGO'S COMMITMENT

The AGO is dedicated to supporting women artists through the full range of our exhibitions, collections and programming. WAI has been a dynamic partner, directing its philanthropic impact to major projects on an annual basis.

In the past year alone, the AGO has presented exhibitions by artists such as Sonia Boyce, Pacita Abad, June Clark and Jinny Yu, and welcomed works by women like Sarindar Dhaliwal—among many others—into the AGO Collection.

This momentum continues in the coming months with exhibition projects including *Jesse Mockrin: Echo*, *Faye Heavyshield* and the return of Yayoi Kusama's *INFINITY MIRRORED ROOM – LET'S SURVIVE FOREVER*.

In addition, we are only two years away from the opening of the Dani Reiss Modern and Contemporary Gallery, an expansion that will significantly increase gallery space for presenting art—including works by the world's most exciting women artists.



Visitors in the *Pacita Abad* exhibition

## WHAT'S NEXT

The AGO is thrilled that Women's Art Initiative will continue amplifying the voices and perspectives of women artists with its support of *Joyce Wieland: Heart On*, opening June 21, 2025.

The abstract paintings, textile works and visionary films Wieland made over her 40-year career reveal an artist whose feminist convictions are expressed with humour and courage. Her work integrates the personal and the political and explores themes ranging from sexuality, nationalism and the environment.

Visitors to this exhibition will encounter several works that have never previously been seen by the public. Accompanying the exhibition is a publication highlighting new research into the Canadian artist's life and career, edited by co-curators Georgiana Uhlyarik, Fredrik S. Eaton Curator, Canadian Art and Anne Grace, Curator of Modern Art at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

As the AGO celebrates its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, WAI looks forward to celebrating this next step in our journey of supporting women artists—one that will help shape the AGO and the world of art for generations to come.



Joyce Wieland, Canadian, 1930 - 1998, *Time Machine Series*, 1961. Oil on canvas, Overall: 203.2 x 269.9 cm (80 x 106 1/4 in.). Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift from the McLean Foundation, 1966 65/25. © National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

# WAI EVENTS

Women's Art Initiative donors gather regularly to connect with artists, curators and one another. In addition to curator-led tours of every WAI-supported exhibition, some event highlights over the past seven years include:

## 2017-18

- A conversation with artists Julia Dault, Kara Hamilton and Meryl McMaster at the home of Michelle Koerner

## 2019-20

- Tour of solo installations by artists Sandra Brewster and Margaret Priest

## 2020-21

- Virtual tour of the studio of artist Mickalene Thomas

## 2022-23

- Five-year celebration of WAI, featuring a panel discussion with Sophie Hackett, Curator, Photography, and artists Suzy Lake and Laurie Kang

## 2023-24

- Celebration of Sarindar Dhaliwal's exhibition opening, featuring a panel discussion with the artist

## 2024-25

- Opening reception for Sonia Boyce's installation, *Feeling Her Way*, with the artist





THANK YOU

***“Philanthropy has been vital to the AGO throughout its 125-year history—including the extraordinary contributions of the Women’s Art Initiative. As we look towards the next 125 years, we are so excited by the exhibitions and acquisitions that WAI and the Gallery will realize together.”***

**- Jessica Bright, Chief, Exhibitions, Collections & Conservation**

**AGO**