

Five Things That Should Change in 2014

by [Sky Goodden](#) 03/01/14 4:15 PM EST



Power Plant: Be Better

There was a time when the Power Plant scheduled nine exhibitions a year. And the exhibitions were good — international artists like **Ann Hamilton** shared the floor with Canadian talent like **Eldon Garnet**, and, under the right direction, the tiles could balance the weight. The waterfront institution saw curators like **Richard Rhodes**, **Kitty Scott**, and **Philip Monk** position artists like **Rachel Whiteread**, **Mark Lewis**, and **Janet Cardiff** within the walls of Toronto's internationally-minded *Kunsthalle*, seemingly without much regard for the badgering question, "us versus them."

Something, since then, has changed. In recent years directors, curators, and board members have shuttled in and out at a disturbing pace, with unhappy realities both assumed and broadcast. The operation seems uneasy. Then, when current director **Gaetane Verna** was positioned at the helm, her first initiative was to regress: she moved the year's programming from four shows to three. Curatorially, she gestured to her alienated constituents with an homage to Toronto — but, the thing is, it was never about Toronto. It was simply an artist, **Micah Lexier**, casting one hundred artists in his own image. So we implore the Power Plant to take a page from its former book. Show more, reach further; and, if you're in need of a strong example, we'd encourage you to look at the **Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal**, where (as we noted in our "[Best of Canadian Art 2013](#)") the people coming through the door are the beneficiaries of your good effort.

Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal: Don't Stray

Having said all that, let it be noted that the **MAC** has recently initiated a restructuring that puts its best assets at risk. Its board appears to be attempting a [model of greater accessibility](#), losing its director and chief curator in the process, and folding the city's troubled biennial into the institution's laureled triennial in one fell swoop. The MAC's most remarkable assets have long been intelligence, internationalism, and risk-taking. The new structure, under the helm of board director **Alexandre Taillefer**, begs the question: with director **Paulette Gagnon** and chief curator **Marie**

Fraser departed, and your initiative to fuse the positions of director and curator (**John Zeppetelli**, formerly of **DHC/ART** is taking on both roles), who are you pitching to? Because we're not sure you have a catcher in the outfield.

The NGC at Venice Biennale: Something's Got to Give

The Canadian contribution to the Venice Biennial is in need of some long thought, because what's happening lately [isn't working](#). For example: it doesn't work when the government blindly tasks an independant curator with the job (one inevitably spends the year fundraising). And it doesn't work when the **National Gallery of Canada** takes control, either; risks aren't taken, the pavilion's curation remains overly cautious. In either event, the artist works alone — part (fundraising) circus performer, part engineer, fully compromised. There isn't enough to suggest we care to compete — but, let it be known: this is the ballgame. Nothing in our cultural production matters more. It's time we step up and recognize that government money, in the right hands, makes history.

Art Toronto: Go Small to Be Big

Many of us [lament the absence of a real secondary market](#) in Canada, so it might follow that our only non-specialized art fair is a bit too ambitious in its objective. We see the country's major commercial event diluted with second-rate galleries, while the fair's programming panders to more programming and its gallerists scratch their heads as to why it costs so much to be so close to home. It's a simple fix: Do it elsewhere, somewhere smaller. Invite fewer galleries. Be more selective. Show greater confidence in what you present.

Roving, Tired Exhibitions

We saw several of our major institutions take the easy way out, this year, pulling traveling exhibitions in, no matter how tired, no matter how disconnected. The **AGO** led the pack with a distracted program including **Patti Smith** and **David Bowie**, and a [poorly curated exhibition of Ai Weiwei](#). While good work was presented (its ongoing [photography exhibit](#) has been an underlit triumph), it typically hangs in the alcoves, where the sense of pandering, and a touch of greed, lingers still. Ultimately, we can't help but wonder if these efforts go in vain. The AGO surely loses members in its attempt to gain new visitors? We'd like to see a greater sense of confidence in this institution. God knows, it has the wares.