

Varley
Art Gallery
of Markham

2024
Annual
Report





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About the Varley Art Gallery of Markham

Vision

The Varley Art Gallery of Markham is a vital cultural hub for artists and diverse communities. A municipal gallery, we create meaningful conversations about Canadian art and society.

Mission

We inspire local and regional audiences to engage with art through outstanding exhibitions and rich public and educational programs relevant to the communities we serve. We support artists from York Region and seek to broaden access to the arts for diverse artists and cultural groups. We also share and celebrate the life and work of F.H. Varley, a founding member of the Group of Seven.

The Varley Art Gallery is situated on the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples including the Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe. We are committed to reconciliation, partnership and enhanced understanding.

2020 to 2024 Strategic Priorities

Meet:

The Gallery is an accessible hub that builds community by attracting all of Markham and York Region residents to meet each other, celebrate their milestone events and engage with art, artists and current ideas.

Exchange:

The Gallery is a site for the free exchange of ideas, through exhibitions and related programming.

Discover:

We offer inclusive, arts-based discovery and learning opportunities to all members of the community.

Thrive:

We nurture Varley staff, grow their professional development, build stability into our facilities, finances, security and administration.

Gallery Staff

Niamh O’Laoghaire, Director	Anik Glaude, Curator
John Abrams, Facilities	Doriana Cabeceiras,
Rachel D’Oliveira Fell, Programs	Rentals/Visitor Services
Ryan Taylor, Cultural Programs Assistant	Jessica Li, Communications





Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham Staff

Francesca Dauphinais, Development

Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham Board of Directors

Jim Schmidt (Board Chair), Craig McOuat (Vice-Chair), Amin Giga (Treasurer), Michael Chan (Deputy Mayor), Reid McAlpine (Ward 3 Councillor), Connie Leclair, (Governance Chair), Paul Cicchini, Josy Jamieson, Nik Mracic, Sophia Sun, Arpita Surana

Contact Information

216 Main Street Unionville, Markham, ON L3R 2H1
905.477.7000 extension 3261
varley@markham.ca
    VarleyArtGallery
VarleyArtGallery.ca

2024 by the Numbers

A snapshot of our reach, impact, and engagement over the year:



Message from the Director



2024 was a year of superlatives for the Varley Art Gallery. Our first great success was reaching visitorship of 62,373, the highest annual attendance since opening our doors in 1997. We're proud that the Gallery has been admission-free since 2012, and clearly this commitment to accessibility is working. In our 27 years of operation, we can now boast over one million visitors.

In 2024 we presented seven new exhibitions across three rotations, along with a host of complementary exhibition programming. We inaugurated a series of free workshops for older citizens. Our registered public programs offered a wide range of art classes, camps, and workshops. 2024 also saw the first full-year return to in-person school visits since the pandemic began in 2020. Our revised and updated school programs, drawing their content directly from our rotating exhibitions, were a resounding success.

We completed several facilities upgrades and our activities and presence were greatly bolstered by numerous technological improvements. Foremost among these was the launch of a wonderful new, user-friendly, website, made possible by support from the Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham and the Community Services Recovery Fund.

Through all of this we continued to garner significant recognition from our peers. The Gallery received three nominations for GOG (Galleries Ontario – Ontario Galleries) Awards in 2024, and we were delighted to win in two categories, both for projects co-presented with Markham Public Art.

I extend a huge thanks and congratulations to all members of the Varley team who contributed so much to all of our successes: Curator Anik Glaude; Exhibitions Collections and Facilities Coordinator, John Abrams; Public Programs Coordinator Rachel D'Oliveira Fell; Programs Assistant, Ryan Taylor; Coordinator, Art Gallery, Doriana Cabeceiras; Communications Specialist, Jessica Li. Thanks also to our 2024 front desk staff, Lucie Bolduc,

Bob Chan, Zoe Eisenstat, Grier Hunt, Kate Tan, Spencer Wolf, Kendra Young-Shing and Cindy Zhang, and of course, our many art class, school program, and camp instructors, our seasonal and temporary staff, co-op students, intern and volunteers.

Enormous recognition is also due to our generous supporters, funders, donors, members, and our parent organization, the City of Markham, whose contributions make a significant impact on everything we do.

A particularly heartfelt thanks is reserved for the Foundation and its full-time and seasonal staff for all that it accomplishes on our behalf. In 2024, Development Officer Francesca Dauphinais secured major funding from TD Bank Group to underwrite free admission, exhibitions and programs, and obtained a grant from the K. M. Hunter Foundation for new acquisitions. Added to that, Francesca managed the volunteer program which provided an astonishing 4,158 volunteer hours in 2024.

Looking ahead, 2025 will bring its share of challenges. The Gallery is located in the heart of Unionville's historic district, which will undergo a major streetscape restoration throughout the year. While this will bring some disruption, the Gallery and McKay Art Centre will remain open throughout the project. We look forward with great excitement to a restored and revitalized Main Street Unionville by the end of 2025.

The new year has brought many uncertainties, social, political and economic. However, these difficult times convince us more than ever of the importance of public art galleries. We contribute to the local economy, help drive tourism, animate the public, and act as barometers of community well-being. We maintain and preserve significant artifacts of Canadian culture, both historical and contemporary. We present the work of local and regional artists, many of whom pose difficult questions and ask us to engage with provocative ideas and new perspectives. But it is precisely through this openness to diversity and dialogue that we continue to reflect, promote and disseminate Canadian values and identity.

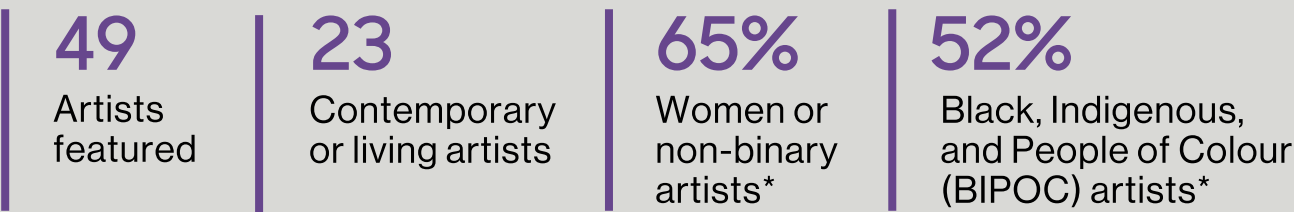
A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Niamh O'Laoghaire' in a cursive, flowing script.

Niamh O'Laoghaire, Varley Art Gallery of Markham Director



2024 Exhibitions Overview

In 2024, the Varley Art Gallery presented dynamic and diverse exhibitions that celebrated a wide range of artistic voices and perspectives.



First Impression

A butterfly flaps its wings featured new acquisitions to the Gallery’s permanent collection, several of which had their first appearance in our exhibitions, including **Amauti** (2018) by Katherine Takpannie, **Summer Camp Scene** (1968) by Pitseolak Ashoona, and **The Satellites Are Watching** (2018) by Janet Jones.

Legacy Note

Three works from **To go boldly** were later acquired for the Gallery’s permanent collection, further cementing the exhibition’s impact. These include **Attempts to Contain Evil** (2011) and **Move Along Home, Cardassian** (2024) by Vancouver-based artist Brendan Lee Satish Tang, as well as **Strangling Fruit** (2019) by Claire Scherzinger, a former resident of York Region.

Collection Spotlight

Tracing Patterns showcased 19 works from our permanent collection, many of them exhibited for the first time. Among the works were 13 sketches by F. H. Varley, 12 of which were transferred to the Varley Art Gallery from the AGO in 2020.

*Of contemporary artists.

Lost and Found

by Holly Ward and Kevin Schmidt

Lost and Found is a public art project conceived by artist duo Kevin Schmidt and Holly Ward. The project unfolded as a series of constructed situations along the Rouge River Trail in Unionville throughout the summer and fall of 2023. Augmented by specially designed t-shirts and musical carts, it was brought to life through everyday activities embodied by local community groups and amateur musicians.

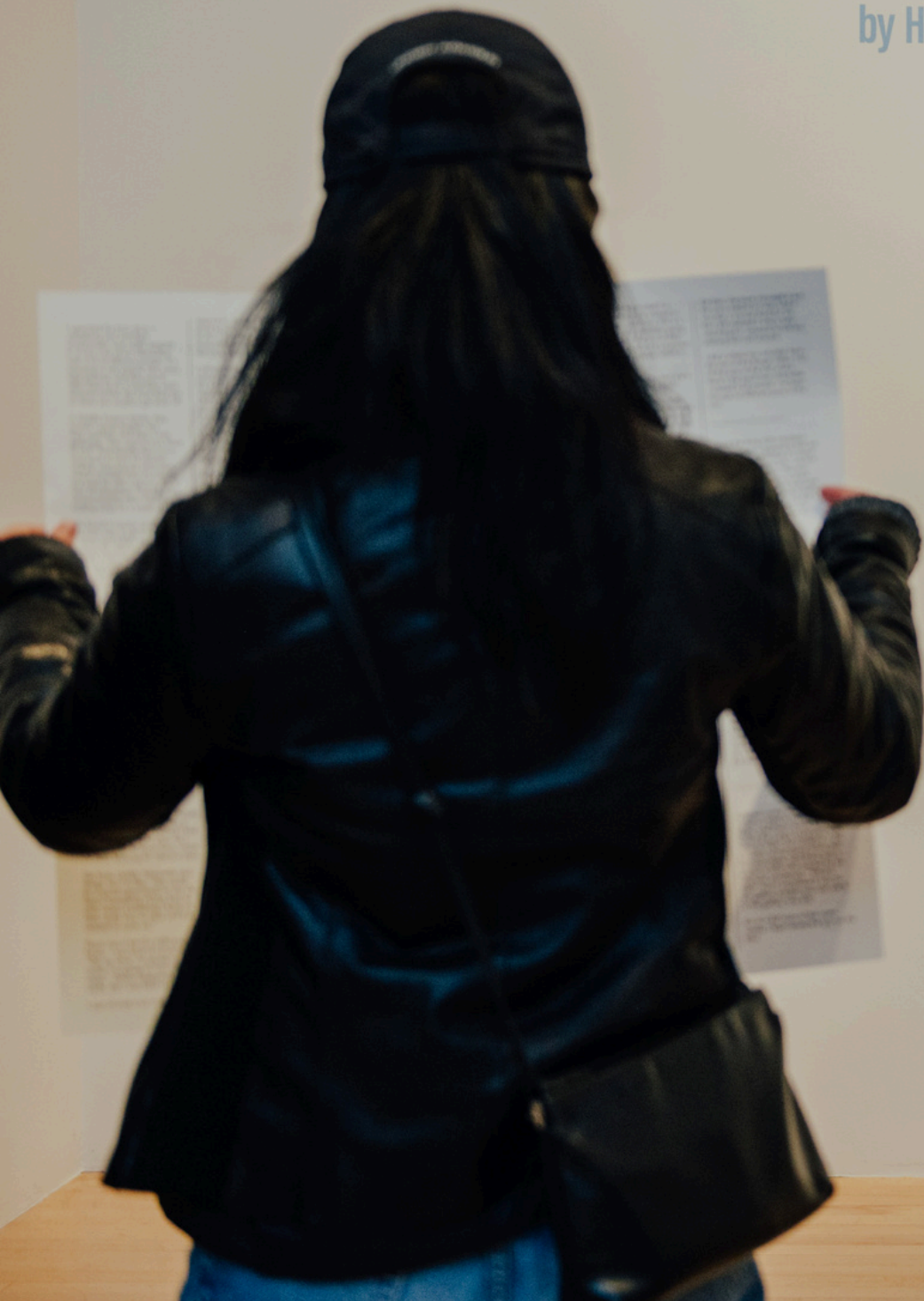
The project now transitions into the gallery space to formalize a visual language that frames individual experiences along the trail as "artworks" through the presentation of objects and ephemera in an interactive installation. Here, visual and audio devices—sculpture, field recordings, newspapers, and posters—are utilized to retrace the fragments and narratives of earlier events, while new situations and engagements unfold live in the gallery.

Wandering, practicing, improvising, and experimenting are revealed here not only as preparations, but as substantial activities in themselves. *Lost and Found* locates these activities in public space, designating chance encounters as a potential site for the formation of publics.

Holly Ward's work explores the role of aesthetics in the formation of social realities, while Kevin Schmidt's practice delves into the artist's role in a spectacle-driven society, exploring faith, mythmaking, craft, and popular culture. Their collaborative projects include *Eye of the Beholder*, sculptural cameras obscura situated outside of Dawson City for the Midnight Sun Camera Obscura Festival (2016), and *The Pavilion*, a 22-foot geodesic dome located in rural Heffley Creek BC, serving as a catalyst for artistic experimentation, and being performed as an interdisciplinary life-as-art project (2011-).

The artists would like to thank Alessandra Pozzuoli and Roch P. Smith for their invaluable help in producing this exhibition. In addition, they are extremely grateful to those community members whose participation made this project possible; the participating musicians: Mark Bennett, Sean Breen, Laurel Burnett, Karen Chan, Calvin Chan, Samantha Chui, Manon Henry, Michael Liang, Valerie Lo, Cathy McWatters, Selena Miao, William Nicolaou, Timmy O'Toole, Lukas Pfundt, Rich Pfundt, Susan Katz, Randa Khoury, Reema Khoury, Heather Richards, Victoria Tang, Joseph Trainor, Oziah Wong, Oswin Wong, Corey Yeung, Bo Zhao, and Audrey Zhu; the 1st Unionville Scout Group, the Seniors Tai Chi group from 105 Gibson Centre; and all the individuals who signed out and wore the t-shirts along the trail.

Lost and Found is co-presented by Markham Public Art and the Varley Art Gallery of Markham, curated by Yan Wu, Markham's Public Art Curator. A publication documenting and reflecting on the project will be launched in March 2024.



2024 Winter Exhibitions: Place, Environment, and Collective Experience

Lost and Found

January 27 to May 5, 2024
A Public art project by Holly Ward and Kevin Schmidt
Curated by Yan Wu
Co-presented by Markham Public Art and the Varley Art Gallery of Markham

A butterfly flaps its wings

January 27 to May 5, 2024
Curated by Anik Glaude
Artists: Pitseolak Ashoona (1904–1983), Michel Daigneault, Chun Hua Catherine Dong, Janet Jones, Kiakshuk (1886–1966), William Noah (1943–2020), Pudlo Pudlat (1916–1992), John Reeves (1938–2016), Katherine Takpannie, F. H. Varley (1881–1969), Xuan Ye, Lan “Florence” Yee

Discover:
[Virtual Gallery Tour](#)



Subject: Landscape

January 27 to May 5, 2024
Curated by Anik Glaude
Artists: A. J. Casson (1898–1992), Maurice Cullen (1866–1934), Clarence Gagnon (1881–1942), Molly Lamb Bobak (1920–2014), Jean Paul Lemieux (1904–1990), David Milne (1882–1953), Albert H. Robinson (1881–1956), Philip Surrey (1910–1990), and F. H. Varley (1881–1969).

Highlights

The winter exhibition season explored the deep interconnections between art, place, and the environments we inhabit. Together, they challenged the notion of the artist as a solitary creator, instead presenting creativity as something

9,864

Exhibition
attendance

rooted in community, shaped by context, and informed by both natural and social landscapes.

Lost and Found brought public space into the gallery, transforming a series of community-led moments into art.

A butterfly flaps its wings extended this idea, showing how artists absorb and respond to cultural, ecological, and political currents. Meanwhile, **Subject: Landscape** grounded the conversation historically, offering insight into how artistic depictions of place have evolved over time.

This season invited audiences to reconsider their relationships to both art and place, encouraging reflection on how everyday experiences—on a trail, in a city, within a community—can become powerful acts of creativity and connection.



Exhibition Programs and Community Engagement

This season featured a series of immersive programs that invited the community to experience the transition of public art from outdoor spaces to the gallery setting: Winter Exhibitions Opening Reception; Lunch and Learn with Holly Ward and Kevin Schmidt; Artists’ Talk with Holly Ward and Kevin Schmidt; Found Sounds, **Lost and Found** Musician Practice Sessions.



Image: **To go boldly**, installation view, Varley Art Gallery of Markham, 2024. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid

2024 Summer Exhibitions: A Celestial Dialogue

To go boldly

May 25 to September 2, 2024
Curated by Anik Glaude
Artists: Sonny Assu, Ana Diab, Rosalie Favell, Dara Gellman, Sky Hopinka, Stefana Fratila, Shelley Niro, Alex McLeod, Rajni Perera, Claire Scherzinger, Brendan Lee Satish Tang, and Syrus Marcus Ware

Summer Solstice

May 25 to September 2, 2024
Curated by Anik Glaude and Suzanne Lee
Artists: A. J. Casson (1898–1992), Joachim Gauthier (1897–1988), Frederick Hagan (1918–2003), Agnes Johnson (1881–1952), J. E. H. MacDonald (1873–1932), Henri Masson (1907–1996), Florence H. McGillivray (1864–1938), Goodridge Roberts (1902–1974), Dorothy Stevens (1888–1966), Philip Surrey (1910–1990), and F. H. Varley (1881–1969)

Highlights

Discover:
[Virtual Gallery Tour](#)



To go boldly and **Summer Solstice** were linked by their engagement with celestial themes—one looking outward to the vastness of space and speculative futures, the other grounded in the cyclical rhythms of the cosmos. While **To**

go boldly explored how artists use science fiction to imagine new worlds, **Summer Solstice** drew inspiration from the astronomical event that marks a turning point in the year, reflecting on light, time, and transformation. Together, these exhibitions highlighted the ways in which artists turn to the celestial—whether through fiction or natural phenomena—as a means of questioning, storytelling, and renewal.

Using Star Trek as a focal point, **To go boldly** examined how fandom can serve as a conceptual framework for artists to explore their identities, aspirations,

and critiques. The exhibition also provided several artists with the opportunity to delve into their own fandoms and create new works:

- **Syrus Marcus Ware** unveiled a striking large-scale vinyl mural **Black Girl Magic: Portrait of Uhura, Michael, and Guinan** (2024). The piece featured drawings of prominent Black female and femme characters from the Star Trek universe, celebrating their cultural impact and representation.
- **Sonny Assu** infused three new paintings with Northwest Coast design elements, weaving together traditional Indigenous aesthetics with references to Star Trek: The Next Generation, further highlighting the intersection of speculative fiction and identity.

Exhibition Programs and Community Engagement

The summer season was enriched by a robust schedule of exhibition programs featuring exhibiting artists, deepening audience connections to the themes: Summer Exhibitions Opening Reception; Honouring the Summer Solstice: Nature Poetry Walk; Lunch and Learn with Annemarie Hagan; Online Panel Discussion: Close Encounters Futurism in Contemporary Art; Fandom Art: Printmaking workshop with Karen Law; Curator’s Corner; Lunch and Learn with Sonny Assu; Mandarin Guided Tour: Science Fiction in Art Gallery.



Impact and Feedback

13,601
Exhibition
attendance

“...Your ability to bring together contemporary artists who engage with this rich legacy, while also reflecting on the broader implications of fandom and science fiction, is truly inspiring.” —Frank J Miles, August 21, 2024

“Fantastic show!! Congratulations to Anik and the team on a beautifully designed and engaging exhibition!” —@jeffnyepaints, June 4, 2024



Image: **Meera Sethi: A Brief History of Wear**, installation view, Varley Art Gallery of Markham, 2024. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid

2024 Fall Exhibitions: Weaving Stories of Identity and Materiality

Meera Sethi: A Brief History of Wear

September 21, 2024, to January 5, 2025
Curated by Anik Glaude
Artist: Meera Sethi

Tracing Patterns

September 21, 2024, to January 5, 2025
Curated by Anik Glaude
Artists: Andrew Benyei, Willia Berzcy (1744–1813), Alma Duncan (1917–2004), Joseph Sydney Hallam (1899–1953), Christina Sealy, Philip Surrey (1910–1990), and F. H. Varley (1881–1969).

Highlights

The fall exhibition season explored the profound ways textiles and clothing function as carriers of identity, history, and cultural meaning. The exhibitions examined how garments are more than just material objects—they are deeply embedded with personal, political, and social significance.

Sethi’s work challenges conventional ideas of fashion, representation, and belonging, particularly within South Asian diasporic and queer communities. Her multidisciplinary practice considers the power dynamics of textiles—who makes them, how they are worn, and what they signify. In contrast, **Tracing Patterns** drew from the Gallery’s permanent collection to explore how artists have depicted fabric in portraiture, from the elaborate detailing of formal attire to more abstract gestures that hint at texture and movement. Together, the exhibitions investigated how clothing and fabric function as markers of identity and storytelling tools across time and cultures.

This season also emphasized materiality—whether through Sethi’s incorporation of non-traditional materials such as plastic and hair, or through

historical portraits that meticulously render the tactile qualities of lace, brocade, and cotton. The focus on texture and process invited viewers to consider the relationships between clothing, craft, and self-expression.

By placing contemporary and historical perspectives in dialogue, this season fostered a deeper understanding of how textiles shape our sense of self and community. Interactive elements in **Tracing Patterns**, including fabric swatches that correspond to artworks, further enhanced visitor engagement, while **A Brief History of Wear** highlighted fashion as a site of both resistance and reinvention.

Discover:
[Virtual Gallery Tour](#)

Exhibition Programs and Community Engagement

The exhibitions were accompanied by a series of meaningful and hands-on exhibition programs: Fall Exhibitions Opening Reception; Chai and Write: What we carry with us with Sheniz Janmohamed; Lunch and Learn with Par Nair; Function of Fabric: Sewing Reusable Pads; Art Bus with artist Meera Sethi; Lunch and Learn with Roda Medhat.



Impact and Feedback

9,478
Exhibition attendance

“This was a really stunning exhibition, informative, fun and diverse.” — Walter Segers, September 4, 2024



Image: **Woodland Boogie Woogie 6**, installation view, Varley Art Gallery of Markham, 2023. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid

Awards and Recognition

Two projects, co-organized by the Varley Art Gallery of Markham and Markham Public Art, won 2024 GOG (Galleries Ontario/Ontario Galleries) Awards in the following categories, underscoring our commitment to inspiring audiences with art through innovative and outstanding exhibitions and projects:

Innovation in a Collection-Based Exhibition

Woodland Boogie Woogie 6

Curator | Anik Glaude
Exhibition Designers | Native Art Department International (Maria Hupfield and Jason Lujan), Anik Glaude
Exhibition Coordinators | Anik Glaude, John Abrams
Installation Team | John Abrams
Artists | Native Art Department International, Norval Morrisseau, Daphne Odjig, Steve Snake, John Laford
Organization | Varley Art Gallery of Markham in partnership with Markham Public Art, 2023-2024

Art Book Design

Lost and Found: A Public Art Project by Kevin Schmidt and Holly Ward

Designer | Mark Bennett Project
Artists | Kevin Schmidt, Holy Ward
Project Curator | Yan Wu
Project Coordinator | Alessandra Pozzuoli
Organization | Markham Public Art and Varley Art Gallery of Markham

The GOG Awards is one of the oldest and most prestigious arts recognition programs in Canada. Its annual awards ceremony is one of our sector’s most important and signature events. We extend our gratitude to the Galleries Ontario / Ontario Galleries for this recognition.



Public Programs: Promote Lifelong Learning

The Varley Art Gallery of Markham offers a robust selection of children’s and adult art programs designed to spark creativity, foster learning, and build community. Our programs are grounded in the belief that art is for everyone, regardless of age, experience, or background.

Highlights from 2024

High Engagement:

Over 500 individuals registered for adult art classes, and more than 700 children participated in holiday programs and art camps.

Popular Art Camps:

Our seasonal camps remain among our most sought-after offerings, consistently reaching full capacity and maintaining active waitlists.



Expanded Offerings:

In 2024, we introduced new adult classes including life drawing, portrait painting, and **en plein air** workshops, meeting growing demand for diverse and specialized instruction.



Free Community Events:

The Gallery hosted free community workshops during major events such as LunarFest, Black History Month, Asian Heritage Month, Unionville Festival, and Culture Days. Free exhibition programs, including opening receptions, artist-led talks, and workshops, continue to attract hundreds of participants and enrich public engagement with contemporary and historical art.



128	500+	700+	120
Public programs offered	Adult program registrants	Children’s program registrants	Senior workshop participants

Wellness Wednesday Senior Workshops

The Wellness Wednesday Senior Workshops is a series of free, art-making sessions designed specifically for seniors with all skill levels, fostering well-being, creativity, and social connection. Led by older adult instructors who bring relatable experiences and expertise, this workshop series create a supportive and inspiring environment.

The series launched in 2024 with five workshops hosting 85 participants, guided by five talented instructors and enriched by tours led by three dedicate older adult docents. Each session explored various art forms, including painting, drawing, textiles, and mixed media, with all materials provided by the gallery.

By combining art-making activities with gallery tours, the Senior Workshops offer participants both creative expression and deeper engagement with the gallery’s exhibitions. These programs, made possible through the support of the Ontario Seniors Grant Program, enhance mental and emotional health, encourage social interaction, and build a strong sense of community among participants.

Participant Feedback

“I just wanted to tell you how much my son enjoyed the art class. The instructors were amazing!”—Esmeralda, parent of a child participant

“This was very helpful and calming. The instructor was excellent. The workshop got me back into my community for the first time since COVID and decreases isolation.”—Wellness Wednesday Senior Workshop participant

School Programs: Foster Cultural Awareness

The Varley Art Gallery of Markham’s school programs offer dynamic, curriculum-connected experiences that bring learning to life through art. Designed for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, our programs integrate studio-based activities with interactive gallery tours, encouraging exploration, creativity, and critical thinking.

Impact and Participant Feedback

45
School
group visits

2,395
Students in
school programs

“We wanted to let you know that our students fully enjoyed learning about the artists and their creative work. They learned the language to describe the emotions that they felt while viewing the respective artworks that were displayed at the Varley Art Gallery. It was the first time for all the learners and they expressed their appreciation many times in the classroom.”
—Dorothy and Yin, teachers

William J. Withrow School Visits Bursary

Supported by the Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham, this program is designed to eliminate financial barriers and ensure equitable access to arts education. In 2024, the bursary provided \$2,500 in funding to support transportation costs for four schools, enabling 221 students from Kindergarten to Grade 8 to participate in our in-gallery programs. Since its launch, the program has helped bring a total of 666 students from eight York Region schools and one summer camp (in 2019, 2023, and 2024) to the Gallery, fostering meaningful engagement with art for young learners who might not otherwise have the opportunity.



Image: Jessica Li



Image: Jason Niu

Public Events: Community Engagement

The Varley Art Gallery of Markham's free public events continue to make art accessible, inclusive, and meaningful for everyone. By offering engaging, hands-on activities and cultural celebrations throughout the year, these events invite people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with art. Whether it's a vibrant festival, a quiet art-making session, or an inspiring performance, each event strengthens the Gallery's role as a cultural hub in Markham.

Seasonal Highlights

Winter 2024:

LunarFest, Black History Month, Little Native Hockey League Tournament
Week: Arts and Crafts, Purple Market

Summer 2024:

Unionville Festival, Doors Open Markham, Celebrate Every Hue: Pride
Weekend, CRAFTERIA: Art & Handmade Bazaar, TD Markham Jazz
Festival, Eternal Echoes: Immersive Dance Performance

Fall 2024:

Culture Days: Sewing Activity at the Varley, Artist Trading Cards, Olde
Tyme Christmas

Annual Participation

In 2024, our public events welcomed a total of 8,587 participants, reflecting the community's growing enthusiasm and support for accessible arts programming.

Participants frequently express their appreciation for the Gallery's welcoming atmosphere, interactive programming, and unique opportunities to experience art and culture.



Image: **To go boldly**, installation view, Varley Art Gallery of Markham, 2024. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid



Volunteer Contributions

Volunteers are at the heart of the Varley Art Gallery of Markham's success. While the Gallery's volunteer program operates within the City of Markham's broader network, it is uniquely supported and coordinated by the Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham, allowing us to offer a more personalized and rewarding volunteer experience.

How Volunteers Make a Difference

Our volunteers take on a variety of meaningful roles that bring art and people together. Their contributions include:

- Supporting events, exhibition openings, and fundraising initiatives.
- Assisting with camps and public programs to inspire creativity across all ages.
- Enhancing visitor experience and engagement by welcoming guests and providing information.
- Building a sense of community while gaining valuable skills in a fun, dynamic setting.

156
Dedicated
volunteers

4,158
Hours
contributed

Recognizing Our Volunteers

To celebrate the contributions of our volunteers, the Gallery hosted a Summer Camp Volunteer Appreciation Day on August 22, 2024, recognizing the many individuals who made our summer camps such a success.

Volunteer Voices

"I wanted to express my gratitude for the opportunity to volunteer at the Varley Art Gallery's opening ceremony last Friday. It was a truly eye-opening experience, and I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of it. The event was exceptional, and I appreciated the chance to assist in welcoming and guiding guests. The artwork and atmosphere were inspiring, and it left a lasting impression on me. Thank you for trusting me with this role. I look forward to the possibility of volunteering at future events and continuing to support the Gallery." —Ming, Volunteer





Image: Jessica Li

Rental Services: Welcoming Community and Creativity into our Spaces

259

Rental
days

In 2024, the Varley Art Gallery of Markham and the McKay Art Centre continued to serve as vibrant venues for private functions, creative initiatives, and community gatherings. Together, they hosted a total of 259 days of rental events, reflecting growing demand for versatile, inspiring spaces in the heart of Markham.

Rentals at the Varley Art Gallery

The Gallery's bright and contemporary indoor spaces provided the perfect backdrop for weddings, showers, piano recitals, corporate events, and cocktail receptions. The outdoor courtyard offered a lively, open-air setting for community-facing events such as artisan markets and musical performances.

Rentals at the McKay Art Centre

Located at 197 Main Street in historic Unionville, the McKay Art Centre is a beloved destination for artists and art groups. The main floor was rented for weekly exhibitions between April to June and September to December. Studio spaces were available year-round, supporting local artists and creative practice throughout every season.

Notable Rental Events in 2024:

- The MOM Market
- Trinity Home Market
- York University Engineering Deans of Canada Reception
- Indigenous Workshop with York University
- Evergreen Hospice Gala
- ScotiaMcLeod Wine Tasting
- Launch of OG Catering
- Across U-Hub Asian Craft Market

Facilities Upgrades: Investing in our Future

This year, with the support of the City of Markham, we executed several improvements at both the Varley Art Gallery of Markham and the McKay Art Centre. The upgrades enhanced safety, accessibility, and visitor experience, while preserving the charm and integrity of our spaces.

At the [McKay Art Centre](#), we replaced both the interior balustrade and exterior stair railing, making them safer and more in line with the heritage character of the house, which dates from the 1850s.

Inside the [Varley Art Gallery](#), we refreshed the lobby with new wall finishes and flooring, brightening the space to create a cleaner, more contemporary and welcoming atmosphere. We also installed a new art hanging system in the Deacon Room, expanding its functionality for gallery programs and private rentals.

Outdoor improvements included the addition of colourful tables and chairs near the entrance, encouraging visitors and pedestrians to relax, socialize, and enjoy the space.

Our most significant infrastructure project this year was the complete repaving of the courtyard and adjacent accessible parking area. The new paving stones, which align with the upcoming [2025 Main Street Unionville Restoration Project](#), not only improve safety and accessibility but also elevate the visual appeal of the courtyard—making it a more versatile venue for public gatherings and events.



Technology Enhancements

The Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham received a grant of \$100,000 from the Government of Canada’s Community Services Recovery Fund to support the Varley Art Gallery of Markham. This funding has enabled us to implement significant upgrades, modernizing our operations and enhancing the visitor experience.

Improvement Highlights

New Website:

- A new Varley Art Gallery website for a more user-friendly experience

Enhanced customer relations system:

- Zoho and Sprout Social are streamlining communications with our diverse audiences

Advanced photography equipment:

- New tools to better document and share gallery activities and events

Mobile large screen TV:

- Benefitting art classes, camps, and school visits with improved presentation capabilities

Storage and transportation box:

- Simplifies setup and storage of outdoor sound equipment in the courtyard

New projector and wide screen:

- Upgrades in the Deacon Room for enhanced programs, special events, and private rentals

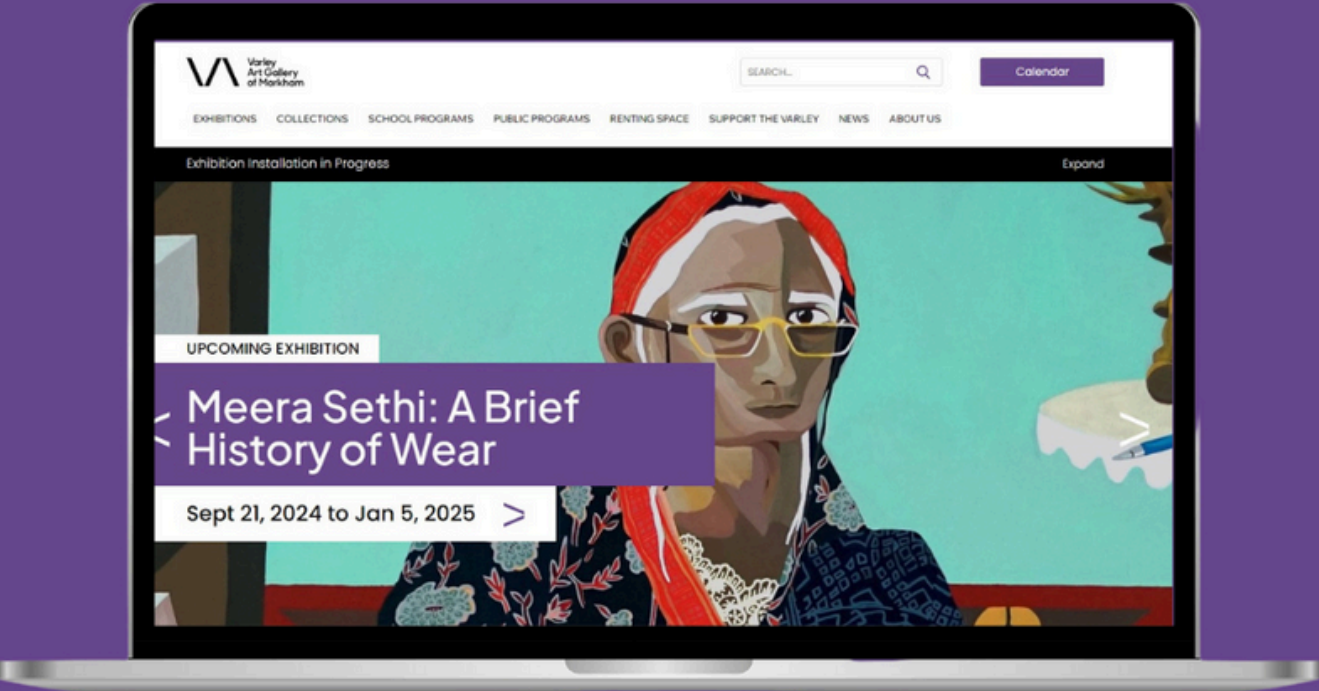
Touch screen tablets:

- Three large tablets with stands for virtual tours, enriching exhibition and collection content

TipTapPay donation kiosk:

- A new kiosk for convenient credit and debit card donations

These enhancements have been made possible thanks to the Foundation and the major grant it received from the Government of Canada. We extend our deepest gratitude to both for their tremendous support and the impactful improvements they have enabled.





Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham

The Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham was established in 1992 to support the Varley Art Gallery of Markham's goals. The Foundation provides advisory guidance on the gallery's administration and operations, including the preservation, conservation, and display of its art collection. The Foundation also leads fundraising efforts to support the gallery's exhibitions, programs, and collection growth.

Grants Received in 2024

Programs	Funders	Amount Received
Connected Communities (Supporting free admission, exhibitions, and programs)	TD Bank Group	\$30,000
Canada Summer Jobs (Funding summer employees)	Government of Canada	\$15,237
Private Foundation (Funding the acquisition of a work of art by Inuit women artists)	K.M. Hunter Foundation	\$5,000 (same amount secured in 2025)
Exhibition Support	Jackman Foundation	\$2,000
Partnership Support Program	Destination Markham Corp.	\$8,000 (in 2025)

Fundraising Event Highlights

Voyages to the Varley

- Held on June 13, 2024. Attended by 80 guests.
- Gross Revenue: \$20,995; Net Revenue: \$10,545
- An exciting event that featured a DJ, dynamic projections, and an outdoor bar area.

Glitter and Gold

- Held on October 11, 2024. Attended by 95 guests.
- This elegant event helped to broaden the Foundation's reach to new audiences from diverse communities.

Old World/New World Wine Tasting

- Third-party event hosted by Santo Natale.
- The event raised \$14,200 and proceeds were split evenly between the Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham and the Markham-Stouffville Hospital Foundation



Wallace Joyce Scholarship

The Wallace Joyce Scholarship is a \$1,000 bursary awarded annually to a graduating high school student in York Region who is pursuing post-secondary studies in an art or design-related field.

This scholarship honours the legacy of Wallace Joyce, a devoted supporter of the arts who made a lasting impact on the Markham community. Throughout his life, Joyce championed numerous cultural organizations and helped nurture local talent. The Foundation is proud to celebrate his enduring contributions through this meaningful award.

Angel Zheng from Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School in Aurora was the 2024 Wallace Joyce Scholarship recipient. Angel is currently studying architecture at Tongji University in Shanghai.

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Students have been awarded this scholarship by the Foundation since 2008



Images: Francesca Dauphinais



Image: Jessica Li

William J. Withrow School Visits Bursary

The William J. Withrow School Visits Bursary is designed to eliminate financial barriers and ensure equitable access to arts education. In 2024, the bursary provided \$2,500 in funding to support transportation costs for four schools.

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Students from Kindergarten to Grade 8 were enabled to participate in in-gallery programs in 2024

These schools were: St. John Chrysostom CES (Newmarket, YCDSB) William Armstrong Public School (Markham, YRDSB) Reesor Park Public School (Markham, YRDSB) Christ the King CES (Richmond Hill, YCDSB)

Donors, Sponsors, and Supporters

The Varley Art Gallery of Markham extends heartfelt thanks to every individual and organization who has supported our work over the years, with special appreciation for our 2024 funders, sponsors, and donors. Your generosity helps us connect people through art, foster creativity, and deliver meaningful experiences to our community.

Government Support

- City of Markham
- Ontario Arts Council
- Ontario Seniors Community Grant Program
- Canada Summer Jobs
- Young Canada Works

Foundations

- Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham
- K.M. Hunter Foundation
- Epilepsy Toronto
- Jackman Foundation

Sponsors

- TD Bank – Exhibitions, Programs, and Free Admission Sponsor
- Destination Markham – Promotions Sponsor
- DeSerres – Membership Sponsor

Thank you for making our work possible.

Financial Overview

In 2024, the Varley Art Gallery of Markham had an operations budget of \$1,258,433 with expenses breaking down as follows:

Expenses

Non-Personnel	\$380,375
Personnel	\$878,058
Total:	\$1,258,433

The Gallery is committed to responsible financial stewardship and the effective use of resources. In addition to the vital annual support provided by the City of Markham, the Gallery continues to actively generate revenue to sustain and enhance its programs and services. In 2024, the Gallery generated \$462,578 through a range of activities and funding sources, exceeding its non-salary operating expenses. Revenue was generated through the following streams:

Revenues

Registered Programs	\$309,101
Rentals	\$56,374
Grants	\$56,052
Varley-McKay Art Foundation	\$35,000
Other	\$6,051
Total:	\$462,578



216 Main Street Unionville,
Markham, ON L3R 2H1
905.477.7000 extension 3261

varley@markham.ca
f @ x v VarleyArtGallery
VarleyArtGallery.ca

