

GUIDELINES

Consent, derivative artwork, and representation of individuals and communities

Strathcona County strives to create welcoming, equitable and ethical environments for visual art events and exhibits, and artists are asked to contemplate the impact their artwork may have on individuals and communities.

1. Portraiture and Consent

Capturing the likeness of a person through art takes great skill and can make for powerful artwork. But there are many reasons why someone might not want to have their image made public.

The artist is responsible for ensuring that models understand and agree to how their image will be used, including the overall vision for the final artwork and if the artwork will be displayed publicly.

The artist is also responsible for determining an appropriate method for obtaining consent, which can look different depending on the situation. For example:

- An artist asks a friend to sit for a portrait. The friend is familiar with the artist's practice, and they have discussed the artist's plans for an upcoming exhibition (verbal consent obtained through conversation).
- A street photographer requests to take a stranger's photograph. After the stranger agrees, the photographer has the stranger sign a photo release form (formal written consent).

Artists submitting portraiture are asked to include a description of their relationship to the models and how they communicated with them throughout the process of creating the portrait. If the artist hasn't obtained sufficient consent, the portrait may not be eligible for exhibition.

Exception: Permission is not required for portraits of celebrities, historical figures, politicians, or mainstream fictional characters as long as the artwork is the artist's own unique creation. The County discourages artists from copying images that are not their own (such as copying a movie poster or photograph of a celebrity).

2. Derivatives

In art, a "derivative" is an artwork that purposefully imitates another work of art. If an artwork looks too similar to an artwork by another artist, it may be ineligible for exhibition.

Examples of derivative artworks that may be ineligible include:

- A replica of the Mona Lisa
- A painting that copies a photo from National Geographic
- An artwork created by following step-by-step instructions, such as a "paint night" artwork.

3. Reproductions of the artist's own artwork

Because the County seeks to exhibit and/or purchase original works of art, digital reproductions of handmade artwork are not eligible. For example, a photograph of an oil painting (such as a giclee or ink-jet print) is not eligible.

4. Harmful representations of races, cultures, communities, and individuals

Artists are encouraged to contemplate the impacts their artwork may have on individuals and communities. In addition to the artwork itself, artists should consider the implications of the words and language they choose to add to their artwork (such as artist statements, titles, and artist bios)—all of these elements contribute to the narrative the artist is creating.

Though artists may not intend to perpetuate discrimination through their artwork, harmful effects on individuals and communities could still result. Artwork that perpetuates discrimination or of any kind is ineligible for exhibition. However, these artworks will be discussed thoroughly amongst staff and with the artist before a decision is made.

The following understandings underlie discussions around representation of races, cultures, and communities in artwork:

- People and cultures are complex, nuanced, and changing. Without intimate knowledge of the people or places depicted in an artwork, some images can unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes, generalizations, and harmful assumptions that can result in real-life discrimination.
- Artwork can hold multiple truths simultaneously; an artist may show their appreciation for a race or culture while at the same time perpetuating discrimination towards that race or culture.
- Artwork that attempts to advocate for a race or community that the artist does not belong to can appear patronizing, and reflect attributes of colonization and systemic racism, including objectification, de-humanization and entitlement.
- Objectification occurs when the human qualities of a person—such as personality, power, dignity, needs, and rights—are rejected or overlooked. Objectification can be subtle.

Common scenarios in which objectification occurs through art include:

- Taking a photograph of a stranger without obtaining informed consent.
 - Over-sexualizing particular genders.
 - Depicting people of another race because an artist finds them “beautiful” or “fascinating”.
 - Using artwork to advocate on behalf of a racialized or marginalized community that artist does not belong to.
 - Creating over-romanticized images of scenes, landscapes, imagery, and objects that are closely tied to a particular culture that the artist does not belong to.
- Cultural appropriation occurs when an individual or group benefits from using imagery, symbols, iconic figures, traditions, or significant objects, sound, or music from a culture they do not belong to. Cultural appropriation results in the misrepresentation and objectification of cultures; contributes to systemic racism and discrimination; and can negatively impact the day-to-day lives of individuals whose culture is appropriated.

- Artists benefit from the opportunity to display their work in public or online—artists may sell their work, grow their audience, or gain status or additional opportunities. Therefore, if an artist displays or sells artwork that reflects a culture that the artist does not belong to, this can be deemed cultural appropriation.

For some artists, thinking carefully and objectively about their own artistic choices may seem like a barrier to creativity and expression. However, the opposite can be true. Contemplating our assumptions, fascinations, and biases toward other people and communities can reveal opportunities for growth or bolster an artist's confidence in their practice.

The following questions can be used as starting points for self-reflection:

- Why did you choose this imagery?
- When you encountered the subject matter, was your first impulse to capture it through artwork? Why?
- Do you know the people depicted in your artwork personally?
- Is this imagery part of your story, or someone else's?
- How do you benefit from the use of this imagery? Is your artwork for sale?

Note: While all participating artists are encouraged to consider the impacts and implications their artwork may have, these guidelines are not intended to discourage the many participating artists who respectfully incorporate a diversity of people and subject matter into their artwork. Artists are encouraged to reach out with questions, concerns, and feedback related to these guidelines.