

Ontario Museum Association Awards of Excellence 2021 Recipients

Distinguished Career Award of Excellence

The OMA Distinguished Career Award of Excellence is presented to individuals who, over an extended period of time, have created a lasting and meaningful legacy within the Ontario museum community.



Karen Bachmann
*Director and Curator, Timmins Museum:
National Exhibition Centre*

“I experienced firsthand Karen’s dedication to the museum community, her commitment to innovation, and her natural leadership skills... She is undoubtedly one of the most respected museum professionals both in Ontario and across Canada”.

*—Gerry Osmond, Director of Arts and Heritage,
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador*

A proud graduate of the Ontario Museum Association Certificate in Museum Studies, Karen Bachmann began her career at the Timmins Museum in 1986 as the Programme Supervisor and swiftly moved to Director/Curator just two years later. She has seen the Museum through a number of challenges, including its shut down in 2008, relocation and reopening in 2011, and renovation in 2017. Throughout her 35+ years at the Museum, Karen has worked on over 600 temporary and travelling exhibitions.

Karen has been actively involved with the professional museum community; she joined the OMA Council in 1989 and became Council President in the mid-1990s, before returning again in 2011. Karen has also served on the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) Awards committee for many years, and was President of the CMA in 2018-2019. Over her career, Karen has participated in a number of OMA and CMA conferences, speaking on topics ranging from travelling exhibitions to museum re-org projects. Recently, she was instrumental in the creation of the City of Timmins’ Municipal Heritage Committee and continues to work with them on local heritage preservation

issues. Her work at the Timmins Museum has helped strengthen our knowledge of local history and she hopes to continue to do so for a few more years!

Promising Leadership Award of Excellence

The OMA Promising Leadership Award of Excellence is presented to emerging professionals, of any position or institution, who have shown promising leadership within the museum community. An emerging professional is an individual within the first ten years of their professional career.

Hailey Hollingshead

“Hailey works with heart, grit and undeniable talent. She is an asset to any institution or company that is blessed to work with her and have her on board”.

—Vanessa Lio, *Coordinator of Heritage and Collections for the Museum on the Boyne*



Hailey is a graduate of the Museum Management and Curatorship Program at Fleming College. She is confident and unafraid to raise problematic issues, even when there may be an institutional and budgetary effect. While working as an intern at the Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives (PAMA), Hailey discovered a mould issue. She was vocal, clear, and direct in her communication with facilities staff, arguing for the need to install dehumidifiers to mitigate against the rising humidity.

Hailey was subsequently hired as a Museum Curatorial Assistant at PAMA to plan a collections move. Over the course of four months, Hailey took the lead cleaning artifacts, working closely with another Curatorial Assistant, and remediated approximately 6% of the Collection. Hailey's leadership in treating and handling the Collection was evident throughout the abatement work. She trained two senior colleagues on abatement procedures when additional team members were brought in to work on the project.

Hailey's work planning and executing a collections move from temporary offsite storage was instrumental in PAMA's move in Winter 2021. She also showed initiative and promising leadership when, on her own initiative, she developed a rehousing plan for PAMA's textile collection that was significantly affected by the mould outbreak. Hailey brings a positive attitude to all her endeavours, and has proved to be a leader amongst her peers and a mentor to students entering the field.

Volunteer Service Award of Excellence

The OMA Volunteer Service Award of Excellence is presented to individuals who have made a significant contribution to a museum or museums through volunteer work.

Katharine Bourgon

Volunteer, Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery

“Katharine’s work demonstrates her passion and dedication to [Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery] and her willingness to do what it takes to get the job done and above expectations. Katharine Bourgon has always demonstrated a strong work ethic and constantly maintains a positive and affable attitude.”

—Alexandria Nelson, Independent Consultant



Katharine Bourgon is a former professional dancer, adjudicator, choreographer, and instructor, who has been a tireless volunteer at the Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery for the past two years. Since the Gallery hired a new Executive Director in 2018, Katharine has been a key volunteer in the implementation of many changes including a reimagining of programs, exhibitions, collections management, and their role within the local and national communities.

One of the key projects Katharine worked on was organizing and cataloguing the Gallery’s exhibition files. This project created an important resource that would help current staff and community researchers to better understand and access the nearly 30-year history of the Gallery. In addition, Katharine also worked as an Archives Assistant through a grant received by the Gallery to digitize all the permanent collection object files, enabling these documents to be accessed online and connected to our database. When her hours under the grant ran out, Katharine volunteered to continue the project, scanning documents and images for the more than 1000 items in the Gallery’s permanent collection.

Katharine’s incredible impact on the Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery has been immense and wide-reaching across the entire institution, and her contributions are sure to be felt by both staff and members of the public for many years to come.

Award of Excellence in Community Engagement

The OMA Award of Excellence in Community Engagement is presented to individuals, institutions, corporations, or agencies that have increased the community's engagement with the museum or institution.

Hamilton Civic Museums and Civicplan *Reimagine Our Museums*

WOW Distinction

“Reimagine Our Museums strengthened the City of Hamilton by creating a holistic and honest dialogue about the role of civic museums in the community. This included everything from issues of representation in the exhibits to museum-specific operational issues that needed to be improved. The result is increased trust between the City and community as well as a stronger understanding of the community's attitude, interest and support of the civic museums.”
— Donna Reid, The Hamilton Store



City of Hamilton staff worked alongside the consulting firm Civicplan to create the *Reimagine Our Museums* project – a city-wide engagement project designed to inform the development of the City of Hamilton's Museum Strategy. The project was intended to guide the long-term direction and sustainability of the seven City of Hamilton Civic Museums and their supporting programs. In this project, a diverse number of engaged communities in the Hamilton region were consulted, including more than 1,700 residents, stakeholders, and visitors; more than 200 groups participated to help inform the future direction of the Hamilton Civic Museums. These groups included Indigenous groups, educational institutions, LGBTQ+ organizations, conservation and environmental organizations, youth and senior groups, among many others so that every voice could be heard in the project. There were 20 points of engagement, either, in person or online, which gave more opportunities for people to engage in at least one part of the six month process. Workshops, visitor and non-visitor surveys, exit interviews, community events, and focus groups were among the key activities that were used in the project. At the centre of the communications strategy was a project website (reimagineourmuseums.ca) that acted as a hub for project information, updates and engagement. The project identified the need for external engagement with broader communities to gauge what opportunities and priorities should drive future planning, including the potential for a new Hamilton Museum.

Reimagine Our Museums has been designated as this year's WOW Distinction recipient. The Awards of Excellence Committee considers the work undertaken by Hamilton Civic Museums and Civicplan as a profound and impactful template for future strategic planning projects within our sector.

Community Engagement—Honourable Mention

Niagara Falls History Museum

The Poppy Project

“As impressive as the final product was, it was the process by which the project was created that brought together countless volunteers from within our municipality and well beyond our city limits and national borders. The foresight of tapping into resources such as professional artists and ironworkers for design and technical expertise, a local knitting guild for their skills and passion for their craft, the fire department with their specialized equipment to help with the installation, and the dedicated staff and volunteers, allowed for the realization of this exquisite project on a scale the likes of which Niagara Falls has never seen.”

—Debra Jackson-Jones, Niagara Falls-based artist and art educator



Niagara Falls History Museum’s *The Poppy Project* started off with a simple idea—to use the symbol of the poppy to celebrate Remembrance Day in a creative and public way. Knowing they couldn’t do this alone, the Museum reached out to local stitching guild Stick’N Needles to help make their imaginings into a reality. The result was a large-scale collaborative community art project that exceeded all expectations.

The project began with a simple call to the local Niagara community for poppy donations, to be created from knit and crochet patterns provided by Stick’N Needles. As the pandemic hit, their supporters grew online, with eventually over 11,600 poppy donations from over 280 individuals coming from every province in Canada, twenty-five different states in the United States, as well as Denmark and New Zealand. Heartfelt letters accompanied many of the poppies, dedicating them to family members who fought and died in the numerous wars that have affected our world.

Volunteers and members of the community came out to the Museum to attach the poppies to recycled baseball netting to be displayed around the building. Text panels around the site shared with the public the story of the Poppy Project, and encouraged donations to the Poppy Trust with the Royal Canadian Legion. The intent is for this installation to be displayed for years to come every Remembrance Day, and the sheer number of donations has allowed the display to expand to other museums within the Niagara Region.

Award of Excellence in Exhibitions

The OMA Award of Excellence in Exhibitions recognizes the creation of an exhibit. Examples may include permanent, temporary, traveling, or virtual exhibitions.

Canadian Automotive Museum *Oshawa's Automotive Community*

“Taken as a whole [the research materials] demonstrate the commitment of the Canadian Automotive Museum to telling the “whole story” at museological and historical research standards worthy of a much larger institution—the “whole story” of not only a business but a community—including women, people of colour and recent immigrants whose stories are often omitted from exhibits of corporate history.”

—M. Christine Castle, retired museum education and interpretation specialist



The Canadian Automotive Museum’s exhibition *Oshawa’s Automotive Community* traced the origins, growth, and community impact of Canada’s largest automotive assembly plant, the GM factory located in Oshawa, Ontario. The facility had roots that extend to the carriage factories of the 1870s, and defined the economic and social fabric of Oshawa and the surrounding region. *Oshawa’s Automotive Community* was formulated and launched during the uncertainty that surrounded the announcement of the closure of the Oshawa assembly plant at the end of 2019. With the city’s future as an auto manufacturer in doubt, the Museum sought to document this multi-generational story from a community rather than a corporate perspective.

The conventional history of the auto industry in Oshawa is one dominated by traditional narratives put forward by corporate and union interests. This exhibit sought to tell a more complete story by shifting the focus away from the life of General Motors Canada founder Sam McLaughlin, and the traditional narratives of Oshawa compiled in the 1950s and 1960s. Using critical museology, the exhibit examined the vital role of women workers in a predominantly male-dominated industry from the 1890s to the present day, as well as presented authentic oral histories from female auto employees, people of colour, and the recent immigrants who formed much of GM’s employee base in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. The exhibit includes a bilingual [digital exhibit](#) and a semi-permanent physical display.

Oshawa’s Automotive Community is an impressive example of an exhibition created through an innovative reimagining of the Canadian Automotive Museum’s long-held narrative. The effort that the staff contributed to finding unheard stories to highlight is commendable and a positive example of museum scholarship.

Award of Excellence in Programs

The OMA Award of Excellence in Programs recognizes programming that creatively engages new audiences, or provides exemplary service to existing ones.

Christina Sydorko, Oil Museum of Canada
Oil Museum of Canada Virtual Education



“This work allowed OMC to expand their reach beyond the local communities and across international boundaries. A body of knowledge previously inaccessible to students due to logistics of travel is now accessible...this new and valuable work will have a long-lasting contribution to the knowledge base of the local community, region, and beyond.”

—Jordan Clark, Manager, Oil, Gas & Salt Resources Library

Located in Oil Springs, the Oil Museum of Canada has in the past had a difficult time engaging local schools. As a result of the ongoing pandemic closures, the Museum’s Educational Program Coordinator Christina Sydorko has begun offering synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities to educators, as well as video content for the general public. Christina used these new circumstances as an opportunity to successfully overhaul the site’s educational programming, engaging with local school boards and teachers to develop a wider range of program opportunities that link to curriculum in areas the Museum had not explored in the past. Christina formulated, researched, developed, and delivered this entire suite of virtual programming as she is the sole member of the Oil Museum’s Education Department.

Prior to March 2020, the Oil Museum had been investigating how best to reach a greater audience, as the Museum is situated in a rural area which creates transportation barriers for those who wish to visit the site. Since Christina’s overhaul in March, the Oil Museum’s educational content has reached over 10,000 people through curriculum-linked school programs, YouTube videos and 360° tours of the Museum. The offerings are accessible to at-home learners, virtual classrooms, and the wider at-home public through several online platforms. Over 4,000 students in 403 classes have participated in live programs online, while over 3,000 educators have accessed and downloaded curriculum-linked programs from the website, either as a visitor or as part of an organized educational program. The programs have had an impact beyond the local school board, with Christina delivering Live Sessions across 17 different school boards in Ontario, and 3 in Alberta. At a time when travel is limited and the Museum is not seeing their usual visitor numbers, it’s incredible that Christina has been able to present programs not only throughout Ontario, but also inter-provincially, and internationally.

Programs—Honourable Mention



Thunder Bay Art Gallery *Virtual Field Trip for Piitwewetam: Making is Medicine*

“The Thunder Bay Art Gallery demonstrates significant innovation and leadership with the challenging adjustments to virtual education... *Piitwewetam: Making is Medicine* allows students to learn about and connect to

Indigenous way of life in their community and provides a sense of normalcy in [the] midst of a global pandemic. The gallery’s ability to adapt and produce an excellent and informative program brought to light on a virtual stage is inspiring.”

—Sydney Maki, Teacher, Lakehead Public Schools

Hosted on their website, Thunder Bay Art Gallery developed the Virtual Field Trip (VFT) series. a selection of video-based tours and workshops designed to bring art education directly into classrooms for Grades 1-12. The *Virtual Field Trip for Piitwewetam: Making is Medicine* features a video tour of the artwork, interviews, a step-by-step video art lesson, a set of digital slides of artwork, an art lesson plan, and printable activities to extend learning. The exhibition honours the memory of Piitwewetam (Rolling Thunder), also known as Jesse Gustafson, who died in 2015. The Gallery’s curators created a space that honours the insightful stories and art of the Gustafson family. Through their beautiful work, the Gustafsons teach us that creating helps with the process of grief and loss. The Gallery’s education program connects with the curriculum and allows students to engage with art through reflection, analysis, and exploration. Students were able to learn about the diverse and vibrant cultures of Northwestern Ontario and Canada through exhibitions and develop new skills through hands-on art making workshops.

The Virtual Field Trip for Piitwewetam: Making is Medicine has allowed the Gallery to bring a richly personal exhibition – along with the artists’ intentions, stories and traditions – to a young audience. The VFT program was released June 1, 2021 and has reached over 7,000 students to date. This virtual art experience exemplifies the spirit behind the Gallery’s mandate: “to advance the relationship between artists, their art, and the public, nurturing a life-long appreciation of contemporary visual arts among visitors to Thunder Bay and community members of all ages.”

Award of Excellence in Special Projects

The OMA Award of Excellence in Special Projects is presented to individuals, institutions, corporations, or agencies for innovative initiatives, new approaches, or techniques that advance the museum profession.

Diefenbunker: Canada's Cold War Museum *Safeguarding Our Shelter: Visitor Experience Renewal at the Diefenbunker: Canada's Cold War Museum*

“All of this remarkable research, planning, development and execution work by the Diefenbunker has resulted in an extraordinary learning experience for school children, seniors, new immigrants and visitors from afar. The project and the end result are a model for how other museums in Canada and globally can update their exhibition galleries/public spaces and visitor experience.”

—Robin Etherington, Executive Director,
Bytown Museum



Between 2019 and 2020, the Diefenbunker: Canada's Cold War Museum completed a major permanent exhibition redevelopment. Using a holistic approach, the Museum made significant exhibition improvements throughout its interpreted spaces and improved the design and accessibility of its narrative and interpretive plans. In addition to consulting a panel of Cold War experts to create new interpretive text panels, this expansive project introduced new colour-coded bilingual signage and the addition of Braille translations. The Museum also expanded their Audio Guide from two languages to eight languages, effectively including communities that otherwise might be excluded. One of the new languages added was Inuktitut, which was meant to not only address the TRC's Calls to Action, but to ensure the museum is accessible to its Inuit community and allowing them to learn about the site's history in their language. These audio guide devices themselves are also free to use, include accessible raised features, and contain accessible video and closed-captioned content.

Through their commitment to improving the visitor experience at their Museum, the Diefenbunker: Canada's Cold War Museum has gone above and beyond standards within the museum profession to create a truly welcoming, and still improving, environment for the public to engage with the Museum in ways that may not have been possible before. Their vision of a future-oriented museum is one that is barrier-free and welcoming to all; it provides new and different ways of considering content, opening the door for further interpretation and dialogue. The Diefenbunker is paving the future for museums, setting a standard within the field for inclusivity.

Special Projects—Honourable Mention

King Heritage & Cultural Centre

Stories of King: An Online 3D Exhibition with Treasured, Inc.

“King has taken their heritage beyond the walls of the KHCC and strengthened their image within the local and museum community...It has also improved community engagement by presenting local history in small bites, in



a fun new format, delivering history to those who may never venture into a real-life museum and capturing new audiences for the KHCC. An impressive accomplishment for a small team of two.”

—Shawna White, Curator, Aurora Museum & Archives

While many institutions looked to quickly turn in-person exhibits online due to Covid-19 closures, the King Heritage & Cultural Centre (KHCC) staff wanted to create an entirely new exhibit designed specifically for an online audience. Through their partnership with Treasured, Inc., a new company specializing in online exhibits, the 2 person staff at KHCC developed [Stories of King: An Online 3D Exhibition](#).

The exhibition was developed to share short stories of King Township’s history that, while fascinating, did not supply enough content to complete a full exhibition. Each story was a small exhibit sharing the remarkable lives of some of the people who have lived in King, from a pilot who survived twelve days on an arctic ice floe to a schoolteacher who reported on her own hostage taking. The multi-media mini exhibits included video clips, audio clips, and links to further reading. The addition of 3D functionality allowed for a completely new and immersive approach to telling these stories. The 3D virtual format allowed visitors to “walk” through the gallery and guide their own experience, rather than just reading online content. They could also interact with virtual artifacts, archival images and texts.

Prior to *Stories of King*, the most recent online exhibit created by the KHCC was an exhibit about local schoolhouses for the Virtual Museum of Canada in 2012. Without the phone call from Treasured that sparked this partnership, it is unlikely that KHCC staff would have had the capacity to create an online exhibit in 2021. The impact that this project has had on KHCC has been particularly significant due to their small size, and their partnership with Treasured, Inc. has been beneficial to expanding the museum’s impact within the community.

Award of Excellence in Publications

The OMA Award of Excellence in Publications recognizes the creation of materials that are distinguished by their design & content. Examples may include books, catalogues, brochures, blogs, posters, and other printed or digital materials.

The Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery

Public Art in Glass—Publication

"Culturally transformative, socially engaging and intellectually provocative, the public art pieces selected for the exhibition challenges the viewers to see public space in a new light. The catalog and the exhibition create a first-of-its-kind opportunity to give the audience an unseen perspective into the conceptual and technical development of these large-scale art pieces."

—David Correa, Assistant Professor, University of Waterloo School of Architecture

The Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery's publication for [*Public Art in Glass*](#) accompanied their exhibition of the same name. The exhibition presented the works of Warren Carther (MB), Sarah Hall (ON), Robert Jekyll (ON), Michèle Lapointe (QC), all recognized nationally and internationally for their public art work, yet rarely, if ever, exhibited in galleries and museums. As these artists rarely have had the opportunity to display their public glass art in a cohesive setting, the *Public Art in Glass* publication created a highly unique contribution to the appreciation and understanding of Canadian glass artists.

Today, public art focuses on public values, and this exhibition intended to showcase the creative process behind public art. The creative process of each work was illustrated with drawings, maquettes, architect plans, and written descriptions. The publication also included three essays looking at both the glass artists and the historical importance of glass art in public spaces.

The publication was available in person during the exhibition, and due to several requests was also offered in a downloadable digital version. This popularity speaks to the uniqueness of the publication, and the valuable additional learning opportunity it provided in tandem with the in-person exhibition at the Gallery.

