

Staff Report

Report To: Tom Thomson Art Gallery Advisory Committee
Report From: Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator
Meeting Date: September 2, 2026
Report Code: AG-26-003
Subject: September 2026 Update Report

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report AG-26-003 respecting the September Update Report, the Tom Thomson Art Gallery Advisory Committee recommends that City Council receive the report for information purposes.

Highlights:

- On July 11, the Gallery opened three new exhibitions including a two-part presentation of Robert Markle's work in collaboration with the Durham Art Gallery, as well as a solo exhibition by Michelle Peraza, and the second half of a two-part collection exhibition focused on the changing seasons, Forecast.
- Camp TOM: Summer Art Adventures was at full capacity with 116 registrations. It continues to be a major highlight of the Gallery's summer programming season, welcoming children ages 8–12 for 7 weeks of creative exploration.
- In August, the Gallery welcomed artist Michelle Peraza for two special workshops inspired by themes of identity, ecology, and collaborative artmaking. The first workshop took place with the Camp TOM participants and the second with the public.

Vision 2050 - Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: Celebrating and Embracing Culture - Uplifting all aspects of the City's local culture, including Indigenous Peoples' cultural

histories and practices, the cultural histories and practices of all residents, and formal institutional arts and culture.

The Tom Thomson Art Gallery plays a vital role in advancing the City's Strategic Priority of Celebrating and Embracing Culture by serving as a dynamic hub for artistic expression, learning, and community connection. Through exhibitions, collections, and public programs, the Gallery uplifts cultural histories and contemporary practices, amplifies the diverse cultural voices of local and regional residents, and strengthens appreciation for formal institutional arts and culture. By stewarding significant Canadian artworks alongside community-driven initiatives, the Gallery fosters respect for cultural heritage, encourages dialogue across cultures and generations, and creates inclusive opportunities for residents and visitors to engage meaningfully with the arts. In doing so, the Tom Thomson Art Gallery contributes to a vibrant cultural ecosystem that reflects the City's shared values, deepens understanding, and enhances quality of life for all.

Previous Report/Authority:

N/A

Background:

This report provides an update on the Gallery's programming and operations, highlighting current and upcoming exhibition and engagement initiatives as well as operational items.

Visitor Engagement and Audience Reach

Prepared in accordance with the Gallery's Standard Operating Procedure:

Year-to-Date Attendance Summary Update –

January 1 to July 31, 2026

Facility Data

Visitors Counted Manually and Engaged by Gallery Staff: 5468

Exhibition Visitors via Laser Door Counters: 7332

Facility Visitors via Laser Door Counters: 10,618

Data was collected and reported in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedure for attendance tracking.

Visitors counted manually are those who entered the facility and had direct engagement with staff at the front desk. The Exhibition visitor data was collected from the laser door counter at the entrance to the Gallery's exhibition spaces. During busy periods, staff are frequently unable to connect with each person entering the facility, so the laser counters are helpful especially when comparing year-to-year trends.

Gallery Visitor Demographics YTD

(of those visitors* engaged by staff):

- 8% showed their OPEN Card
- 18% were first-time visitors
- 35% were from Owen Sound
- 37% were from Grey-Bruce-Simcoe
- 10% were from GTA
- 2% were from Kitchener-Waterloo/Guelph/Cambridge
- 3% were from London-Southwest ON
- 2% were from Hamilton-Niagara
- 2% were from Eastern Ontario
- 4% were from outside of the province
- 3% were from outside of the country
- 30% were seniors*
- 38% were adults*
- 25% were under 18*

*does not include 7% attending specialized programming (ages unknown)

Attendance to July 31 shows growth in manually counted visitors, and in laser counted visitors to exhibitions and the facility. Total tours and school tours, Gallery Night at the Movies, and Engagement-Outreach also reflect strong growth over previous years.

Visitor attendance continues to show strong engagement across exhibitions, public programming, and community partnerships. Attendance data is collected through both front-desk visitor engagement and laser door counters, providing a more complete picture of overall visitation, particularly during peak periods when staff are unable to interact with every visitor.

From April through July, the Gallery experienced a particularly active period of community participation. Highlights included the celebration of the Upcycle TOM project with children and families, the Magic of Children in Arts display, an artist talk by Liz Zetlin connected to *More Than Human – a year in my*

garden, participation in One World Festival, the successful launch of CAMP TOM, the opening of the summer exhibitions, and strong community engagement during Doors Open Owen Sound.

Year-to-date visitor demographics indicate continued success in welcoming a mix of local residents, regional visitors, and tourists from across Ontario, Canada, and internationally. The Gallery continues to attract first-time visitors while maintaining strong engagement with the local community. Visitors represented a broad age range, with adults, seniors, and youth all well represented, reflecting the Gallery's diverse programming and community reach.

April - July Highlights:

Upcycle TOM Project

174 children and their families celebrated the Upcycle TOM project with a reception at the end of April.

Special Projects and Community Partner Engagement

207 visitors viewed the Magic of Children in Arts display in the studio space.

50 visitors attended artist Liz Zetlin's talk in conjunction with her exhibition *More Than Human - a year in my garden*.

539 students, families and educators visited the Gallery for One World Festival day June 17.

68 children have participated in the first four weeks of CAMP TOM in July.

58 patrons visited the Gallery for the opening of its summer exhibitions.

264 people visited the Gallery during Doors Open Owen Sound.

Balancing Collection Strength and National Relevance

Exhibitions

On July 11, the Gallery opened three new exhibitions:

Markle: *Content is Just a Glimpse*

Continuing to September 12

Content is Just a Glimpse is presented simultaneously at the Durham Art Gallery as a two-part exhibition exploring the life, work, and creative circle of Robert Markle.

Following a motorcycle accident in 1970, Robert and his wife and lifelong muse, Marlene Markle, left Toronto and settled in Grey County. This exhibition traces the people who informed Markle's work—his muses, artistic peers, and creative community—while reflecting on his legacy.

Markle was an Indigenous Canadian painter, sculptor, writer, musician, and educator whose work became a defining presence in postwar Canadian art. Emerging from Toronto's experimental art scene of the 1960s and associated with the influential Isaacs Group, Markle developed a highly personal visual language centered on the figure and informed by gesture, colour, and improvisation. His work gained national attention following controversy surrounding Eros '65—a 1965 Toronto exhibition of art that was raided by police and sparked a broader public debate about censorship and artistic freedom in Canada.

Michelle Peraza – *Tú eres mi otro yo: Mundos, Mundo, Worlds*

Continuing to October 3, 2026

This exhibition presents new works by Peraza, a second-generation Latin American Canadian of Cuban and Costa Rican descent whose practice explores postcolonial identity, interconnection, and transformation. Developed during a two-year period of recovery following a serious car accident, the works emerge from Peraza's personal journey of healing and draw on traditional healing approaches that blend Indigenous Mesoamerican, African, and European medicinal knowledge with spiritual beliefs and ceremonial practices.

Using amate paper, medicinal plants, precious metals, hand-dyed textiles, and hand-stitched fibers, Peraza creates intricate works that speak to repair, resilience, and care. Guided by Mesoamerican worldviews and a deep reverence for celestial and earthly rhythms, she approaches artmaking as a process of re-worlding—extending personal healing into a broader consideration of how individuals, communities, and the natural world might heal, reconnect, and flourish together.

Peraza holds a B.A. from Western University, a B.F.A. from OCAD University and an M.F.A. from York University. She has completed residencies internationally and nationally, including at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Canada). She has exhibited in public and artist-run galleries including Maison de la Culture Claude-Léveillé, Niagara Artists Centre, Cambridge Art Galleries, Sur Gallery, TAP Centre for Creativity, Guelph Civic Museum, Tom

Thomson Art Gallery and upcoming at Neutral Ground. She teaches in the Faculty of Art at OCAD University.

Forecast – June to January

Continuing to June January 2, 2027

The second half of a two-part exhibition, *June to January* builds on Tom Thomson's devotion to observing seasons and weather patterns. It explores our bodily and emotional responsiveness to the atmosphere and the subtle ways we sense and adapt to weather. In addition to Thomson's work, a salon-style hanging of selections from the Gallery's collection traces the progression of the seasons in step with the exhibition running dates. Visitors are invited to tune their perceptions to the rhythms of changing skies and light. Situating us within the present, we are also compelled to consider how our awareness of familiar weather patterns—and their disruption—has evolved in a changing climate.

Education and Youth Programming as a Core Priority

July – September 2026 Initiatives:

Canada Day Community Engagement

The Gallery's Education and Engagement team joined the City of Owen Sound's Canada Day celebrations at Kelso Beach Park on June 30 and July 1, 2026, hosting a TOM pop-up tent featuring creative activities for families and visitors. The activation included temporary tattoos, colouring stations, and interactive art activities that encouraged community participation and connection. Despite the hot weather, the team created a welcoming and engaging space for attendees, helping families stay cool while celebrating together. Their enthusiasm and creativity provided a positive representation of the Gallery, strengthening the TOM's presence at community events and supporting the City's Canada Day festivities.

Summer Exhibition Opening Reception

On Saturday, July 11, 2026, the Gallery celebrated the opening of three new summer exhibitions. Bringing together contemporary and historical perspectives, the exhibitions explore themes of transformation, creativity, healing, and connection to the natural world. The opening reception provided visitors with an opportunity to experience the new exhibitions and to meet artist Michelle Peraza.

Camp TOM 2026 – Summer Art Adventures

Camp TOM: Summer Art Adventures continues to be a major highlight of the Gallery's summer programming season, welcoming children ages 8–12 for 7 weeks of creative exploration, outdoor discovery, and hands-on artmaking. With strong registration numbers and enthusiastic participation, Camp TOM continues to be one of the TOM's most successful youth engagement programs.

Final Camp TOM 2026 Numbers:

- 7 weeks of summer art camp programming
- 116 campers registered (full capacity)
- Ages 8–12

Each five-day camp week features a new theme inspired by nature, contemporary artists, and the work of Tom Thomson. Campers explore the Gallery, create in the TOM studio, experiment with a variety of materials and techniques, and develop their own creative voices through painting, printmaking, sculpture, clay, and 3D art explorations.

A highlight of Camp TOM 2026 has been the group's visits to Harrison Park, where campers connect with nature through hiking, sketching, observation, and outdoor exploration. These experiences allow campers to gather inspiration directly from the landscape and reflect on the ways artists, including Tom Thomson, have been inspired by the natural world.

The Education and Engagement team continues to provide a welcoming and engaging environment where campers build confidence, make new friendships, and experience the joy of artistic discovery.

Artist Workshops – Michelle Peraza

On August 14 and 15, the TOM welcomed artist Michelle Peraza for two special workshops inspired by themes of identity, ecology, pollinator plants, and collaborative artmaking.

August 14 – Camp TOM Artist Workshop

Camp TOM participants took part in a private workshop with Michelle, exploring storytelling, nature observation, and creative expression through hands-on art activities.

August 15 – Public Workshop: SHIMMER & Re-Worlding

Community members were invited to participate in an inclusive, mixed-age creative workshop exploring connections between identity, nature, and

collective creation. Using natural materials, tree bark paper, and Indigenous-made BEAM paints, participants created artwork inspired by local ecosystems and personal stories.

The collaborative artwork created during the workshop will be featured in the Gallery's Atrium during late August and September, allowing visitors to experience the shared creation and continue conversations around art, nature, and connection.

Upcoming Events, Programming, and Outreach

On September 18, the TOM will once again host the Cobble Beach Concours d'Elegance Welcome Reception, continuing its third year as a community partner for this prestigious event. The reception welcomes Concours guests, vehicle participants, visiting judges, and City of Owen Sound staff to the Gallery for an evening celebrating art, community, and automotive excellence. This partnership continues to strengthen the TOM's role as a cultural destination and gathering place within the region.

As the summer season continues, the TOM is preparing for a busy fall schedule of exhibitions, educational programming, community partnerships, and public engagement opportunities. School tours, workshops, and community programs remain an important part of the Gallery's commitment to connecting audiences of all ages with art and creative learning.

July–September 2026 continues to be a season of strong engagement, creativity, and connection at the TOM. From community celebrations and the opening of new exhibitions to the success of Camp TOM, upcoming artist-led workshops, and ongoing partnerships, the Gallery continues to provide meaningful opportunities for visitors of all ages to experience art, learning, and creativity.

Gallery Night at the Movies:

Gallery Night at the Movies will kick off its 29th season in September with the film THE CHRISTOPERS starring Ian McKellen.

In conjunction with the Toronto International Film Festival, The TOM's Gallery Night at the Movies film series is one of our most successful and long-running programs. As an Official Film Circuit Centre, Gallery Night at the Movies provides local filmgoers an opportunity to see films that may not otherwise be available in our region, and supports the Canadian film industry by providing filmmakers and distributors the opportunities to extend the

reach and theatrical runs of their releases into the smaller communities across the country.

With a season running September to April, Gallery Night at the Movies brings the best of Canadian, foreign and independent film to the region, featuring highlights from TIFF and the Film Festival Circuit. Our films are screened at our local Cineplex Theatre, Galaxy Cinemas in Owen Sound, offering a true cinematic experience with all the amenities. Season passes went on sale August 7 and are going well.

There are three screening times available - 1pm, 4pm & 7pm. Passes for 9 films are \$150 each, or \$135 for Supporters Circle Members, and are available for purchase at the Gallery or online.

Single movie tickets for each screening go on sale 2-3 weeks before the screening date.

Fall screening dates: September 14, October 5, October 26, November 9 and December 7; films to be announced shortly. Four dates for Winter/Spring 2027 are yet to be confirmed.

2027 – Celebrating a Milestone Year for Tom Thomson

Looking ahead, next year (2027) represents 150 years since Tom Thomson was born and it coincides with the Gallery's 60th anniversary. We continue to work with Algonquin Outfitters and Ontario Parks on plans to further celebrate this milestone year, with the concept of an open call for a mural project which will be installed at the Canoe Lake location where Thomson died. The Gallery is also working with Algonquin Outfitters to develop a unique limited line of merchandise featuring Tom Thomson and his work, including concepts for Buffs and graphic T-shirts. Here in Owen Sound, the Gallery's Curator is planning an exhibition that celebrates the intertwined lives and artistic dialogues of Tom Thomson, J.E.H. MacDonald, and Thoreau MacDonald, featuring a newly acquired piece from Thoreau MacDonald's estate that highlights the enduring resonance of their shared creative legacy. Tom Thomson and J. E. H. MacDonald had a close artistic and personal relationship that played a key role in shaping Thomson's development as a painter. They met in Toronto around 1912–1913 when both were working at the commercial design firm Grip Limited. MacDonald, who was already an established artist, quickly recognized Thomson's talent and encouraged him to pursue painting. He became both a mentor and a friend, introducing Thomson to other artists who would later form the Group of Seven. MacDonald was deeply affected by Thomson's death and later helped

preserve and promote his legacy, ensuring that Thomson's work remained foundational to the story of Canadian art.

Collections Stewardship and Conservation Progress

Work is nearing completion in Vault 5, which is being reconfigured as a dedicated collections resource space. The Gallery's reference library, accession files, and archival materials have now been consolidated into a single location, improving access and efficiency for staff while also providing a more organized space for researchers and members of the public who wish to consult these resources by appointment.

Framing of the Gallery's recently acquired Tom Thomson paintings is complete. These new frames provide improved long-term protection for the works while enhancing their presentation for future exhibitions.

Looking ahead, staff are beginning to plan a fundraising initiative in 2027 in conjunction with the celebration of Tom Thomson's 150th anniversary. The campaign will seek to raise funds to continue upgrading the frames of additional Tom Thomson paintings in the Gallery's permanent collection that remain in need of conservation-quality framing, helping to ensure their preservation for future generations.

Fundraising and Revenue Development

The Gallery has been notified that its application to the Ontario Arts Council's Ontario Arts Operating Fund was successful, maintaining the Gallery's current level of operating funding.

This year's result is particularly significant as it followed the Ontario Arts Council's major overhaul of its operating grant programs. Beginning with the 2026 funding cycle, the OAC consolidated its previous discipline-specific operating grants into a single operating fund with a standardized application and assessment framework for organizations across the province. Hundreds of organizations across Ontario were assessed through a single unified operating program for the first time, rather than within separate discipline-based streams. That structural change alone underscores the increased competitiveness of maintaining funding. Applicants were required to demonstrate organizational strength, artistic impact, community engagement, financial sustainability, accessibility, and equity through a more comprehensive and competitive review process. Maintaining the Gallery's funding level through this new province-wide process reflects continued confidence in the Gallery's artistic leadership, public impact, and

organizational capacity, while preserving a stable source of provincial operating support for future programming. On August 20, MPP Paul Vickers visited the Gallery to deliver the official news and to tour the exhibitions.

As previously noted, the Gallery was successful in achieving a four-year operating grant spanning 2026-2029 (total funding \$280,000, \$70,000/year) from the Canada Council for the Arts.

The Gallery received \$4000 from the Community Foundation Grey Bruce to support the expansion of Upcycle TOM in the community.

The Gallery was successful in receiving funding for three summer student positions from Young Canada Works totalling \$18,900. These positions were dedicated to planning and leading PD Day art camps and summer art camps.

Planning is underway for Palette to Palate 2026 and a save the date poster has been shared on social media and Artefacts. The event will celebrate regional art, food, and drink at the Gallery on Saturday, November 7. This signature fundraising event offers guests an inspired evening immersed in artwork, complemented by locally crafted food and thoughtfully paired local beverages. The experience will be further enhanced by auctions, providing attendees with the opportunity to support the Gallery while taking home some exceptional pieces and experiences.

The Fundraising Coordinator is preparing sponsorship packages to support this event, as well as other visible opportunities. Several sponsorship requests for art education programs and the studio were submitted to local businesses, but the feedback has been that this year is very difficult for them financially.

We launched the 2026 Box Art Project: A Remix, in partnership with the Durham Art Gallery. This project revives a collaborative fundraiser first presented by our two galleries in 1986. We're inviting artists to transform a simple wooden box into an original work of art. The completed boxes will be exhibited and auctioned at the Durham Art Gallery from August 22 to September 12, with proceeds supporting arts programming at both Gallery

locations. An update on the 2026/27 Calendar Campaign is contained in the attached Fundraising Team update.

Analysis and Options:

Overall, this report highlights a season of strong public engagement, ambitious programming, and continued organizational momentum. The Gallery experienced sustained growth in visitor attendance and community participation, driven by exhibitions, education initiatives, and partnerships with local organizations. Summer programming included the launch of three new exhibitions alongside successful outreach activities.

The Gallery continues to focus on long-term sustainability and stewardship and looking ahead, staff are planning major initiatives to mark Tom Thomson's 150th anniversary and the Gallery's 60th anniversary in 2027, including new exhibitions, public art partnerships, and commemorative merchandise. The Gallery has had significant funding successes, including maintaining its Ontario Arts Council operating grant through a newly consolidated and highly competitive provincial funding program, securing ongoing Canada Council support, and obtaining additional funding for youth programming and community initiatives, positioning the organization well for future programming and fundraising efforts.

Resource Alignment:

Financial Resources

A 2026 year-to-date net/gross revenue/fundraising summary is attached to this report. The Gallery remains on track with strong revenues from operating grants, the endowment fund, art camps, and donations. Most of the revenue from Gallery Night at the Movies, the annual fundraising event, the fundraising calendar, and memberships are achieved later in the fall.

Human Resources

Through a grant from the Young Canada Works program, the TOM has welcomed three summer Education and Engagement students to the team. These summer students are leading the Gallery's children's art camps through July and August.

Time and Scheduling

N/A

Technology and Infrastructure

N/A

Climate and Environmental Impacts:

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

Communication and Engagement:

This report has been posted to the City's website with the agenda in advance of the meeting.

Media advisories are issued to highlight new exhibitions and new/returning programs. The Gallery's website and social media will communicate and promote key exhibitions and programs.

Report Developed in Consultation With:

- Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services
- Kim Skene, Operations Coordinator
- Shannon Bingeman, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections
- Heather McLeese, Curator of Public Projects and Education

Attachments:

1. Attachment 1 - 2026 Gallery Revenues by Category - Year to Date 2026-07-31

Reviewed by:

Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator at aware@thomthomson.org or 519-376-1932 ext. 5001.