



THINKING ROCK COMMUNITY ARTS 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT



A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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of Support	

When I left full time employment in the non profit sector in Toronto to start Thinking Rock in 2012, I knew that I wanted to return home to Algoma to start an organization that would use the arts as a way to bring the people of Algoma together across difference: different ages, languages, cultures, abilities, and ways of knowing. To build community and create connections. I had no way of knowing then just how vital this kind of work would become over the next ten years, or what kind of an about-turn our collective sense of and need for community - and art - would take in 2020.

The years 2020-2021 will be remembered for many things: a global pandemic, an anti-racist awakening, political upheaval and social unrest, an unchecked climate crisis, an ongoing reckoning with the concept of “reconciliation”. This complex and multi-faceted historical moment has called on us as individuals, as families, as communities, and as a global society to pause, to listen, to learn and unlearn. To unpack our individual and systemic relationship to anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. To hold each other while distancing ourselves from one another. To be alone while coming together for the greater good. To innovate, and pivot, and re-imagine ourselves and our world....again, and again, and again.

For Thinking Rock this moment tested the core of our founding principles, our vision, and our purpose. It forced us to re-examine why we do what we do, how we do it, and what it means for our communities. We leaned gently into this moment as we always have and always will: with uncertainty, with questioning, with curiosity, with humility - most importantly - with the help of many hearts and many hands.

We hosted conversations and shared resources about anti-racism in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. We learned and applied new techniques for creating accessible, safe, inclusive, welcoming online spaces that brought together diverse folx from across Turtle Island and beyond. We hosted virtual visits with Indigenous and settler community-engaged artists from across Northern Ontario and brought the “stories of their stories” to light in hopes of bringing more support and resources for their vital work...made more vital in these times of trauma and turbulence. We closed the chapter of the Rivers Speak Community Play with the release of a legacy music album. And we put forward a new face to the world with the launch of a newly designed website.





In April of 2021 I stepped away from my formal role with Thinking Rock Community Arts. I welcomed my daughter Rowan and following my maternity leave will be stepping into the position of Founding Executive Director with the newly formed Algoma Community Foundation.

I left Thinking Rock feeling incredibly proud of what we have done together for our communities. I am excited about the direction the organization is going and who is taking us there: our amazing Artistic Director Miranda Bouchard, our wonderful Board of Directors, our staff team of lovely and talented artists, our incredible artistic collaborators and mentors, and a huge family that includes all of you who I know will continue to support, encourage and inform the work Thinking Rock is doing in our communities.

I look forward with great hope to the day that we can all once again gather in person and participate in a Thinking Rock event or presentation that changes perspectives, builds a sense of community and belonging and fosters new relationships.

Miigwetch, Merci, and thank you all for making Thinking Rock what it is today. I am endlessly grateful for our extended Thinking Rock family.

Until next time, À bientôt, Baamaapii!

Robin Sutherland
Founding Artistic Director, Thinking Rock Community Arts





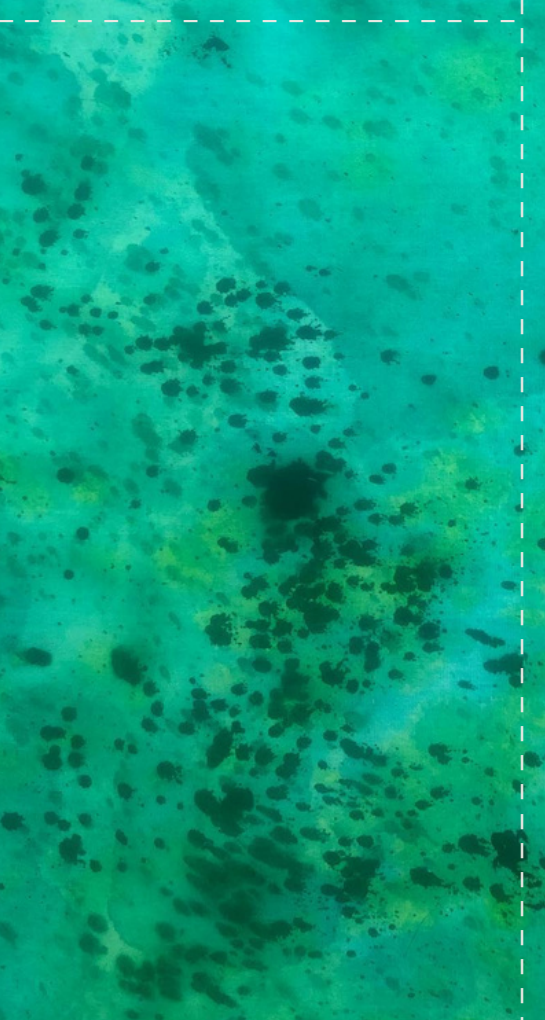
ABOUT THE LANDS WHERE WE WORK

We acknowledge that we are living, gathering, working and creating on the Traditional Territory of the Anishinabek Peoples of Baawaating, Thessalon First Nation, Misswezhaging and Genaabaajing - a place where the Métis have lived for generations, and that is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that this area is covered by the Robinson Huron Treaty. By making this land acknowledgement we are committing to taking action on reconciliation and against anti-Indigenous racism as well as to honouring the land and Indigenous presence, practices and protocols which date back to time immemorial.

OUR FOUNDING

Thinking Rock was established in May 2013 by Founding Artistic Director, Robin Sutherland. Gigidoowag Ziibiik | The Rivers Speak was Thinking Rock's first major multi-year project, a community play that drew inspiration from personal stories, memories, myths, tall tales and legends shared by Indigenous and Settler people of Central Algoma about local waterways. The project brought community members together across time, distance and culture to share and animate their stories through a collaborative process, guided by professional, interdisciplinary artist facilitators. Over the course of 5 years (2013-18), more than 4,000 community participants were involved in the project!





WHO WE ARE: OUR MISSION & MANDATE

Based in Thessalon, Algoma District, Northern Ontario, we co-create art with and for the people living along the North Shore of Lake Huron, from Genaabaajing (Serpent River First Nation) to Baawaating (Sault Ste. Marie) and all points in between. We're a team of artists, cultural workers and community members of Indigenous, settler and Newcomer descent who co-create spaces for dialogue, mutual understanding and artful social change through multidisciplinary, multi-generational, cross-cultural community arts projects.

Through our free and inclusive artistic programming, we invite people of all Nations, ages, abilities, backgrounds and identities to join us in playing, making and dreaming about this special place we call home – as it was, as it is, and as it might yet be. We learn more everyday about what that invitation, the spaces we hold together, and the ways we show up for each other can and must look like, and we bring this growing understanding to our work.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

We believe that if Central Algomans of Indigenous, Newcomer and settler descent co-create community arts projects and presentations, then we'll build relationships across cultures and communities, and that opportunities to live, work and play in the arts will increase across the region. Ultimately, this will lead to more inclusive, vibrant and resilient Algoma communities.



THE SOCIAL FABRIC PROJECT

Social Fabric engages a variety of fabric, fibre and textile-based making practices – some unique and others common to Indigenous, Newcomer and settler traditions in Central Algoma. Many of these handwork practices are deeply embedded in our rural communities, handed down over generations. We're learning together about how things have been made here across time, and sparking cross-cultural, intergenerational conversations about the people, cultures, traditions and territories in this place.

Slowing down with textile-based practice instills a reflective pace in the maker, and creates a connection with the handwork that develops and evolves over time. This echoes the weaving and interweaving of our lives and relationships to each other, which similarly require care, mindfulness, reflection, practice, and a commitment to ongoing learning. We are reflecting together on two key ideas:

Interweaving

The more we collaborate, the more interwoven we become. We look for and make opportunities to come together to share - about ourselves, our skills, our art-making and our time. We work together to promote and engage in meaningful, actionable social change that weaves our communities, learnings and day-to-day practices together.

Mending

We are learning about repair, and looking to techniques of mending, patching and darning for inspiration: we're mending our clothes, to keep them present and useful; we're reflecting on our relationship to the environment, our knowledge of our locations on Gidakiiminaang, and mending our ways to leave a lighter, more thankful footprint; and we're learning more everyday about what it means to live in the land now known as Canada, using daily practices of reflecting, connecting and making to mend the tears between us, weave new ways, and heal - as individuals and as a community.

THE SOCIAL FABRIC PROJECT

Local and regional artists, practitioners, knowledge- and skill-holders have been generously sharing their skills and collaborating intergenerationally and cross-culturally with community and artistic team members to weave these approaches together into new, truly community-based works. We will work closely with local Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers to ensure that the conveyance of these skills respects, observes and upholds cultural protocols.

As Social Fabric continues, we'll weave in popular community art forms such as installation, puppet-making, music, culinary and performing arts. We'll co-create and host culminating presentations at each phase to share and celebrate what we've made together, thank participating communities, and invite folks into the process. The project will wrap up with a multidisciplinary celebration that visually and metaphorically reflects the hundreds of stories, makers and methods that informed our multi-year creative process. We'll imbue the Social Fabric we weave together with a truly Algomian relevance, reflexivity and respect.






MAKING NIGHTS

Our Making Nights initially launched in October 2020 as free bi-weekly drop-in sessions, hosted alongside our friends at AlgomaTrad. In 2020-21, we hosted informal, unstructured Making Nights every second Tuesday - 22 of them altogether! These continue to be spaces for sharing, creative exchange and multilingual conversations. We've talked about everything from studio tips and tricks, to the things we enjoy most about the seasons, to evocative stories and memories about lands and place. Folx from across many geographical regions are encouraged to make art in the same virtual space. Curated topics of discussion allow folx across all ages the opportunity to interpret and share ideas, projects, experiences and perspectives in a brave and inclusive space that is open to folks of all ages, Nations, backgrounds, abilities and identities. Making Nights make room for sharing ideas, projects, and life experience.

THE PATCHWORK OF PLACE



The Patchwork of Place Project is an ongoing, slow textile-based collaborative making project launched in Fall 2019 that's engaged more than 50 people to date - many hearts and hands. Participants have received free art supply kits (along with original drawings of important places created by community members of all Nations, ages, abilities, backgrounds, identities and locations) and have been asked to re-create and interpret these images through felt and embroidery - in other words, to make portraits of place. More than 30 completed pieces have been received in the mail, with more to come. The bringing together of places and community through long-distance collaboration has been joyful. A number of makers have shared the process of their patchworks at Making Nights over the weeks and months.

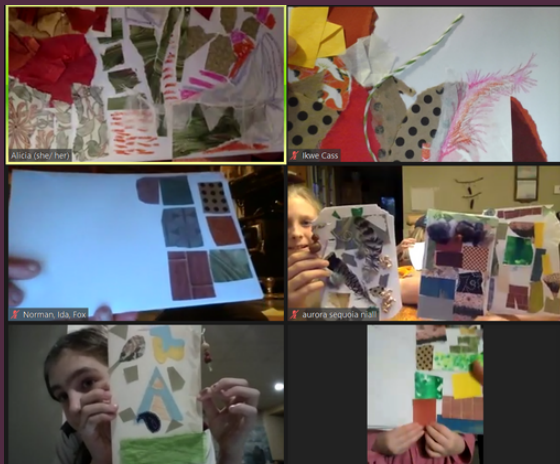


ONLINE GATHERINGS & WORKSHOPS

Social Fabric Online Gatherings (SFOGs) were launched in May 2020 as a way to host regional and "visiting" artists in Thinking Rock's virtual programming. These sessions include artists' talks, meant to showcase the practices of our special guests, along with a participatory activity or open making session that brings artists and audiences together.

In 2020-21, we hosted a total of 10 SFOGs with Frank Belleau, Miranda Bouchard, Michael Burtt, Betty Carpick, Shifra Cooper, Hilary Evans, Tuija Hansen, Sharon Hunter, Isabelle Michaud, Maria Parrella-Ilaria and Sarah Pinder.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING



2020-21 marked a new phase in programming for Thinking Rock, as we designed, developed and delivered our first sessions specifically with children and youth in mind. Following a limited pilot project in summer 2021, we launched a year-long series of seasonal programming - The Seasons & Senses Program - for children in Fall 2021. We're delighted to share that we'll be offering Children's Programming for children ages 5-10, throughout 2021-22 that focus, season-by-season, on artful activation of our five senses! During our sessions together, we'll explore our connections to the land, the season at hand, and each other through art-making techniques, movement activities, music and more.

We are grateful to have received the support of the Canada Post Community Foundation for this programming.



RESOURCES

Waazakonewinaagan / The Digital Basket - At Thinking Rock, we're continuously thinking through and reflecting on our relationship to and with the Indigenous peoples of these lands. With this in mind and heart, we've carefully compiled and crafted some resources to share in the spirit of collective, continuous self-learning and to support one another in addressing the historical and ongoing legacy of colonialism in Canada, in ways that are meaningful and deeply felt. We invite you to check out these resources on our [website](#) - including Waazakonewinaagan / The Digital Basket, developed by Thinking Rock's Operations & Programming Coordinator, Cassandra Spade!

Waazakonewinaagan / The Digital Basket was developed in Summer 2021 and launched in early October 2021.

INTERNSHIPS

During 2020-21, we hosted three Internship positions from Algoma University - Cassandra Spade and Josie Weir, from the Community Economic and Social Development (CESD) Program; and Hilary Evans, from the Fine Arts Program. The students were able to learn experientially about the inner workings of a non-profit arts organization, and continue to work with us now in various staff positions. Thinking Rock's culture of mentorship and ongoing organizational learning, as well as its experienced and outgoing staff team, make it an ideal placement. If you are interested in learning more about internships at Thinking Rock, please contact Miranda Bouchard, Artistic Director, at miranda@thinkingrock.ca





SURFACING THE SAULT: A COMMUNITY MURAL PROJECT

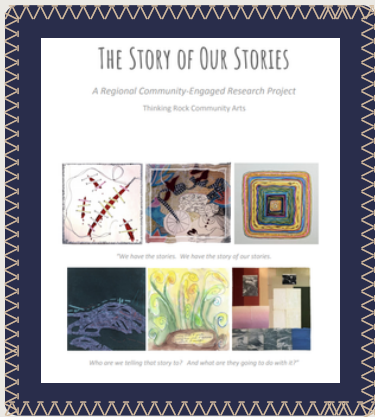
The Thinking Rockers worked through Summer and Fall of 2021 on *Surfacing the Sault*, a year-long, in-person mural project that became a two-way message board: a love letter written for the community, by the community. Installed on the fence bordering a former industrial site on Bay Street in downtown Sault Ste Marie, on the banks of the historic St. Mary's River, this project wove us together through the pandemic when we couldn't BE together, becoming a gathering place for raising awareness and amplifying calls for action and solidarity during pivotal moments.

Together with hundreds of community members, we co-designed and wove words and messages of love, care and community in Anishinaabemowin, French and English. The messages of love left by participants were later sewn together to create a physical banner and quilt of community care. During mural site activations, community members wrote and read messages. On a windy day, when the fabric would move, participants were engulfed in a social fabric hug, surrounded by messages of love. The final phase of the mural, pictured above right, was designed in collaboration with, and under the direction of, youth across Algoma District. This project was featured as part of Ontario Culture Days 2021.





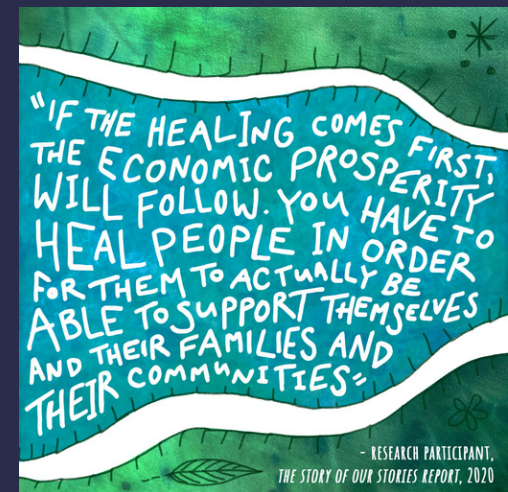
THE STORY OF OUR STORIES PROJECT



The Story of Our Stories (SOOS) Regional Community-Engaged Research Project brought together 30 community-engaged artists from across Northern Ontario to consider the question:

What challenges and opportunities are community-engaged artists and organizations based in rural and First Nation contexts of Northern Ontario facing, and what support, research and policy might help make this work easier/more sustainable?

In 2020, we published the SOOS Research Report, available as [The Story of Our Stories \(English\)](#) and [L'histoire de nos histoires \(Français\)](#).



AUDITOR'S REPORT

REVENUES

	2021	2020
Earned	2,192	8,930
Partner	13,240	7,675
Private	0	35,373
Government	252,407	150,139
In-Kind	3,650	16,805
TOTAL REVENUE	271,489	218,922

EXPENSES

	2021	2020
ARTISTIC		
Artistic fees/salaries	99,085	64,037
Production fees/salaries	45,796	69,152
Project/production costs	10,593	13,409
Documentation & publication	0	1,247
Outreach & promotion	3,880	3,865
TOTAL ARTISTIC	159,357	151,710

EXPENSES

	2021	2020
OPERATING		
Operating fees/salaries	54,578	30,517
Space & facilities	7,068	5,589
Professional fees	8,344	5,982
Office & Administration	17,532	6,503
TOTAL OPERATING	87,522	48,591
 TOTAL EXPENSE	 246,876	 200,301
 Excess of revenues over expenses	 24,613	 18,621

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Staff & Volunteers

Abir Abouelsaadat
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Bob Przybyla
Cassandra Spade
Robin Sutherland
Josie Weir

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Miranda Bouchard
Matt Ceolin
Maggie MacKay
Bob Przybyla
Robin Sutherland
Josie Weir

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CatalystsX / The Northern Lights
Collaborative
The City of Sault Ste. Marie
Ermatinger-Clergue National Historic Site
Fringe North
Jumbles Theatre + Arts
The Klub
MABELLEarts
Mass Culture
Myths and Mirrors Community Arts
NORDIK Institute
Ontario Trillium Foundation
Positively Charged
Prologue Performing Arts - Prologue
arts de la scène
Sault Community Career Centre
Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre
SKETCH
Thessalon First Nation
Thessalon Public Library
Friends of Wharncliffe Community Hall &
Citizens Committee

Annual Report

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Funders

Canada Council for the Arts |
 Conseil des arts du Canada
 Canada Post Community Foundation
 Canadian Red Cross
 The City of Sault Ste. Marie
 The Department of Canadian Heritage
 The Government of Canada
 The New Horizons for Seniors Program
 Ontario Arts Council -
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 Ontario Trillium Foundation and
 the Government of Ontario
 Young Canada Works



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New
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