

Tribute to Marc Mayer by Thomas d'Aquino December 5, 2018

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Bonsoir chers amis.

Bonsoir cher Marc - et un accueil chaleureux à ta famille.

Marc – you have led the National Gallery of Canada for ten years. I have chaired the Foundation of the Gallery throughout that time. Our working relationship, and our personal relationship, over this time has enriched my life. You are very special to me – and to Susan.

This evening, dear Marc, is dedicated to you and to your extraordinary achievements over these past ten years.

Before the evening is done, you will hear other heart-felt tributes. Enjoy them. Savour them. Reflect on them in your quiet moments. You have earned them.

Assembled here tonight in this great hall are artists, museum professionals, collectors and philanthropists, ambassadors, and leaders of business, government, and cultural communities from all across our great country.

Among them are a former governor general, a former prime minister, and a former chief justice of Canada. A warm welcome to the Right Honourables Adrienne Clarkson, Joe Clark, and Beverley McLachlin.

A warm welcome as well to Minister of Finance Bill Morneau and Justice of the Supreme Court Rosie Abella. And to my friend Gordon Campbell, former Premier of British Columbia, welcome.

I am proud to say that this evening has been organized by the Foundation of the National Gallery as our gift to you, Marc.

My fellow Foundation directors, most of whom are here this evening, and Karen Colby-Stothart and her team, join with me in expressing our deep appreciation for all that you have done to aid and abet us in our role. You have always made yourself available to reach out to our growing family of donors - bringing to the conversations your deep knowledge and your energizing passion. And your dreams!

Our Distinguished Patrons now number almost 100 families - all publicly-spirited philanthropists whose zeal is driven by a love of art and a deep attachment to the National Gallery.

In the ten years that you have served at the helm of the Gallery, you have been an outstanding spokesman for the Gallery. You **are** the engaging, warm voice of the Gallery. Your vision, your passion, and your scholarship always shine through. This is of immense importance.

Marc, projecting Canada's art and artists beyond our borders has been one of your priorities. This was much in evidence as you accompanied Distinguished Patrons' visits to St. Petersburg and Moscow, to London, to Venice, to Paris and Berlin, and only weeks ago to the great collections of Rome and the Vatican.

Of that last visit, I must acknowledge that photos exist somewhere that will attest to Marc's readiness to embrace the moment. Much to the astonishment of our patrons and others in an elegant Roman restaurant, Marc sprang to his feet to join me in belting out "vesti la giubba" from Leoncavallo's opera Pagliacci. Memorable!

Marc, you have responded admirably to challenges – at times under heavy fire - while steadfastly defending the Gallery’s professionalism and independence. This I know: Shepherding the fortunes of a major museum, respected around the world, is not an easy task. Decisions about acquisitions – some of them controversial, working closely with curators and donors, building bridges to other institutions and partners, and being the voice of the gallery in Canada and abroad carry with them more challenges than we can appreciate.

There are many milestones that will shape your legacy at the Gallery. Others this evening will speak to some of these – including memorable exhibitions and acquisitions that came to the national collection thanks to you. Those that stand out for me are:

First: The ground-breaking re-imagining of the Canadian and Indigenous Galleries to mark Canada’s 150th anniversary – incorporating a new, inclusive historical narrative.

Second: A number of transformative gifts: The receipt of the splendid A.K. Prakash collection of 50 works by J.W. Morrice;

the \$10 million gift from Scotiabank and the support of the Archive of Modern Conflict which together led to the creation of the Canadian Photography Institute here at the Gallery; and Bob Rennie’s most generous donation of his collection of Canadian and international contemporary art.

Third: Firing up support for Canada’s commitment to the Venice Biennale – the epicentre for the celebration and advancement of contemporary art. A beautifully restored Canada Pavillion now stands proudly in the Giardini – again a fitting place for our artists to show their works to the world. Here enormous thanks go to the generosity of Reesa Greenberg and the dogged work of Karen Colby-Stothart.

And fourth: The first-ever naming of spaces in the Gallery to recognize the outstanding philanthropy of the Donald Sobey family, Michael Audain, the Michael and Sonja Koerner family, Ronald Mannix, Fred and Elizabeth Fountain, Ash Prakash, and Bob Rennie. To these we add Scotiabank whose name graces this Great Hall.

Marc, you can take pride for your part in these achievements, and many many more. Avec une gratitude profonde, nous vous remercions.

The story does not end here, ladies and gentlemen. We have heard warm words from Bob Rennie. During the course of dinner, you will hear from Françoise Lyon, from former Chair of the Gallery's Board of Trustees and Distinguished Patron, Michael Audain, and from Karen Colby-Stothart, CEO of the Foundation. Stand by for some very exciting news!