

## **Loan of Artwork to the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts**

**Date:** September 4, 2024

**To:** Economic and Community Development Committee

**From:** General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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This report recommends that City Council authorize the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to enter into agreements to temporarily loan "Barren Ground Caribou", an artwork by Joyce Wieland owned by the City of Toronto, to the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. City Council authority is required to approve the loan since the artwork has an appraised value of over \$100,000.

Joyce Wieland (1930-1998) was a conceptual artist who worked in film and mixed media and is recognized globally as one of the leading Canadian contemporary artists of the 20th century. The Art Gallery of Ontario and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts are preparing to stage a major retrospective of Joyce Wieland's work and have approached the City with a request to loan "Barren Ground Caribou" to feature prominently in the exhibition. "Barren Ground Caribou" is a large-scale quilt depicting caribou roaming across a tundra landscape that was commissioned for the Spadina subway station in 1975.

The exhibition will run at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts from February to May 2025 and is expected to open at the Art Gallery of Ontario in June 2025, before closing in January 2026. Following the exhibition, "Barren Ground Caribou" will be re-installed in its original location near the north entrance of Spadina station. The Art Gallery of Ontario and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts will assume all costs related to the loan of the artwork, and will ensure that its transportation, exhibition, storage, and re-installation are completed in accordance with professional museums standards.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to negotiate and enter into agreements with the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts to loan "Barren Ground Caribou" by Joyce Wieland for a period beginning October 14, 2024, and expiring on March 31, 2026, with an option to extend the term of the agreement at the discretion of the General Manager, in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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There are no current or future year financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendation contained in this report. All costs related to the loan of the artwork will be assumed by the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact section.

## DECISION HISTORY

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At its meeting on May 17, 2011, City Council authorized the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to enter into agreements related to loaning works of art and artifacts that have an appraised value of up to \$100,000.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2011.ED3.1>

## COMMENTS

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### Artwork Background and Significance

"Barren Ground Caribou" by Joyce Wieland was commissioned by the Toronto Transit Commission in 1975 in an effort to incorporate the works of Canadian artists into Spadina Station. The artwork consists of layers of cotton fabric, stuffed with a synthetic batting to create a quilted relief of caribou and arctic landscape against a blue sky. An image of the artwork is included in Attachment 1. Now a unique asset in the City of Toronto (the City)'s Public Art and Monuments Collection, this monumental textile is emblematic of the ethos of this significant Canadian artist and captures the essence of the necessity of art in public space. By bringing this colourful, tactile work underground, Wieland delivers her message of ecological activism, feminism, and artwork accessibility.

Deeply rooted and invested in the growth of the Toronto art scene, the creation of "Barren Ground Caribou" highlights the collaborative nature of Wieland's practice. Hand-stitching, applique, and quilting work were executed by Joan Stewart Associates, which employed women who practiced their craft for years in Ontario. Wieland included the meaning of this contribution in her original proposal, writing that, "through design and craft, this piece could be a true focal point of one of the country's best known cultural expressions – the quilt."

The vision for the public experience of "Barren Ground Caribou" is best described by the artist herself:

"While running towards the lower level to catch a train in a subway, one is confronted with a depiction of a group of Barren Ground Caribou in quilted form ... the subject is a favourite ecological theme having to do with the preservation of our Canadian natural heritage. Here the lordly Caribou, those marvelous beasts who roam the barren ground are seen wandering across the Tundra covered with delicate Arctic flora. The quilt is at once intimate and familiar – a very human offering in the purely technological environment of a subway station."

*- Joyce Wieland on the Philosophy and Public Use of "Barren Ground Caribou", 1977 (York University Archive)*

## **Exhibition and Loan of Artwork**

The important message of this artwork will reach a broader audience through its inclusion in the upcoming exhibition "Joyce Wieland: Heart On". The exhibition is set to be the first major retrospective of Wieland's work in thirty five years, as well as the very first exhibition dedicated to her in Quebec. This exhibition will reinvigorate the conversation around Wieland's expansive and crucial body of work, which tackles still-pertinent subjects including sexuality, love, gender, ecology, political identity, and social justice.

"Barren Ground Caribou" is an essential contribution to the project, as it will not only be the largest artwork on display, but also will be exhibited for the first time along other significant quilted works by Wieland. By partnering with the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) in the loan of this artwork, the City has the opportunity to showcase the international calibre of its art collection to a broad audience, while delivering on its mandate to enhance and amplify the impact of the City's public art program.

The exhibition will run at the MMFA from February to May 2025, before moving to the AGO, where it will open from June 2025 to January 2026. The artwork is currently exhibited in a glass case near the north entrance of Spadina subway station. The AGO will work with the City to produce didactic materials related to Wieland's life and career, which will be displayed in the case while it is on loan.

In May 2011, City Council approved revised policies related to the management of the City's art and artifact collections. This included authority for the General Manager,

Economic Development and Culture, to enter into agreements related to loaning works of art and artifacts provided that the value of the contract or the artwork does not exceed \$100,000. The City engaged Toronto Art Restoration Inc. to conduct an appraisal of "Barren Ground Caribou", which confirmed that its value exceeds \$100,000. As such, Council authority is required to approve the loan to the AGO and MMFA.

This report recommends that Council authorize the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to enter into loan agreements with the AGO and MMFA, including an option to extend the agreements should the dates of the exhibition change. Staff from Economic Development and Culture are working in close collaboration with the AGO and MMFA to ensure that the removal, transport, exhibition, and re-installation of "Barren Ground Caribou" are completed in accordance with the highest professional standards for the care of collections. The quilt has been assessed as safe for transportation and display by art conservation professionals at the City and the AGO. The AGO and MMFA will assume all costs related to the loan of the artwork and will arrange for insurance for the artwork during removal, transport, storage, exhibition, and re-installation.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Patrick Tobin  
General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1 - Image of "Barren Ground Caribou" by Joyce Wieland

**Attachment 1 - Image of "Barren Ground Caribou" by Joyce Wieland**



Joyce Wieland  
"Barren Ground Caribou" (1975)  
Quilted cloth, 243.8 x 914.4 cm  
City of Toronto Public Art and Monuments Collection