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## **Knowledge Synthesis Grant to support project aimed at preserving histories of artist-run centres through oral storytelling**

A new project designed to preserve the rich histories of artist-run centres in Canada has received support through a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Knowledge Synthesis Grant.

Led by Dr. Devon Smither, an associate professor of Art History and Museum Studies and associate dean in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Lethbridge, the project will produce the first national synthesis of how artist-run centres document and preserve their histories through oral storytelling and archival practices.

“This project positions oral history as a key tool for preserving and understanding artist-run culture,” says Smither of her project, *Oral Histories and Artist-Run Centres in Canada*. “By synthesizing scholarship from oral history and related fields, alongside artist-run centre practices, we aim to support more equitable, accessible and sustainable ways of preserving artist-run culture in Canada.”

Artist-run centres emerged in the late 1960s response to limited access to mainstream institutions and a growing resistance to market-driven exhibition models. They provided essential opportunities for artists by fostering alternative exhibition spaces that supported experimental, dematerialized forms such as performance, installation and video art. Often at the forefront of equity and diversity initiatives, artist-run centres continue to play a crucial role in building regional arts communities while challenging conventional definitions of artistic production and display.

Despite their vital role in shaping Canada’s cultural landscape, their histories remain scattered, under-resourced and at risk of being lost. Smither’s project will bring together existing scholarship, archival materials and sector knowledge to identify best practices and policy directions for sustainable, community-led documentation and oral histories.

The grant, valued at \$29,127, will support Smither’s work in generating a bilingual synthesis report, a policy evidence brief and practical tools to support artist-run centres, alongside a national virtual workshop and academic dissemination. It builds on Smither’s five-year SSHRC Insight-funded project, *Parallel: The History and Archives of Artist-Run Centres in Canada*.

Once completed, the project's results will contribute to broader conversations around cultural policy, digital preservation and community-based knowledge in the arts.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/knowledge-synthesis-grant-support-project-aimed-preserving-histories-artist-run-centres>

-- 30 --

Contact:

Trevor Kenney, Manager of Public Affairs  
403-329-2710  
403-360-7639 (cell)  
[trevor.kenney@uleth.ca](mailto:trevor.kenney@uleth.ca)  
@ULethbridge

*Our University's Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.*