

Varley
Art Gallery
of Markham

2025
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.

Current Strategic Priorities

Meet:

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

Exchange:

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

Discover:

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

Invest:

We engage in the stewardship of Varley staff and volunteers, grow their professional development, and work towards stability and responsible management.

2025 Gallery Staff

Niamh O’Laoghaire, Director
John Abrams, Facilities
Rachel D’Oliveira Fell, Programs
Ryan Taylor, Cultural Programs Assistant

Anik Glaude, Curator
Doriana Cabeceiras,
Rentals/Visitor Services
Jessica Li, Communications





2025 Varley-McKay Art Foundation Staff

Francesca Dauphinais, Development

2025 Varley-McKay Art Foundation Board of Directors

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

Contact Information

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    VarleyArtGallery
VarleyArtGallery.ca

2025 by the Numbers

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

67,000

Annual gallery visitors

8

Exhibitions presented

175+

Exhibition programs, public programs, and public events offered

13,050+

Events and programs participants

60+

School group visits

2,450+

Students in school programs

212

Rental days

146

Volunteers engaged

4,213

Volunteer hours contributed

9,280

Newsletter readership

11,036

Combined social media followers*

444,628

Total impressions across social media platforms



Message from the Director



The year 2025 was one of exciting change and transformation for the Varley Art Gallery of Markham. First came the City's Main Street Unionville Restoration Project, officially launched by Mayor Frank Scarpitti in the Varley courtyard on April 14, 2025. The following months saw a range of wonderful improvements, vital, if hidden, infrastructure, along with beautification of the streetscape, and all in keeping with the aesthetic of

this important heritage and tourism district. While the construction presented numerous challenges, the Varley and the McKay Art Centre remained fully accessible, and all exhibitions, programs, and events continued as planned.

2025 also saw a lot of transition within the City of Markham. The Department of Economic Growth, Culture and Entrepreneurship, where the Varley is located, acquired a new Director, Vinay Sharda. Organizationally, we moved from the Development Services Commission into the Office of the CAO. All Varley staff had the opportunity to participate in a City-wide Transformation Project to support the City's goal of delivering Excellent Service by Excellent People.

Through all of these changes, the Varley adhered to its core mandates. We mounted eight outstanding exhibitions with a range of programming, including exhibition launches, artist and curator talks, workshops, and Lunch and Learns. We also offered free cultural activities during festivals throughout the year. In addition, we delivered a variety of registered programs, including camps and art classes and workshops for all ages, while maintaining strong partnerships with organizations such as the Unionville BIA, the Markham Group of Artists, the Markham Jazz Festival, and Platform for Youth Creativity.

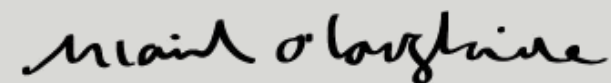
2025 was also a year of remarkable recognition. In October, **Lost and Found**, a public art project by Holly Ward and Kevin Schmidt, co-presented by Markham Public Art and the Varley, received the **Creative City Impact Award in Public Art: Sustainability**, announced at the Annual Creative City Conference. In December, our 2024 Summer Exhibition, **To go boldly**, received an **Exhibition Of The Year** award at the 48th Annual GOG Awards Ceremony.

A further confirmation that 2025 was a stellar year came with the final tally of our visitors. Once again, we reached a new attendance level of 67,000, beating the previous high set in 2024. Since opening in 1997, the Varley has now welcomed more than 1.143 million visitors, a testament to our growing impact and continued relevance within the community.

I extend my thanks to all Varley staffers for their dedicated service. The 2025 team included: Curator Anik Glaude; Exhibitions, Collections, and Facilities Coordinator John Abrams; Public Programs Coordinator Rachel D'Oliveira Fell; Programs Assistant Ryan Taylor; Art Gallery Coordinator Doriana Cabeceiras; Communications Specialist Jessica Li. Thanks also to our 2025 front desk staff, Bob Chan, Zoe Eisenstat, Emily Fan, Kate Tan, Spencer Wolf, Kendra Young-Shing, and Cindy Zhang, and of course, our many art class, school program and camp instructors, and volunteers.

Thank you to all of our funders, foremost among them the City of Markham. We also thank the Board of the Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham for its ongoing support of exhibitions, programs, operations, and school visits. The Foundation, and its Development, Officer Francesca Dauphinais, further strengthen our work through fundraising and partnerships with TD Bank Group, Destination Markham, the K. M. Hunter Foundation, and Partners in Art. In 2025 the Foundation secured a major financial commitment from Dr. Sylvester and Mrs. Pauline Chuang, including \$10,000 each year for a decade to support Varley internships. Thanks also to the Ontario Arts Council for operating support, the Canada Council for the Arts for project funding, and the Ontario Seniors Community Program for underwriting workshops for older adults.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Varley will see a wonderful slate of exhibitions and programs, including expanded evening classes, partnership for a new En Plein Air Festival, and mentorship opportunities for interns through the Chuang bursaries. These will be complemented by celebrations for the newly restored Main Street Unionville, and excitement surrounding the Markham Indy, happening within walking distance of the Varley. We also begin planning for the Varley's 2027 30th Anniversary. Stay tuned!



Niamh O'Laoghaire, Varley Art Gallery of Markham Director



2025 Exhibitions Overview

41
Artists
featured

12
Contemporary
or living artists

83%
Women or
non-binary
artists*

75%
Black, Indigenous,
and People of Colour
(BIPOC) artists*

In 2025, the Varley Art Gallery of Markham continued to present dynamic and thoughtful exhibitions that foregrounded both regional practice and broader contemporary dialogues. Focused solo exhibitions by Markham-based artist Karen Kar Yen Law and Richmond Hill-based artist Kejie Lin highlighted the strength of artistic production within York Region. Their work was presented in dialogue with that of other Canadian artists, fostering meaningful curatorial exchange and supporting sustained professional development.

Throughout the year, exhibitions emphasized artistic process and material exploration. From precise, methodical techniques to experimental contemporary approaches, visitors were invited to engage closely with the tools, materials, and decisions that shape artistic production, encouraging a greater appreciation of craftsmanship and creative inquiry.

Collection Spotlight

The 2025 exhibitions featured 41 works on view for the first time, including **Favourite Daughter** by Jessie Oonark (a recent acquisition), a selection of F. H. Varley's sketches from his 1954 trip to Russia, and rare 19th-century travel drawings by Charlotte Price. These presentations provided new perspectives on the Gallery's collection and expanded its historical and cultural narratives.

Firsts and Highlights

The year also marked the Varley's first exhibition dedicated to the techniques of printmaking, showcasing the scope of media represented in our collection.

*Of contemporary artists.



Image: **Karen Kar Yen Law: Better Bitter**, installation view, Varley Art Gallery of Markham, 2025. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid

2025 Winter Exhibitions

January 25 to May 4, 2025

Discover:
[Virtual Gallery Tour](#)



[Karen Kar Yen Law: Better Bitter](#)

Curated by Anik Glaude
Artist: Karen Kar Yen Law

[Beneath the Surface: Stories of Kinship and Connection](#)

Curated by Anik Glaude
Artists: Emma Nishimura and Gayle Uyagaqi Kabloona

[The Printmaker's Matrix: Process, Image, and Innovation](#)

Curated by Anik Glaude
Artists: Mayoreak Ashoona (1946–), David Blackwood (1941–2022), Sorel Etrog (1933–2014), Betty Goodwin (1923–2008), Frederick Hagan (1918–2003), A. Y. Jackson (1882–1974), David Milne (1882–1953), Jessie Oonark (1906–1985), Walter J. Phillips (1884–1963), Pudlo Pudlat (1916–1992), George A. Reid (1960–1947), Campbell Scott (1930–2013), F. H. Varley (1881–1969)

Highlights

The winter exhibition season explored printmaking as a powerful lens through which to examine identity, memory, and history. Across the exhibitions, printmaking emerged as both a material process and a conceptual language—one that reflects the layered nature of cultural, familial, and personal narratives.

Bridging past and present, the season brought together artists who revisited and reinterpreted histories through contemporary approaches. From Chinese culinary traditions to Japanese Canadian internment and Inuit artistic lineages,

the exhibitions positioned the gallery as a space where stories are not only preserved, but actively re-examined and reimagined.

A central focus of the season was to demystify the process of printmaking. Through both historical and contemporary works, visitors gained insight into how prints are made, how artists innovate within the medium, and how technique shapes meaning. This emphasis encouraged close looking and a deeper appreciation for the role of process in artistic practice.



The season also highlighted emerging and underrepresented voices, including artists exploring diasporic identity and Indigenous perspectives, reinforcing our commitment to diverse representation. A key highlight was the acquisition of **Favourite Daughter** (1985) by Inuit artist Jessie Oonark. The work holds a significant familial connection, as Oonark is the great-grandmother of featured artist Kabloona. For more details, please see page 23.

Exhibition Programs and Community Engagement

This season featured programs that focused on exploring the medium of printmaking, including the Opening Reception; Lunch and Learns with artists Emma Nishimura, Karen Kar Yen Law, and Gayle Uyagaqi Kabloona; Curator's Corner; a printmaking workshop led by Karen Kar Yen Law; and the Canadian Art Hop.

Impact and Feedback

7,644
Exhibition
attendance

“We walked into the Museum, not knowing what to expect, but were pleasantly surprised with what we found inside...”
—Prachi Shailendra, January, 2025

“Loved the current exhibits at the #VarleyArtGallery in Markham that focus on printmaking and modern Canadian print artists...” —@conservationplusculture, February 8, 2025



Image: **Between the Current and the Echo**, installation view, Varley Art Gallery of Markham, 2025. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid



2025 Summer Exhibitions

May 24 to September 1, 2025

Between the Current and the Echo

Curated by Anik Glaude
Supported by Partners in Art
Artist: Z'otz* Collective

All Aboard!

Curated by Anik Glaude
Artists: Franklin Carmichael (1890–1945), A. J. Casson (1898–1992), Alan Collier (1911–1990), Kathleen Daly (1898–1994), Audrey Garwood (1927–2004), Lawren Harris (1885–1970), Maurice Haycock (1900–1988), A. Y. Jackson (1882–1974), Arthur Lismer (1885–1969), J. E. H. MacDonald (1873–1932), Doris McCarthy (1910–2010), James Wilson Morrice (1865–1924), Charlotte Price (1796–1898), Ernestine Tahedl (b. 1940), F. H. Varley (1881–1969)

Highlights

Discover:
[Virtual Gallery Tour](#)



The summer exhibition season explored themes of collaboration, movement, and storytelling across time and place. At its centre was a focus on collective creation, foregrounded through the work of the Z'otz* Collective, which reimagines art-making as a relational and shared practice. This approach challenged the notion of the solitary artist-genius, instead emphasizing exchange, improvisation, and co-authorship.

Movement emerged as a key conceptual thread throughout the season. In **Between the Current and the Echo**, transformation, cyclical time, and Latin American mythic narratives shaped shifting worlds of hybrid forms and layered meanings. In **All Aboard!**, movement was explored through travel, geography, and artistic journeys across centuries, drawing from the Gallery's permanent collection. Notable highlights included the first-time display of:

- F. H. Varley's sketches from his 1954 trip to Russia
- a selection of 19th-century travel drawings by Charlotte Price

By pairing a contemporary, process-driven exhibition with a collection-based presentation, the season created a dialogue between past and present. This curatorial approach activated the Gallery's permanent collection while contextualizing contemporary experimentation, inviting visitors to consider continuity and change within artistic traditions.

The season also embraced imagination and open interpretation. It encouraged viewers to engage with ambiguity, whether through the Z'otz Collective's mythic, hybrid worlds, or the speculative journeys suggested in **All Aboard!**

Exhibition Programs and Community Engagement

This season featured a wide range of free programs, including an Opening Reception; a Lunch and Learn, a hands-on artist workshop titled Make Your Mark, and an Art Bus tour with the Z'otz* Collective; Chai and Write with Sheniz Janmohamed; and exhibition guided tours and drop-in activities led by Gallery Animateurs.

Impact and Feedback

13,946

Exhibition attendance

"For a gallery with free admission, this place is honestly a hidden gem. It's peaceful, quiet, and a great spot to slow down and take in a variety of beautiful artwork. There were plenty of pieces to enjoy across different styles, and the space was well laid out..."
—Areum Lee, August, 2025

"A wonderful cultural gem in Markham! The Varley always offers thoughtfully curated exhibitions, blending Canadian art history with exciting contemporary work. The staff are knowledgeable and welcoming...Definitely worth repeat visits."
—Jason Grover, September, 2025



Image: Kejie Lin: *A Garden of My Own*, installation view, Varley Art Gallery of Markham, 2024. Photo: Toni Hafkenschied

2025 Fall Exhibitions

September 20, 2025 to January 11, 2026

Kejie Lin: A Garden of My Own

Curated by Yuluo Wei
Artist: Kejie Lin

Sights of Convergence

Curated by Anik Glaude and Yuluo Wei
Artists: Jess Riva Cooper, Gabriela García-Luna, and Stanzie Tooth

The Quiet Fall: Scenes of Autumn from the permanent collection

Curated by Anik Glaude
Artists: Franklin Arbuckle (1909-2001), A. J. Casson (1898-1992), J. S. Hallam (1899-1952), Francis Hans Johnston (1888-1949), Jean Paul Riopelle (1923-2002), William Goodridge Roberts (1904-1974), Herbert S. Palmer (1881-1970), Carl Schaefer (1903-1995), F. H. Varley (1881-1969)

Highlights

The fall exhibition season explored the natural world as an active, relational force—one that shapes human experience as much as it is shaped by it. Across contemporary and historical presentations, landscape was approached not as a backdrop, but as a site where identity, memory, and emotional life are formed.

At the heart of the season was the relationship between place and identity. Through the meticulous, layered practice of Kejie Lin in **A Garden of My Own**, alongside the contemporary perspectives in **Sights of Convergence**, landscape became a medium for negotiating belonging, migration, and lived experience. These works revealed nature as both intimate and expansive, rooted in personal histories while shaped by broader cultural and ecological forces.

This dialogue extended into the Gallery’s permanent collection in **The Quiet Fall**, where historical depictions of landscape offered a reflective counterpoint. Together, the exhibitions traced how artists across generations have used seasonal change and natural environments to express shifting states of observation, emotion, and perception.

Traditional techniques and contemporary approaches were also brought into conversation, highlighting both continuity and innovation in artistic practice. From labour-intensive **gongbi** painting to experimental installation, the works underscored how material process shapes meaning and how inherited forms are reimagined.

Ultimately, the fall season framed nature as a space of reflection, where ecological awareness, cultural memory, and personal narrative intersect. It invited audiences to slow down, observe closely, and consider how place informs not only what we see, but how we understand ourselves.

Discover:
[Virtual Gallery Tour](#)

Exhibition Programs and Community Engagement

This season’s programming provided multilingual and community-centered engagement. Offerings included the Opening Reception; Curator’s Corner; Lunch and Learn sessions with Stanzie Tooth, Jess Riva Cooper, and Gabriela García-Luna; and a Mandarin-language gallery tour with Kejie Lin.



Impact and Feedback

10,206
Exhibition
attendance

“Had the chance to visit this gallery today and I’m still in awe. Kejie’s work is absolutely incredible, so much depth and emotion in every piece. Truly inspiring to see her talent up close!” —@mearochedu, October 2, 2025

“...To my surprise and joy, I discovered the work of Kejie Lin. The artist’s style is highly meticulous, adept at using complex layers of flowers and leaves combined with vibrant colors, creating a majestic composition that blends the delicacy of traditional gongbi painting with a modern sensibility.” —Lance Lan, October, 2025



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

Awards and Recognition

This year's achievements underscore our commitment to inspiring local and regional audiences with art through innovative and outstanding exhibitions and projects. We extend our gratitude to the GOG and Creative City Network of Canada for their recognition:

2025 GOG Awards

On December 1, 2025, Galleries Ontario Galleries (GOG) announced the slate of winners at the 48th Annual GOG Awards held at the Toronto Reference Library. Our 2024 Summer Exhibition, **To go boldly**, received **Exhibition Of The Year (Budget Over \$20,000 Thematic)**.

Curated by Anik Glaude, **To go boldly** explored how contemporary artists draw from science fiction to confront the past, interpret the present, and imagine the future. The exhibition examined complex social and cultural issues, ranging from racial justice and colonial violence to gender identity and ableism, while considering the relationship between science fiction and popular culture.

At the same event, Yan Yu, the City of Markham Public Art Curator, received the GOG Changemaker BIPOC award, one of three prestigious annual Individual honours. Wu led the development of the City's first five-year Public Art Master Plan and currently oversees its implementation. Wu also curated the award-winning public art project **Lost and Found**.

2025 Creative City Impact Awards

Lost and Found, a public art project co-presented by the City of Markham's Public Art Program and the Varley, received the **Creative City Impact Award in Public Art: Sustainability**, announced at the 2025 Annual Creative City Conference held in Kingston, Ontario, on October 7, 2025.

The Creative City Impact Awards recognize Canadian municipalities that demonstrate visionary leadership by supporting a distinctive program and process that led to a successful public art project or program.



Image:
Beneath the Surface: Stories of Kinship and Connection,
installation view, Varley Art Gallery of Markham, 2025.
Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid

Acquisition Highlights

Over the past twenty-five years, the Varley Art Gallery of Markham has significantly expanded its permanent collection through the generous support of the Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham, dedicated donors, and institutional partners such as the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Since opening in 1997, the collection has grown to over 1,100 works, reflecting both historical depth and an evolving commitment to contemporary practice. As we look ahead, our acquisition strategy remains responsive to the communities we serve, ensuring continued growth in both relevance and representation.

2025 Acquisitions

In 2025, four works were acquired for the permanent collection, including three originating from the exhibition **To go boldly**. These acquisitions further extend the impact of the exhibition while strengthening the Gallery's holdings of contemporary Canadian art. Acquired works include **Attempts to Contain Evil** (2011) and **Move Along Home, Cardassian** (2024) by Brendan Lee Satish Tang, as well as **Strangling Fruit** (2019) by Claire Scherzinger.

Collection Spotlight: Jessie Oonark

A significant highlight for 2025 was the acquisition of **Favourite Daughter** (1985) by Inuit artist Jessie Oonark of the Utkuhiksalingmiut. This stonecut and stencil print was purchased by the Varley-McKay Art Foundation with generous support from the K. M. Hunter Charitable Foundation, whose arts and culture grants support Indigenous artists, women, and other underrepresented communities.



Image: Sarah Hunter (left), President of the K. M. Hunter Charitable Foundation, with Anik Glaude (right), Gallery Curator, during a visit to view **Favourite Daughter** by Jessie Oonark.

Presented in the Introduction Gallery during the winter season, the work was exhibited alongside **Ningiuq** (2020), a woodcut with collage by Gayle Uyagaqi Kabloona, Oonark's great-granddaughter. This pairing created a meaningful intergenerational dialogue, further enriched by Kabloona's inclusion of a collage element depicting her grandmother, Victoria Mamnguqsualuk, connecting three generations of Inuit women artists.



Image: **Favourite Daughter** by Jessie Oonark (left) and **Ningiuq** by Gayle Uyagaqi Kabloona (right). Installation photo by Toni Hafkenscheid.

The acquisition of Oonark's work not only strengthens the historical scope of the collection, but also reinforces the Varley's responsibility to support representation, agency, and visibility for Indigenous artists.

Evolving Acquisition Priorities

Since its inception, the Varley has focused on collecting works by F. H. Varley, his contemporaries in the Group of Seven, and artists central to the history of art in Canada. In recent years, this mandate has expanded to include a stronger emphasis on contemporary Canadian artists, particularly those whose work engages with themes relevant to the existing collection and who reflect the diversity of our communities.

Following a comprehensive review of the collection, the Varley has taken active steps to address historical imbalances in representation. Today, acquisition priorities focus on artists who are women, Black, Indigenous, and culturally diverse, with particular attention to artists working in Ontario and across Canada. Recent acquisitions include works by artists such as Anique Jordan, Xuan Ye, and Lan Florence Yee, as well as contemporary Inuit artists including Shuvina Ashoona, Pitseolak Ashoona, and Annie Pootoogook.

Through this evolving approach, supported by the continued generosity of the Foundation, the Gallery is building a collection that is both historically grounded and forward-looking—one that reflects a broader range of voices, perspectives, and lived experiences.



Image: Jessica Li

Public Programs

Learning Through High-Quality Artistic Practice

In 2025, the Varley Art Gallery of Markham continued to serve as a vibrant cultural hub, offering high-quality, artist-led public programs grounded in skill development and creative exploration. On top of recreational art-making, the Varley programs emphasize structured, technique-based learning delivered by experienced practising artists and arts professionals. Through studio-based instruction, camps, and workshops, the Varley provides meaningful opportunities for participants of all ages to develop real artistic skills.

2025 Program Overview and Participation

This year, the Varley delivered **over 1290 registered participant** experiences across its public programming. Offerings included:

Children's and Youth Programs:

- 11 P.A. Day and holiday workshops
- 14 ten-week weekend art classes
- 4 new programs developed for pre-teens and youth
- 2 week-long March Break camps
- 8 weeks of summer camps (32 sessions)
- 12 Winter Break day camps

Adult Programs:

- 50+ adult art classes and workshops, including Landscape Painting, Portrait Drawing and Painting, Watercolours (Beginner to Intermediate), Acrylics for Beginners, Brush Calligraphy, Acrylic Pouring, and En Plein Air
- Introduction of an evening Life Drawing Studio in partnership with the Markham Group of Artists (MGA)
- 7 workshops and tours for older adults through the Ontario Seniors Community Grant Program

Participation remained strong across all age groups, reflecting sustained community interest in structured, skill-based, and accessible arts education.

New Initiatives and Program Development

In 2025, the Varley expanded its programming through several new initiatives designed to broaden access and deepen engagement with emerging and underserved audiences. These included the development of youth-focused programs for pre-teens and teenagers, as well as expanded evening offerings to better accommodate working adults.

The introduction of an evening Life Drawing Studio, delivered in partnership with the Markham Group of Artists, marked a significant addition to the Varley's adult programming, responding to ongoing demand for rigorous studio-based learning opportunities. These initiatives reflect the Varley's continued commitment to responsive, community-driven programming led by professional artists.

Supporting Older Adults and Inclusive Access

The Wellness Wednesday Older Adult Workshops, supported by the Ontario Seniors Community Grant Program, engaged **over 130 participants** through a series of seven workshops designed and led by senior facilitators and volunteers. Combining hands-on art-making with guided exhibition tours, these programs fostered creativity, social connection, and well-being among older adults.



Acknowledgements and Testimonials

The Varley's programs continued to see strong participation and high demand. Children's camps remained especially popular, with March Break camps reaching a **100%** fill rate, and both Summer and Winter Break camps exceeding **90%** capacity. Family-focused programs, such as the Family Day Canvas Challenge, consistently reached full registration.

Adult classes and workshops attracted enthusiastic participation, reflecting a sustained interest in creative skill-building and artistic development.

The success is made possible through the dedication of staff, artist-instructors, and program facilitators. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of the Ontario Seniors Community Grant Program, Young Canada Works, and Canada Summer Jobs.

Participant feedback continues to underscore the impact of these programs:

“This is my first time taking a watercolour class. I am getting more ideas about what watercolor is about and it is a very interesting class. I will continue taking classes to improve my skills.”—Program participant

“I absolutely loved every workshop and class I've participated in over the last year. I always feel like the classes go by too fast.”
—Program participant

“A big thank you to the support staff to make the facility ready before the start of every class. It really helps to build a pleasant learning atmosphere.” —Program participant





林可
造园记
Landscape Architect Lin:
Garden of My Own

Lin's garden is both her subject and her studio. As a landscape architect who immigrated to Canada, she brings a rare fluency to her work, blending traditional Chinese garden design with modern sensibilities and her intuitive care.

Her garden is a place where she can explore her own ideas and create a space that is both a reflection of her heritage and a new beginning. It is a place where she can find peace and inspiration, and where she can share her love of nature with others.

Her garden is a testament to her passion and her dedication to her craft. It is a place where she has found her true home, and where she has created a space that is both beautiful and meaningful.

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Public Events

Accessible Arts Experiences

The Varley Art Gallery of Markham's free public events continue to make art accessible, inclusive, and engaging for all. Through a diverse range of hands-on activities, festivals, and cultural celebrations, these events invite people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with art in meaningful ways.

Annual Participation

In 2025, our public events welcomed a **total of 12,735 participants**, reflecting strong community engagement and growing interest in accessible arts and cultural programming. Feedback from participants consistently highlights the welcoming atmosphere, interactive experiences, and opportunities to connect with both art and one another.

Signature Events and Community Impact

Exhibition opening receptions remain a cornerstone of our public programming, drawing **over 1,495 attendees** throughout the year. These events bring together artists, curators, and the public in a lively and inclusive setting, fostering dialogue, creativity, and a shared appreciation for contemporary art.

Major community events—including LunarFest, Unionville Festival, One Love Caribbean Festival, and Canada Day programming—engaged **over 2,017 participants**, celebrating the cultural diversity of Markham through art and performance. These events play a key role in reinforcing the Varley's presence within the broader community.

Youth-focused initiatives, such as Purple Market and events organized in collaboration with the Mayor's Youth Council, engaged **over 361 participants**.

12,735
Total
Public Event
Participants

These programs provide platforms for young people to express creativity, develop leadership skills, and actively participate in the cultural life of their city and community.

Event Highlights

The 2025 calendar featured a wide range of public events and partnerships. Highlights include:

- LunarFest
- Black History Month programming
- Family Day activities
- Purple Market by Platform for Youth Creativity
- Amazing Race by Markham Mayor's Youth Council
- Canadian Art Hop
- Colours in Culture by Markham Teen Arts Council
- Unionville Festival
- Music on the Street
- One Love Caribbean Festival
- Markham Jazz Festival
- Plummet Summit by Shadowpath Theatre
- Doors Open Markham
- Artist Trading Cards
- Olde Tyme Christmas





- **Paint Like Varley** – acrylic painting inspired by F. H. Varley’s landscapes
- **Animals and Ecosystems** – mixed media using watercolour and oil pastels
- **Mini Self-Portrait Busts** – sculpture using air-dry clay or plasticine
- **Poster Printing** – relief printmaking with scratch foam
- **Life Drawing** – observational figure drawing using graphite and conté
- **Lino-scapes** – linocut printmaking exploring human and environmental themes

All school visits also include a one-hour guided tour of current exhibitions, connecting students directly with the artworks on view.

A key new addition this year was an **exhibition-integrated studio program**, designed to deepen engagement with our current exhibitions. In this hands-on workshop, students explore themes, materials, and techniques found in the exhibitions, guided by experienced educators. The program encourages creativity, critical thinking, and personal expression, while reinforcing curriculum connections aligned with the Ontario curriculum.

Impact and Educational Value

60+
School
group visits

The Varley’s school programs are designed to support curriculum-based learning while fostering meaningful engagement with visual arts. Each tour, workshop, and studio activity is intentionally developed to align with Ontario curriculum expectations, supporting learning in Visual Arts, Language, Media Literacy, Social Studies, and Science and Technology.

2,450
Students in
school programs

Through direct interaction with artworks and hands-on creative practice, students build visual literacy, observational skills, and confidence in expressing ideas visually and verbally. Teachers consistently note that these experiences enhance classroom learning by deepening student engagement, encouraging inquiry-based thinking, and strengthening interpretive and analytical skills across grade levels.

School Programs

Inspiring Curriculum-Based Learning

In 2025, the Varley Art Gallery of Markham welcomed **over 60 school groups**, engaging **more than 2,450 students** from across the Greater Toronto Area. Our school programs provide immersive, curriculum-linked arts learning for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, both in-gallery and through select outreach opportunities. Supported by a dedicated full-time Culture Programs Assistant, each visit is carefully coordinated to ensure a seamless, engaging, and educational experience.

Through interactive tours, hands-on studio workshops, and exhibition-based learning, students are encouraged to explore contemporary and historical artworks while developing curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking skills.

We were also pleased to welcome three new educators to our team—Sydney Hanson, Lano Aluko, and Angel Hui—joining returning educators Caroline Doyle Keane, and Leslie Luxemburger. Their combined expertise continues to enrich the learning experiences offered to visiting students.

New Program Offerings

In 2025, the Varley expanded its studio programming to offer a wide range of hands-on learning experiences, including:



Volunteer Contributions

Volunteers are an integral part of the Varley Art Gallery of Markham's success, contributing meaningfully to nearly every aspect of our operations. While our volunteer program operates within the City of Markham's broader volunteer network, it is uniquely administered by the Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham. This model allows for a more focused, responsive, and enriching volunteer experience that reflects the Varley's mandate.

Roles and Impact

From supporting exhibitions and special events to assisting with educational programming and welcoming visitors, volunteers play a vital role in enhancing both daily operations and the overall visitor experience. Their presence helps create a welcoming and engaging environment, fostering meaningful connections between art and community.

The Varley volunteers contribute by:

- Supporting exhibitions, special events, and fundraising initiatives
- Assisting with camps and public programs, fostering creativity and lifelong learning
- Engaging visitors and enhancing the gallery experience
- Building connections within the arts community

Strengthening Fundraising and Organizational Capacity

In 2025, the Varley-McKay Art Foundation took an important step in supporting the Gallery's long-term sustainability by revitalizing its Fundraising Committee. Composed of Board members and engaged volunteers, the committee plays a key role in advancing strategic fundraising initiatives that support exhibitions, programs, and community outreach. This collaborative effort highlights the expanding role of volunteers in shaping the Varley's's future.



Volunteer Engagement and Recognition

The contributions of our volunteers are celebrated throughout the year. A highlight of 2025 was the **Volunteer Appreciation Day**, held on August 19, 2025, where we recognized the energy, creativity, and care our volunteers brought to participants and visitors.

We are deeply grateful for the time and commitment our volunteers bring. Their contributions continue to enrich the Varley and the community we serve.



Volunteer Voices

“I wanted to thank you for making the Varley such a wonderful place to volunteer. The atmosphere is so welcoming, encouraging, and informative.”—Barb, Volunteer

“Volunteering here gives me a rare chance to experience art from the inside... The Varley fills my everyday life with colours and creativity, and it even inspired me to start drawing again after many years.”
—Yulia, Volunteer and Fundraising Committee Member

146

Dedicated
volunteers

4,213

Hours
contributed



Rental Services

Dynamic Cultural Spaces

In 2025, the Varley Art Gallery of Markham and the McKay Art Centre continued to serve as sought-after venues for exhibitions, community gatherings, and private events. Despite the challenges presented by the Main Street Unionville Restoration Project, the Varley successfully maintained access to its facilities, ensuring that rentals and events could proceed with minimal disruption. This commitment to accessibility and service excellence allowed us to continue welcoming a wide range of users and audiences throughout the year.

Overview and Utilization

Our rental spaces supported a diverse array of cultural, community, commercial, and private functions:

McKay Art Centre

- Exhibition Rentals: 154 days across 22 rentals
- Unionville BIA Offices Rentals: 365 days

Varley Art Gallery

- Rentals: 58 days

Highlights and Community Use

Throughout the year, the Varley hosted a range of highly attended and well-received events that brought together artists, community groups, and the public.

Highlights included the **Good Neighbours Canada Senior’s Exhibition**, the **Unionville Tennis Club 50th Anniversary Celebration**, the **Hand Over Hand Community Organization Fundraiser**, and the **Unionville College Student Art**

Exhibition. These events demonstrate the Gallery’s role as both a cultural platform and a community gathering space.

Client Experience

Feedback from renters consistently highlights the Varley’s distinctive atmosphere and professional support. The combination of natural light, architectural character, and dedicated staff contributes to memorable and successful events.

“5 Stars – Magical Venue with Outstanding Service!... The artistic ambience and natural light created a perfect intimate setting... The team made our day unforgettable. Highly recommend for unique, top-tier events.”—Tomy, Wedding Client

“...The space was beautiful with lots of natural light... the Varley Art Gallery team were a pleasure to work with...”—Bessie O., Private Event Client

“Thanks to you, we were able to successfully complete our Senior Art Exhibition, and I am truly grateful for your support...Thanks to your kind guidance and assistance, we were able to finish the event smoothly without any shortcomings... If there is another opportunity in the future, we would love to hold an exhibition here again and would definitely recommend this venue to others.”—Yona L., Private Event Client

“...The event was a great success, and we truly appreciate the opportunity to showcase our students' creativity in such an inspiring space. We are especially grateful to Doriana and Kendra for their incredible support throughout the entire process. They were always accessible, responsive, and helpful, which made everything—from planning to installation—run smoothly and efficiently. Their professionalism and warm presence made a significant difference, and we felt fully supported every step of the way...”—Ann H., Unionville College Annual Art Show Client

Facilities Upgrades

In 2025, the Varley Art Gallery of Markham continued to invest in the functionality and accessibility of its facilities, ensuring that both the Varley Art Gallery and the McKay Art Centre remain welcoming, efficient, and responsive to the needs of visitors, participants, clients, and staff. Outdoor improvements included the addition of colourful tables and chairs near the entrance, encouraging visitors and pedestrians to relax, socialize, and enjoy the space.

The Varley Art Gallery of Markham

At the Varley Art Gallery, an Electrical Load Assessment conducted by Sustainability and Asset Management (SAM) will help inform the City's broader goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The Varley also participated in a multi-site upgrade to its Building Automation System (BAS), improving responsiveness and operational efficiency.

Public-facing improvements included the replacement of radiator covers in activity rooms, the addition of a washer and dryer, and the installation of a large screen in the Deacon Room, enhancing the delivery of programs, events, and rentals.

Accessibility enhancements also extended to the Varley, where the reception desk was redesigned and lowered, with additional modifications to ensure full accessibility for visitors using wheelchairs and mobility devices—creating a more welcoming and inclusive point of entry for all.

The McKay Art Centre

At the McKay Art Centre, new exterior railings were installed along the garden staircase, and a swipe card system was introduced to improve both security and ease of access. A key initiative this year was the commissioning of a comprehensive accessibility audit of the McKay Art Centre, completed in mid-summer. With the support of SAM, most short-term and cost-effective recommendations were implemented by year's end.





COLLECTIONS

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 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 and Funding Received in 2025

Funders	Details	Amount Received
K.M. Hunter Foundation	Private Foundation (Funding the acquisition of a work of art by Inuit women artists)	\$5,000
Jackman Foundation	Private Foundation (Supporting Gallery Animateurs staffing)	\$3,000
Partners in Art	Private Foundation (Supporting 2025 Summer Exhibition Between the Current and the Echo)	\$12,000
TD Bank Group	Sponsorship (Supporting free admission and programs of all exhibitions)	\$30,000

Kingdom Developments	Sponsorship (Supporting free admission and programs of the collection exhibitions)	\$7,500
Unionville BIA	Sponsorship	\$1,000
City of Markham	Government Support	\$40,000
Government of Canada	Canada Summer Jobs (Supporting summer staffing)	\$11,000
Destination Markham Corp.	Marketing Support for the 2025 Winter and Summer Exhibitions	\$8,000

Donations Received in 2025

Donors	Details	Amount Received
Dr. Sylvester and Mrs. Pauline Chuang	Scholarship Fund	\$10,000/year for 10 years
Dr. Sylvester and Mrs. Pauline Chuang	Capital Campaign Establishment	\$50,000
Santo Natale	Wine Tasting Fundraising Event	\$5,225
Phoenix Financial/ Sophia Sun	General Donation	\$2,000

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.

Leah Chang was the 2025 recipient of the Wallace Joyce Scholarship. A graduate of Markville Secondary School in Markham, she is currently pursuing a degree in Industrial Design at Carleton University.

“I really am grateful and appreciate all the effort that went into the decision making process, the planning, and the execution of the scholarship and event.” —Leah Chang, 2025 scholarship recipient

14

Students have been awarded this scholarship since 2008



Left to right: Paul Cicchini (Member, Varley-McKay Art Foundation), Niamh O'Laoghaire (Director, Varley Art Gallery), Leah Chang (2025 scholarship recipient), Jim Schmidt (Chair, Varley-McKay Art Foundation), and Craig McQuat (Vice Chair, Varley-McKay Art Foundation)



William J. Withrow School Visits Bursary Program

The William J. Withrow School Visits Bursary is designed to eliminate financial barriers and ensure equitable access to arts education. In 2025, the bursary assisted two schools, enabling 81 students from Kindergarten to Grade 8 to attend in-gallery programming.

81

Students from Kindergarten to Grade 8 were enabled to participate in in-gallery programs in 2025

Since its inception, the program has supported a total of 747 students from eight York Region schools and one summer camp program (2019, 2023, 2024, and 2025 combined), helping to ensure equitable access to meaningful arts experiences.



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 2025 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
- Canada Council for the Arts
- Young Canada Works

Foundations

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

Sponsors

- TD Bank – Exhibitions, Programs, and Admission
- Kingdom Developments – Collection Exhibitions, Programs, and Admission
- Destination Markham – Promotions

Thank you for making our work possible.

Financial Overview

In 2025, the Varley Art Gallery of Markham had an operations budget of \$1,404,693 with expenses breaking down as follows:

Expenses

Non-Personnel	\$385,728
Personnel	\$1,018,965
Total:	\$1,404,693

The Varley is committed to strong fiscal stewardship and the responsible management of its resources. Supported by significant annual funding from the City of Markham, the Varley continues to actively generate revenue to sustain and enhance its programs, exhibitions, and operations.

In 2025, the Varley generated \$524,006 in revenue from a range of activities and sources—a significant increase over the previous year—surpassing its non-personnel operating expenses. This achievement reflects our ability to maximize impact through strategic resource management.

Revenues in 2025 were generated through the following sources:

Revenues

Registered Programs	\$357,169
Rentals	\$53,213
Grants	\$66,659
Varley-McKay Art Foundation	\$40,000
Other	\$6,965
Total:	\$524,006



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