

Good afternoon and thank you so much for inviting me to participate in the Creative Constructs conference. I have been asked to spend some time talking about Toronto Artscape - a company I helped to get up and running 20 years ago and to which I recently have returned. It will be more about the twists and turns which have been the development and continual transmutation of Artscape, than a blow-by-blow historical reiteration of what we did, when, etc. - more a discussion of what did (and didn't) happen when we did what we did, the possible reasons, ideas for solutions and my own musings on the larger context which overtakes us.

And in doing this I need to talk a bit about creativity – hey, doesn't everyone these days! But I hope to be a little more specific perhaps – creativity's effects within society and in individual lives, and how we can (should?) understand the two in a much more integrated way in the future. I find, in trying to weave together all of these threads, that some of this – perhaps a lot of the common matter in these various discussions - may really be about we the artists coming to understanding our role, how we might see our work in a very different way, and then, about taking that on. And, for Artscape going forward, what is our role?

I was the first full time Executive Director of Toronto Artscape and, as I said, have recently rejoined the company after a thirteen year hiatus. It is an exciting and exhilarating experience to come back to something to which you helped “give birth” and see it as both the same and, at the same time, very different. Rather like when I look at my twenty-six year old son and see all the ages and stages reflected back but also, just as clearly, a unique being beyond all that – an independent entity which has found its way to

where it is, to some extent, without me – and, definitely, to some extent, in spite of me.

Back in the late 1980s the Toronto Arts Council produced a report called No Vacancy in which it documented a pattern – not unique to Toronto but definitely of growing importance to that city. We knew that where the artists went the general public would soon follow. In the 1920s it was my grandfather and his pals at Bay and Bloor, then Gerrard St. East, Yorkville, Queen West. We used to say - as I remember it, even with a little pride - that “artists were the storm troopers of gentrification” without actually understanding what we were saying. Even the use of the imagery - soldiers – that soldiers rarely stay long (was that what we wanted?); soldiers - that see only the first level of the impact the their work – (was that what artists wanted?); soldiers – who by the definition of their role must live outside of society (should that be the continued place artists?). In fact it was an apt expression – more than I knew at the time - it described the “place” that we all unconsciously “put” the artists in our city.

The pattern was well known - artists move into cheap, unsavoury neighbourhoods and almost immediately there is ”colour and light”, something magical begins to unfold. Then almost as quickly there are cafes, hot fashions shops and the artists are pushed out by those able to pay higher rents. The neighbourhoods recover, the businesses thrive but the artists must move on to cheaper digs. This hasn't stopped by the way – cheaper digs for Toronto artists right now are in Hamilton.

When we did our first projects in the early 1990's we thought that our work was all about bricks and mortar. About creating the space and them coming. And, of course we did create space and they did come. Our first tenant liaison meetings were full of our talk of us and our tenants – together - being a part of this community of artists – “this is not an Artscape building - it is your building”, and “we are all members of this organization which is trying to effect this change” “ we are all working together on creating and managing this space so that together we can create more space for more artists”. And these buildings on and off over the intervening years have had a sense of community in them – a sense of coming together. But, at that time, this is where our thinking ended – pretty well at the property line.

Having and holding appropriate affordable space for artists was our mandate and it was working at that level. But in many senses – except for having a few square feet of space which was to some extent permanent, and exchanging a commercial landlord for a non-profit landlord – we saw over time that not much else changed. Yes, we anchored a few hundred artists in reviving communities, and that was good for them and that was good for those communities. But over time we realized there was something much more important that wasn't happening – those benefits were to a large extent mutually exclusive. These buildings remained to some extent islands – ghettos – within those communities. The participation – the engagement with the world for the better of both - that we had thought would spring out of permanence - didn't. Or if it did – it did not effectively change the artists' lives. Their impact flowed out, but their lives and, I would say, their perceived place in society, remained the same.

I recently observed a similar pattern through another aspect of the cultural world. For the last couple of years I was the head of a company called the Council for Business and the Arts and for 33 years its mandate has been to increase the level of private sector (particularly the business community's) interaction with the arts. Thirty years ago corporate Canada had little to nothing to do with the arts – very few businesses had any kind of relationship with the cultural community. Of course we can all see that over those 30 years there has been a great deal of change in the number of businesses supporting the arts and in the dollar value attached to that support, particularly for some of the large organizational connections. But at the smaller business and organizational – let alone individual artist - level even these simple financially-based connections were not being made.

It seems to me that this relationship had always been – to many in the arts community anyway - “if they PAY for it we will come”. In other words, the only relationship an artist or arts organization wanted with a business was one involving them giving money. The businesses, which are rich, should help the artists, who are poor. The business is a donor and the artist is the charity. And of course if someone paid for it, something did get done. But, I believe, that in every other way nothing changed. There was no real relationship – no respect among equals - the two remained separate and uninfluenced by each other. They in fact were suspicious of each other – each believing the other was somehow tainted.

So, while, as I said, there has been enormous growth in the area of corporate sponsorship of the arts, I think the underlying relationships and assumptions

have not progressed very far. The mechanism has been developed but the core assumptions and behaviours remain the same.

I had been working in the private sector for ten years and when I took over Business for the Arts I was dismayed to see that we had not managed to overcome these stereotypes. But I have to say, I understood - I had run arts organizations – I had been those artists. I had raised money and then resented actually giving the businesses and private individuals their due as partners in our work. I saw them as sources for money to do what I wanted and hoped that once the cheque was in I would hear from them no more. But, like the experience I was to have coming back to Artscape, I realised that while sponsorships were now much more sophisticated, and the dollars were much larger, the arts and the business sector had not found any more common ground - nothing more to exchange than money and recognition. In spite of all our creative city and partnership talk, the artist's role in society, and their perception of their role in society (or probably more accurately as powerless “outsiders” in society) for the most part has remained the same.

Has a faint hope of a small grant and the odour of philanthropy made our artists into dependents.

I do want to qualify some of this, however. There are a growing number of members of the cultural community who are setting a trend away from large cultural institutions and all that they require to keep them afloat. More and more younger artists, in particular, are looking at themselves as resources within the larger community and offer their services to arts – their own and others' works - and non-arts purposes without making those distinctions.

This is a much more entrepreneurial vision for a career and one which gives flexibility and creates bridges, all of which can help to knit together that famous creative city we all talk about. And we see at the smaller organization and individual artist level a growing awareness of the genuine business partnerships which can be created for the real benefit of both parties.

The ArtsVest / Thunder Bay story.

Over the past 21 years Artscape, of course, learned a lot. We learned how to be a developer and how to be a property manager and, in concert with many partners around the world, a network of colleagues and a body of knowledge has grown which offers a great deal of information on these things. And all of this has helped focus the growing awareness of the fact that we need to rethink infrastructure as it relates to culture and culture as it relates to infrastructure. Our building tenants were clearly telling us that - we hadn't figured out how to bring about the results that we imagined - how to make our buildings into active hubs for their communities, how to connect business to business, how to harness creativity for everyone's gain, how to integrate our tenants into their communities not just as sources for donated pieces of art or free performances for community fund-raisers but as bonafide businesses, entrepreneurs and individual citizens among their neighbours and peers. Our buildings were full of artists, many (not all but many) of whom were still very much outsiders to their neighbourhoods. They had children, concerns over safety, the price of gas and where their next contract or sale would come from - exactly like everyone else. But they and their neighbours often did not see that similarity. Many artists still

feel isolated, unappreciated, underpaid, marginalized. Unconnected. To me this is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that artists remain poor - that the actual value of art and culture in our lives still remains disassociated from recompense and respect. And, is our favourite fruit the sour grape?

So – after some time, we had more than 200,000 sq.ft. of arts space under management with more approximately 300 tenants. And, as I said a few minutes ago, while we had saved a relatively few artists a lot of money, we saw that the only real territory we commanded was to act as an intermediary with land owners and as a landlord with our tenants. We developed and managed space but - after some time - while we saw clearly our positive effect in the immediate neighbourhoods – the value that was generated by our tenants just being there - we also saw that we had not captured the “how” of that nor maximized the potential that our space offered – for the arts community and beyond. When I say we, I mean Artscape specifically, but I also mean our tenants and - perhaps most importantly - those neighbourhoods in Toronto in which these buildings are found.

Why is this.

I think it is because we – Artscape – in our little microcosm, had fallen into the role of “landlord” and our tenant artists were still acting like under dog tenants. When we started, we saw only the first leg of this journey. Now, having travelled past that horizon, we see that was just the beginning of a much longer journey to a “new world” with potentially much richer “gold”. But it would be a hard sail and potentially with mutiny abounding. In the interim, people like Charles Landry and Richard Florida have joined our

fleet and given insight and names to that new world – one we didn't realize we were headed for until our world turned out not to be flat.

The space is a mechanism, not an end in and of itself. Hence our need to take on the next leg – to think not of a building and its tenants but more of its location - of place. To think of the benefits, changes, impacts – surprises – which can come from building upon that presence. To be still more compounded in the mix and integration of uses – and users - which will create impact for that building and location and weave that value into the larger community – the concept of the creative community building.

We wonder now if artist-only buildings are just perpetuating the ghetto mentality and impression. Our Artscape Barns project, which is currently under construction in Toronto, has started us with a decisive step in a new direction. It is not an artists-only complex: it mixes community organizations, social services, arts and environmental organizations and uses. We have set aside a lot of space which is in some senses common area - unprogrammed. It will be managed by a community board - not by Artscape. We have no idea of what will happen there, how it will be organized or paid for – but we are trusting that those who call the Barns “home” will develop those uses to best suit them and their surrounding community. It is not for Artscape to control. Nor will it be ours to pay for. The raw materials will be assembled on site to produce something wonderful and truly unique and really our job is not to make or even help it become – but to let it – happen. One thinks of one's children again!

The future has always belonged to those that can adapt, change and innovate. As we have heard from every lunch hour speaker for years now, the future belongs to those who will practice or harness creativity. We are all quick to point out that this does not mean the future belongs to artists – and some speakers don't even mention artists in their creative futures. But I think all this talk means that there is an opportunity here which likely has never existed before. In the future, we are told, creativity will draw the divide between communities, businesses and individuals which survive and those that thrive. Creativity goes on everywhere, all the time – always has. But, perhaps, in the past things move so slowly that the “heart of creativity” – the source - was not perceived to be connected to its more public manifestations. And, by not seeing the complete process and connecting the outputs, we in general society did not understand the importance of those that safeguard the core of that expertise – the engine of creativity – our artists. From that core, artists have always driven the new ideas. But now we must acknowledge and connect them much more closely. They will do the R & D for much of Canada's future innovation which will then flower–reach wider consciousness and markets – through the more commercial channels: commercial, industrial and architectural design, pop and film music and performers, new manufacturing techniques and materials, and new ways of thinking about, and living, our lives.

Many people are not comfortable confronting the raw stuff of artistic experimentation – fair enough - most of us would not choose to use the early and often crude prototypes for new products. But this experimentation has always been essential to push the edges of those larger, more slow moving commercial manifestations. It is just that it is not slow moving

anymore – it is out in the open and we as a society have to connect these dots. Commercial music, film, video, fashion, television, magazines, design, etc. would not exist without that unseen messy creative core called art. It is a supply chain. Most supply chains eventually arrive at the point where they have to recognize and reward the “raw materials” producers – in this case our ideas people. It is likely time that, with us all loading our community and economic baskets with creative city rhetoric, we connect to our creative conscious, source and soul. One of the things which it seems to me has been left out of all our Creative City discussion is this essential connection. Where is the artist in the creative city? How are we going to make sure they are there, they stay, they work their magic, they get their due? This is a link which has not been made – economically or practically. And the link must be forged on both sides.

I think we sense that to get to these next authentic steps in this evolution there has to be a lot of change. Change by everyone including, not insignificantly, change by the artists themselves. Do artists care about all this. Many do not appear to but I think they should. It's always important to know where you fit in and how important you are.

With no specific knowledge of how we got here, though knowing that it is a result of centuries of assumptions, we need to consciously change how we, as artists, think about ourselves and behave. It will likely require us to change our behaviour to bring about change throughout the rest of society. If we behave like outsiders – we will be treated like outsiders. If we insist that artists must remain poor to be true to their art – we will stay poor and therefore powerless. If we insist that we require subsidy, social assistance,

bail outs and special treatment, we will be treated like, and marginalized as, a special needs community. I think artists and arts organizations have to change the mentality of entitlement (you owe us) to one of “you need us”. This isn’t about being the “squeakiest wheel” in the charity game, its about revealing the power of our wheel.

At Artscape we don’t think we are all about bricks and mortar any more. While creating space remains at the core of our activities I think we have realized that it is only a small element of a much larger movement. We now talk equally about place making because we know that this is a bi-product of artist’s space which has existed forever but which has never been harnessed or incorporated into the larger picture of creativity in society. We also talk about culture as a leader because if there is to be a creative city – in order to be genuine - it will need to be lead by creators. We have transitted from being an arts service provider to understanding a much larger role in leverage value and contributing that value to the building of our city’s future. Having spoken of space and place the first assumption may be that we are talking about urban regeneration (redeveloping neighbourhood infrastructure, economic impact, etc) – and to some extent we are – but really we are talking about something larger - societal regeneration – finding a way to regenerate the ways we live and the ways we live together.

Not only may artist-only buildings not be the right model – perhaps Artscape’s role as landlord and property manager may be holding this process back. Should we be stimulating the creation of space for mixed use – with creativity as its driver - but then step out of the way - leave it to the residents/users to take it where they will. We know that from now on we –

Artscape - want to own the buildings we develop and manage— no more long term leases. We want to start to fully control our sites and build equity which we can leverage to create more. But would it be better still for the artists themselves to own their own studios and homes rather than rent – even if it is renting from Artscape? The fewer intermediaries the better. The more artists planted firmly in the market the better.

But how can artists afford to buy space? Where do they find down payments, could they afford to carry a traditional mortgage and operating costs? In Toronto?

We are currently working on our first development in partnership with a private developer which will offer below market rate artists' live/work studios for sale, on discreet floors, but built within an ordinary condo building on Queen St. West. There will be no grants, no fundraising, no social housing allocation required – just co-operation between the City, Artscape and Urban Corp to come up with benefits enough on all sides to make it work. More developers have heard of this model and are anxious to work with us. Why – we are suspicious. Is it only to get a little additional density – which is good enough reason. We think more and more that there is something else that they are looking for - other than solutions for space which no one else wants. Its an energy that no one else has. Keeping these studios as artists' space and keeping them affordable over time will be a challenge – we are all susceptible to the buoyancy of Toronto's real estate market - but more and more we think individual ownership is the model. Once artists own their own spaces in buildings and neighbourhoods mixed with other people who own their own spaces, will that start to change their

feeling of being outsiders? How much space would be needed to tip the mindset of a community or neighbourhood – or the artists themselves.

In order that we change the place, more specifically the perception of the place, that creativity - and the expression and experience that that creativity holds in our lives - and by extension fully recognize the role that artists play in society – all of us need to change. And, let me share our question with you now – is there a role for Artscape in all this?

What are the right words to bring down the prejudices on all sides. Art is simple and omnipresent. It is not outside of anyone's life, it in fact informs the stuff of everyday life. It comes in many forms and it has its own unique set of professional parameters. It is not odd. It is in fact absolutely common.

Of course, like every profession, it has its procedural idiosyncrasies which must be recognized – and valued. Creating – art - is – well – art is not a science! It is a process of trial and error. Not every piece is great – even by great artists. Experimentation requires risk and risk almost guarantees failure, at some point, and rarely guarantees success. Speaking of science – science is not a science either. We recognize that a scientist does not take the correct road every time – does not find the cure the first time out. We allow the drug industry to experiment before it comes up with the next wonder drug. The commercializing of that wonder drug pays for the development of the next. Should we be using this model to underpin our creative city future.

In fact, most things change through a process of trial and error. In looking back we see the winding road which lead here but we don't see it while we are travelling and we certainly don't see it when we start. This is just as true when starting a business – we hone our concept, develop our proformas and write our business plan but we have no idea where we will end up and if we are too rigid we may miss the best opportunities. Consider all the options. Keep an open mind. Trust the gut feeling. Left field is as good a source for ideas as any. Sound familiar? We have to trust we are on the road to somewhere.

Our artists start the most dangerous leg of that journey for us – the beginning. We can't expect our creators to know where they are going any more than we would have expected Columbus to be able to chart his way to the Americas. And yet society does expect artists to know where they are going. And then once they have arrived they expect them to keep travelling the same route – writing the same symphony, painting the same picture, “I loved your first novel, what happened to your second?” – ie. commercializing their product, working more of the supply chain. But that is rather like asking Columbus to run a shipping line from Spain to the West Indies once he had discovered them. It's not what Columbus did. Its a totally different business. But, in that example we can see very clearly that both were necessary to move society ahead. Queen Isabella understood that when the treasure was gold – we need to understand this if our treasure is innovation.

Too often, when we see creativity standing alone – as art – we think of it as unnecessary - something of a luxury – a frill – because we don't make the

connection – the interconnection and dependencies that are directly associated with creativity. And it seems to me that sometimes artists themselves are the last to see – or perhaps want to see – these connections. Any connection to business is “dirty”, earning a good living is almost seen as a “sell out”. But then, what does sell out mean? To me it means a whole lot of red dots on the gallery walls at the end of the opening reception – a sell out.

Because of this lack of recognition and understanding of connection, when push comes to economic or social shove, society puts less value on its creative resources – especially something as amorphous as art - than it does on more tangible natural resources, industries, products and services. But our artists drive a \$43.2 billion GDP creative sector in Canada – larger than fishing, lumber, oil and gas, and mining – put together. Creativity is big business and will only get bigger. Why then do we live in a world confined to “charity” and grants – and even these are insignificant in scale compared to the government subsidy of the above mentioned industries. Our grants are hand outs, theirs are for business development and they anchor jobs! We are bigger and yet we take – demand – less. We out number them but like in the old westerns, we don’t have the courage to charge out in full force and take our place in those power systems. If we are to believe the growing throng of Floridians – if not just artists but all Canadians want to win in the future - we need to ensure that the roots of the supply chains to our future profitable sectors (most likely creative industries) are healthy. We need to ensure the random seeding and watering of the creative core – raw creativity – art - without any idea of where it will sprout, how it will grow or where it will

lead. We need to support the creative R & D which will feed our future economic success.

How do we do that? How do we ensure this understanding and create these connections. It seems to big to attack at that, high, philosophical level. Is it likely that this must all be driven much closer to home? Here are some of the questions I am asking these days. Where did the disconnect between art – creativity - and normal life happen? Where did we separate art from life? When did we decide that creativity was a profession? Why must you be a star to be recognized as an artist – what happen to amateurism – why is that a bad word now? When did we decide that some people are creative and others aren't (and why do we think telling them when they are in grade two will benefit them!!) and why do we insist that if you are creative, by definition, you are outside of normal society, live your life in an offbeat way and must always be poor to be authentic? And when I say “we” I mean all of us – and perhaps most decidedly artists themselves.

So this has been a growing concern of mine over the past few years and I find it echoed on coming back to Artscape. But it may be starting to sound like nothing more than a rather pompous speech. Where does it all “hit the road”. ”What's it got to do with MY life”. I am starting to think that it has in fact ONLY to do with our lives – individuals - and that is, I think, where the connection that has to be made. We all need creativity and expression. We already include it in our daily lives in every possible form – ride the subway – is there anyone who isn't reading, listening to music – well unless they are on their cell phone! The truth is that no one would dream of living

without culture. Many people – or is it most people - just don't think about it that way.

So culture and art are big words and most people don't use them at all. They don't think they are a part of that world at all and can't imagine having anything to do with effecting change at that level. But there is another aspect of art and creativity – it is the other half of this picture - which is equally important to us all – I think it is the “key” - and it has been relegated to the sidelines of this discussion. Expression, self-expression, the personal experience of art. Expressing for ourselves, to each other, hearing together, things which cannot otherwise be said. Teaching and learning through stylized or non-verbal experiences, sharing feelings without language, showing and revealing without affronting. Finding common ground without saying a word or moving an inch. The personal experience of making and experiencing whatever all this stuff called art is. Art in our home, in our family, as our neighbour, making community, making money.

Its really time that we – all of us – changed the way we think about and define creativity and artistic expression. Its time that it resumed its big fat proper place at the centre of life. Like food, cultural expression is ubiquitous to our existence. There has never been a society that has not had cultural expression – in fact for some – the Inuit for instance – there is no word for “art” because art is synonymous with life. Somewhere, we have forgotten this. We have created strata - we say this is art – an Italian art song - and that isn't art – rap. This is high art and that is low art – or - heaven forbid, folk art. Art is art. There is no differentiation - no good or bad, sophisticated or simple - only what speaks to us as individuals and

what doesn't. This is my personal version – and some in the audience may not agree – of art for arts sake. Art for everyone.

And lastly I want to suggest where we might want to look to make a start at this - with a short story.

I started my career as a singer and, the Canadian pianist Monica Gaylord and I used to do school programs. We would tear all over Ontario performing for grades 1 through 8 – and, in smaller communities, with them all in one gym at once! We started the program of songs (none in English) with very little introduction but just the suggestion that they listen and try to figure out what was going on in the music, and then we would launch into the Mozart Alleluia. Hundreds of little hands would fly up to their ears and then slowly disengage and fall away as the faces changed from pain to wonder. Wonder that any one could sing that loudly, the high, that fast and – well could by the end lift them all up together to that final exaltant high C. Hugh Wolf, Schubert, Puccini, Faure, Ravel followed and they found the mouse in the Wolf, heard and saw Gretchen at her spinning wheel, understood and witnessed Liu's death, sat mesmerized by Faure's moon and took sides in Ravel's cat fight. They knew all the music, they knew all the feelings. They loved the classical music that they had never heard but knew they hated. Well maybe not all of them – but most of them.

We would leave those school concerts hearing high clear voices imitating us through the halls. We thought at the time that they were mocking us. I now think they were trying to figure out how they could do what they had just experienced – communicate, excite, move, share. They all wanted to be

singers that day not because we were stars they had seen on television or even heard of but because we could sing and singing had power they had never felt before.

We don't all like all foods but we all like some of them and – as my mother used to say about turnip – “How do you know you don't like it if you haven't tried it”. Statistically speaking - the more we try the more we will like. We accept, when it comes to food however, that everyone eats. That food is integral to our lives. It may not be so obvious, its much harder to measure, but we are just as likely to wilt and die without artistic expression. Each to his own, but art none the less.

I think one of the elements of our creative future has to be about finding ways for people – everyone – to connect to their expressive selves. When we are there – we are one. And we will be lead by our artists. As leaders they will be sought out for their expertise, they will be respected and they will be paid – like any other professional. And once we have done this the specificity of space and place will be overshadowed by people – we will be connected as communities.

So Artscape has graduated from space making to place making to searching for that road to leadership. I was asked to speculate a little on where we might find ourselves twenty more years down the road. For me – I am thinking Italy!

No – the other facetious answer I gave to the Lorenz was – if we do our job well there will be no need for Artscape 20 years from now.

Maybe in the end we will have been – not the boat – but the rudder which when applied with some – just the right amount - of pressure helped set an entirely different course.

Thank you very much for your invitation and your attention.