

# Strategic Planning Vision 2030



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## Introduction

As it approaches its 40th anniversary in 2025, the Contemporary Art Galleries Association (AGAC) reaffirms its central role in promoting and supporting contemporary art galleries in Canada. Known notably for its Plural Contemporary Art Fair (formerly the Papier Art Fair), AGAC is committed to elevating the recognition and prosperity of its member galleries in the face of economic and structural challenges.

A participatory strategic process has identified priorities such as diversifying revenue streams, enhancing visibility, and increasing support for galleries. In response to a transforming global market and uncertain economic context, AGAC aims to strengthen its leadership role and leverage its 40th anniversary to broaden its reach.

Since 1985, AGAC has worked toward the recognition and prosperity of contemporary art in Canada. It has played a key role in professionalizing the field, developing art collecting practices, and raising the standards of the art market. These efforts have positioned the Association as a pillar for its members and strengthened their standing within the art ecosystem.

However, significant challenges remain, such as economic pressure, limited visibility, and a reliance on grants. In light of these issues, AGAC has developed a structured strategic plan for 2030, defining organizational priorities within the rapidly evolving context of the contemporary art market.

This document outlines the steps of the process, market context, key findings, and strategic orientations aimed at enhancing the organization's impact and reach.

## Acknowledgments

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# Approach

The development of this strategic plan required over a year of work. This process, marked by an interruption due to the departure of the executive director after 10 years in the role, was punctuated by adjustments to adapt to new leadership and a changing organizational context.

## ► Framing and Adaptation

The first phase aimed to frame, and then reframe, the project to align with the evolving realities of the organization. This included a thorough review of internal documentation to better understand the foundations and current practices. Executive interviews were conducted with AGAC staff and board members to clarify internal expectations and challenges.

Meetings with the outgoing executive director were also instrumental in ensuring a comprehensive knowledge transfer. Preparatory sessions were held to lay the groundwork for subsequent strategic reflections while adapting to leadership transitions.

## ► Participatory Strategic Reflection

The second phase, focused on participatory reflection, aimed to deepen the understanding of the specific context of the contemporary art field. This step included secondary research to provide a global overview of the art market.

Additionally, functional interviews were conducted with key individuals in AGAC's ecosystem: gallery members, influential sector figures, and funders. These exchanges offered varied perspectives on the challenges, priorities, and opportunities faced by AGAC.

Collaborative working sessions further structured discussions, highlighting the organization's strengths and weaknesses, its challenges and priorities, as well as the opportunities and threats shaping its future actions.

## ► Strategic Planning

The final phase aimed to establish the major orientations and strategies guiding AGAC's Vision 2030. Conducted over several work sessions with the internal team, AGAC prioritized four orientations addressing strategic imperatives to ensure the Association's relevance, growth and sustainability.

This phase also includes the presentation and adoption of the strategic plan by the board of directors and members.

A structured project management approach was identified as essential for implementing the strategic plan. This will be integrated into daily operations and optimized in real-time using the project management tool Notion. The action plan will remain adaptive, evolving continuously with the organization, its members, and market realities.

## AGAC Context

AGAC operates in an environment where economic and cultural factors play a decisive role. Since its inception, the Association has expanded its reach to include galleries from other Canadian provinces, although its recognition remains primarily rooted in Quebec. Today, AGAC comprises nearly 40 member galleries in Montreal, Quebec City, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver. Plural (formerly the Papier Art Fair), a flagship event of the Association, has been instrumental in strengthening its visibility. However, AGAC's recognition remains limited nationally and internationally.

Organizationally, AGAC benefits from sound management and a stable, competent team supported by a diverse board of directors. However, despite effective management, human and financial resources remain limited in the face of its strategic ambitions.

The profession of gallery owner, central to AGAC's ecosystem, is particularly vulnerable. Highly exposed to political and socio-economic fluctuations, it is directly affected by market changes.

Over the past several years, AGAC has observed increasing precarity among new galleries, marked by a growing turnover of openings and closures. This highlights the urgency of providing stronger structural support to ensure their sustainability.

The pandemic temporarily boosted artwork sales, but 2023 saw a slowdown due to inflation and rising operational costs (rent, salaries), which weigh heavily on galleries and hinder their capacity to invest in development.

In parallel, public funding has been frozen or reduced, with funding priorities shifting toward digital initiatives, regional culture, and projects supporting underrepresented communities. These new realities affect a sector operating under a traditional model but meeting the expectations of collectors, artists, and markets, both locally and internationally.

## ► SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

The strategic exercises clearly identified the organization's strengths and the opportunities to capitalize on for its future development, as well as the elements that weaken it and the external threats that could hinder its proper functioning, the achievement of its ambitions, and its sustainability as a cultural organization.

### Strengths

- AGAC has strong credibility as an organization created by and for galleries. Its expertise in organizing contemporary art fairs, particularly Plural, enhances its positive brand image and visibility.
- AGAC enjoys an excellent reputation in the field, recognized as an influential voice sought after for its expertise.
- Financially sound management and attractive working conditions position AGAC as a leader in the arts and culture sector.

### Weaknesses

- Despite its strengths, AGAC suffers from limited visibility outside Quebec and struggles to effectively promote itself and its member galleries. Its ability to expand membership is constrained by grant requirements and a saturated local market.
- Dependence on public funding and revenue from Plural, combined with limited human resources, hampers its development.
- Member galleries face growing challenges in visibility while managing rising fixed costs post-pandemic (e.g., rent, transportation, storage, salaries). Financial pressures, coupled with limited marketing and management skills, threaten the sustainability of many galleries.

### Opportunities

- AGAC can strengthen its role as a spokesperson for Canadian contemporary art and increase its presence in the field, among institutions, and with the public. The 40th anniversary presents a unique opportunity to enhance its visibility.
- Financially, revenue diversification—particularly through philanthropy via the activation of its foundation and opportunities for autonomous income like exhibition equipment rentals—shows promising potential.
- The development of national and international partnerships and investment in digital tools offer critical strategic avenues. In this respect, the *lesgaleries.ca* initiative is a major opportunity to improve the discoverability of galleries by the public, increase the visibility and reach of cultural activities related to contemporary art, and generate autonomous revenue for AGAC.

## **Threats**

- Economic uncertainty and inflationary pressures impact galleries, as well as collectors and donors, who are reevaluating their spending and investment strategies. A reduction in public subsidies, coupled with a loss of confidence among galleries and collectors in the market, could further weaken the organization, compromising its ability to support its members and sustain its activities.

## **➤ Strategic Imperatives**

AGAC finds itself at a pivotal moment. From the organizational and market context, four clear imperatives emerge that AGAC must address, guiding the selection of strategic orientations and strategies for its 2030 plan:

- **Recognition and Outreach:** Consolidate AGAC's national visibility and develop a positioning and representation strategy on both national and international levels.
- **Influence:** Strengthen AGAC's role as a steward of the Canadian contemporary art market and increase its influence within the field, institutions, and the public to advocate for galleries' essential place in the artistic ecosystem.
- **Revenue Diversification:** Reduce dependence on subsidies by increasing autonomous revenues and expanding sponsorships and private partnerships.
- **Member Support:** Develop services and tools to assist gallery owners in their management, visibility, and commercial strategies.
- **Public Education:** Foster public interest in contemporary art and expand the pool of collectors.

## ► Foundations

### Mission

The Association of Contemporary Art Galleries (AGAC) is a non-profit organization whose primary mission is to ensure the recognition and prosperity of the contemporary art market in Canada.

The Association contributes to the dissemination and promotion of national artistic creation through exhibitions and major events organized in Quebec, Canada and abroad.

In addition to advocating for the moral and economic interests of its members via a rigorous code of ethics, the Association is committed to educating the general public about contemporary art and initiating interested individuals to collecting, stimulating the emergence of new collectors.

### Vision

By continually elevating the Canadian commercial practice of contemporary art, AGAC aims to position its member galleries as recognized actors on the global stage, making Canada a must-visit destination for institutions, curators, and collectors—both local and international—for its events, galleries, and their artists.

## Strategic Orientations and Strategies

Four main orientations underpin the strategic plan and guide the Association's actions over the next five years:

1. Member Support
2. Visibility and Outreach
3. Financial Autonomy
4. Promotion of Contemporary Art and Education in Collecting

### 1. Member Support

AGAC views its members as passionate entrepreneurs, predominantly from the arts and culture sectors, whether through academic training or a sustained interest in art. However, the strategic planning process revealed their vulnerability to political and economic fluctuations. It also highlighted limitations in their management and marketing skills, as most have no prior entrepreneurial experience before managing their galleries.

To achieve its vision, AGAC sees an opportunity to play a greater role in supporting its members' development, positioning itself beyond event organization alone.



## ► Strategies

### 1.1. Professionalize business practices among member galleries

- In collaboration with RAAV, revise the standard contract governing the relationship between artists and galleries in Quebec, and adapt it for other provinces. This standard contract sets industry practices for equitable and responsible representation.
- Develop internal educational content to train and support members in management and representation practices.

### 1.2. Develop associative services for members

- Formalize and communicate the services offered.

### 1.3. Strengthen camaraderie among members

- Create a self-managed exchange thread where galleries can share resources and knowledge.
- Promote networking among members and with industry stakeholders.

### 1.4. Amplify the Association's influence

- Formalize data collection from members every two years.
- Submit a report on the art market based on collected data and publish it every five years.
- Establish a plan to position AGAC closer to the Canada Council for the Arts to better represent members outside Quebec.

### Success Metrics

- Adoption of the standard contract by member galleries and the industry.
- Usage and positive reception of AGAC's educational content by members.
- Increased use of and satisfaction with member services.
- Enhanced digital visibility practices among member galleries.
- Member participation in networking events.
- Collaboration between members through increased sharing of resources and knowledge.
- Recognition of AGAC and its publications as references in the field.

## 2. Visibility and Outreach

For 40 years, AGAC has enjoyed an excellent reputation in the contemporary art sector, primarily in Quebec, supported by its flagship event Plural (formerly Papier). However, AGAC itself remains little known to the general public and is almost absent nationally and internationally.

This is due to two primary factors: financial and human resources have been primarily allocated to events critical for member galleries' visibility and financial success, and funding constraints limit expansion beyond the province. While these event-focused efforts are vital for member survival, they restrict investments needed to enhance AGAC's institutional visibility.

The strategic plan identifies opportunities to increase the Association's visibility. However, achieving them will require sustained efforts by the team and board, as well as the development of strategic partnerships.

### ► Strategies

#### **2.1. Optimize the digital showcase, including a redesign of AGAC's website**

- Establish the importance of digital media and content creation for AGAC's promotional success.

#### **2.2. Leverage existing resources**

- Assess the potential of the Google Ad Grant.
- Utilize Plural's reputation to promote AGAC and its initiatives..

#### **2.3. Formalize communication and discoverability practices for AGAC and its members**

- Develop a communication plan for AGAC and its foundation.
- Produce and distribute a printed map promoting member galleries.
- Standardize data to optimize digital discoverability.

#### **2.4. Develop cultural and tourism partnerships**

- Build alliances that connect art and tourism.

#### **2.5. Increase AGAC's presence as a reference representative of the contemporary art market in Canada**

- Systematize American and European delegations at Plural.
- Attract influential guests to Plural Forum.
- Boost media coverage of AGAC and its events.

## Success Metrics

- Increased VIP attendance from outside Quebec.
- Greater coverage in influential contemporary art media, nationally and internationally.
- Public recognition of AGAC within the Plural Contemporary Art Fair.
- Growth in cultural and tourism partnerships, and their impact.
- Increased visitor numbers and engagement on AGAC's digital platforms.

## 3. Financial Autonomy

One of the main challenges identified for AGAC and its members is the unstable economic context, which encourages caution among collectors. This environment has also led to rising fixed costs, frozen or reduced subsidies, and decreased sponsorship budgets. In this context, it is imperative for the organization to reduce its reliance on subsidies and diversify its revenue streams creatively.

Beyond the measures already identified to improve revenue, activating the AGAC Foundation—supported by the arrival of a new director and a dedicated employee from the art sales and philanthropy sectors—represents a promising opportunity for both funding and visibility.

### ► Strategies

#### 3.1. Leverage the Foundation as a funding mechanism

- Launch an annual fundraising campaign.
- Implement a donor recognition program.

#### 3.2. Diversify revenue sources

- Monetize AGAC assets (e.g., renting exhibition walls).
- Reduce VIP access that is free of charge at the fair.
- Increase the sale of VIP tickets.
- Secure funding to launch and implement the business plan for *lesgaleries.ca*.
- Identify and pursue available grants for both projects and operations.

#### 3.3. Develop strategic partnerships

- Expand contributions from existing sponsors and seek new sponsors for all AGAC projects.

## Success Metrics

- Reduced reliance on subsidies in the annual budget.
- Increased revenue generated through AGAC projects and assets.
- Growth in contributions from existing sponsors.
- Increase in the number of new sponsors and/or expanded participation from current sponsors in AGAC initiatives.
- Growth in donations to the AGAC Foundation.

## 4. Promotion of Contemporary Art and Education in Art Collecting

The success of AGAC's members depends on the sale of artworks, which relies directly on public interest in contemporary art, particularly from affluent collectors, museums, and private institutions that invest in art.

Since its inception, AGAC has played a key role in expanding the collector base, particularly in Montreal, supported by the growing success of its flagship event, Plural. This event allows members to close a significant number of transactions annually. Although Canada still holds great potential for developing collecting practices, much effort is needed to raise public and corporate awareness about the value of contemporary art, the critical role of galleries in ensuring fair representation of artists, and best practices in collecting.

### ► Strategies

**4.1. Activate the lesgalleries.ca project to increase gallery visibility and expand the reach of cultural initiatives related to contemporary art for the public**

**4.2. Develop and deploy educational tools on collecting for both the public and businesses.**

**4.3. Broaden the scope of the Plural Forum**

- Recenter the content on collecting practices.
- Host standalone events throughout the year.
- Enhance the promotion of Forum content in digital spaces.

#### **4.4. Strengthen partnerships with other actors in the contemporary art ecosystem**

- Create visibility exchanges with other influential institutions and organizations to expand audiences.
- Develop strategies for resource sharing and promoting collaborative initiatives

#### **4.5. Position Plural as a must-attend event in Canada for quality contemporary art collecting**

- Invite a renowned curator to organize a museum-quality exhibition (Pavilion).
- Increase participation by bloggers, media outlets, and influencers who promote the fair.

### **Success Metrics**

- Number of galleries and institutions participating in lesgaleries.ca.
- Number and origins of visitors to lesgaleries.ca.
- Downloads and views of content produced by AGAC/Plural.
- Engagement metrics for joint visibility initiatives with partners.
- Specific to Plural:
  - Increased purchasing commitments from Quebec and beyond.
  - Sustained high visitor numbers.
  - Growth in art sales at Plural through corporate, institutional, and private collections.
  - Higher engagement and participation rates among recognized Quebec and Canadian galleries.