

# THE MEETING

A One Act Play Written By Melanie Crist and Olivia Bird  
Performed By Students of ARTH 443: Art and Activism in Canada



Jack Shadbolt  
*Presences in a Thicket*, 1957  
Gift From Maclean's Magazine 1958

Performed April 12, 2021 on zoom.us

## **PREFACE**

Embarking on this assignment, we intended to bring the Alma Mater Society (AMS) archives to life. We wanted to create a scripted scene that we could immerse ourselves into; an imagined world where we could piece together real life events and real people as a way to re-engage a history of the collection in our present.

In these strange COVID-19 times, we had the opportunity to access the online AMS archives and dive into these documents remotely. We discovered a multitude of correspondence relating to a tumultuous history of the collection: vandalism, theft, in-fighting. However, the documents that really piqued our interest, academically and creatively, were those that pertained to the conversion of the former SUB Art Gallery into a lounge. We were primarily concerned with the nature of that decision making process as decisions were seemingly made by the Student Council without the support of the Art Committee, and there appears to be no trace of a vote or referendum.

We decided to piece together an imagined scenario surrounding this decision. We pulled quotes and information directly from archival correspondences and transplanted them into a fictional meeting between Student Council representatives, Art Committee representatives, and a Ubyyssey reporter.

This play is written as a means to highlight the implications of decisions made in private on behalf of the public. Throughout our research, we question who makes decisions in owning and operating a collection for a public, and how these decision-histories are traced.

We want to acknowledge that we are observers and learners in this scenario, and that our actions and assumptions in writing this play may further contribute and/or perpetuate myths surrounding the history of the collection.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to acknowledge that this script was virtually written by settlers on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the səliilwətaʔ (Tseil Waututh Nation) and the scəwaθən (Tsawwassen First Nation). Through our access into the digital AMS archives, documented on the land of xwmə0–kwəy'əm (Musqueam First Nation), we want to acknowledge the original ancestors of these territories and their greater histories.

We would like to thank the support of the Hatch Art Gallery Co-Directors Reiko Inouye and James Albers. Thank you both for sharing your wealth of knowledge and resources for our archival research, and for providing us with the Hot Gossip.

We would also like to thank our professor, Dr. Erin Silver for creating such an experimental and enjoyable project. Thank you for your encouragement and guidance to help bring our script into fruition.

Oh, and also thank you to Olivia's Dad for sharing his memories of the SUB gallery-lounge and his anecdotes about all the Friday nights he spent there during his undergrad.

## **CAST**

DAVID FRANK, *Student Council President* — Performed by Olivia Bird

\* DIANE, *Student Council Vice-President* — Performed by Maggie Wong

SUE VOHANKA, *Ubysey Reporter* — Performed by Tatiana Povoroznyuk

GRACE MURAO, *Art Gallery Committee* — Performed by Keri MacLeod

\* FRED, *Art Gallery Committee* — Performed by Violetta Lapinski

CAROL FRANK, *Art Gallery Committee* — Performed by James Albers

*\* The characters of Diane and Fred are figments of our imagination. The others are real people as referenced in the AMS archival materials.*

## **REFERENTIAL CAST (Referred to in dialogue only)**

JAMES CASWELL, *Professor, Dean: Fine Arts Department*

J.A.S. MCDONALD, *Professor, Acting Head: Fine Arts Department*

JOHN PELLIZZANO, *SAC Member and Representative*

B.C. BINNING, *The One and Only*

## **TIME**

Late May, 1982. End of Term. 6pm.

## **PLACE**

The “Trial” Lounge-Gallery on the main floor of the Student Union Building across from Blue Chip.

## **SET**

A long windowless room filled with low casual seating. The art of the AMS Permanent Collection adorns the walls of the space. Glass doors allow passers-by to peer in. There’s a bar at the back end of the space with a full display of liquor as well as several draught taps.

*\*Note: Any text that appears in **Green** has been sourced directly from AMS archival material.*

*Lights Up.*

*The newly licensed Lounge-Gallery space is bustling. Short couches and coffee tables are populated with students blowing off some steam at the end of term. A small corner is set up as a makeshift cabaret, which is currently occupied by a young John Mellencamp wannabe who struggles to get set up with his acoustic guitar throughout the entirety of the following scene.*

*At the center of the space DIANE struggles to hold down a couch and coffee table. She anxiously looks around waiting for the rest of her group while fending off students trying to usurp the seating. DAVID makes his way through the crowd with a pitcher of draught in one hand and a stack of pint glasses in the other. He sits on the couch and pours beers for himself and Diane.*

**DIANE:** Are you sure this is the best place to meet? It's kinda loud.

**DAVID:** It's fine. It's perfect. They can witness firsthand how rad this place is. Let's go over it one more time before everyone else gets here.

*Diane is nervous but dives into their well rehearsed spiel.*

**DIANE:** Um... ok, so... The trial lounge-gallery has already increased revenue for the AMS via [alcohol sales](#),<sup>1</sup> and if the conversion is permanent, it will push the collection to be exhibited "[both on and off the UBC campus](#)"<sup>2</sup>

**DAVID:** You sound hesitant.

**DIANE:** (*hesitant*) ... no I'm not.

*David spots SUE from the Ubysey as she enters the Lounge-Gallery and waves her over. She grabs an unused chair from a nearby table and pulls it up, opposite to the couch.*

**SUE:** Thanks for inviting me... (*Looks around*) Where's the Art Committee?

**DAVID:** Any minute now. Beer?

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<sup>1</sup> Pellizzon, John. "Report on the Art Gallery Lounge Proposal" (February 11, 1980): 8 \*

<sup>2</sup> Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia, Permanent Collection 1948-2008. Edited by Aliyah Shamsher, Samein Shamsher and Jordana Hovis (Vancouver: Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia, 2008), Exhibition Catalogue: 6 \*

\* [The AMS Archives](#)

**SUE:** No thanks, I don't drink on the job.

*David shrugs "suit yourself." Sue pulls a large coiled notebook from her bag, and unloads a small Panasonic tape recorder with an attached microphone onto the coffee table.*

**DIANE:** You're going to record this?

**SUE:** I record everything.

**GRACE:** Glad to hear it. This is a meeting that we definitely want a record of.

*GRACE has appeared seemingly out of nowhere. She pulls up a chair beside Sue. The other two committee representatives CAROL and FRED trail in and squeeze onto the couch with David and Diane. David pours beers for the newcomers.*

**DAVID:** Excellent. Well, now that everyone is here let's get started.

*He nudges Diane. Sue turns on her tape recorder and points the microphone towards whomever is speaking.*

**DIANE:** So, um... we understand that you want an opportunity to voice your concerns about our permanent conversion proposal?

**GRACE:** It's not just us Dave! No one in the department thinks this is a good idea.

**FRED:** Yeah, I mean you guys read [the letters from Professor Caswell and Professor Macdonald](#) that were sent last week, right?<sup>3</sup>

**DAVID:** We did. Referring to this decision as "[retrograde](#)" is a pretty ill-informed choice of words.<sup>4</sup> Has Macdonald even been here? Look at this place! It's busy as Hell.

**DIANE:** *(performs her spiel)* The trial lounge-gallery has already increased revenue for the AMS via [alcohol sales](#), and if the conversion is permanent, it will push the collection to be exhibited "[both on and off the UBC campus](#)".

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<sup>3</sup> Letters addressed to Student Council President, David Frank, individually sent from the Dean of the Fine Arts Department, Professor James Caswell, and the Acting Head of the Fine Arts Department, J.A.S Macdonald; both regarding their frustration with turning the Gallery into Lounge (May 13, 1982).\*

<sup>4</sup> Macdonald, J.A.S.. Letter to David Frank (May 13, 1982).\*

\* [The AMS Archives](#)



*David smiles at her proudly.*

**CAROL:** But that's just it, isn't it? There *is* no other equal or alternative space available at UBC "for the display of student art" or for the AMS Collection to be exhibited, so it will have to be either shown off campus, or be put into storage until a new space is built.<sup>5</sup>

*Sue raises her hand to interrupt.*

**SUE:** I have some questions about that actually.

**DAVID:** Sorry Sue, we should have started with you. (*To the others*) As you all know, I asked Sue to sit in on our meeting because she's writing a piece for the Ubysey about the conversion. Ask away!

**SUE:** "What values would the AMS be downgrading by eliminating the Gallery?"<sup>6</sup>

*David was not expecting that question straight out of the gate.*

**DAVID:** Uh, none that I can think of. Like John wrote in his report a couple of years ago— "the Art Gallery... is not being used to its fullest extent" and having a lounge would "provide a light cheerful atmosphere for students to relax in"<sup>7</sup>

**FRED:** But where will the MFA students exhibit their work at the end of the year? "It is part of the MFA curriculum." We can't just call up some other gallery in the city and ask to hold our graduate show there.<sup>8</sup>

**DIANE:** Why not?

**CAROL:** It doesn't make sense. We *have* a gallery here on campus to use! Anyways, "our ideas were not included in John's report."<sup>9</sup> It's not just the student exhibitions that would suffer if the gallery were eliminated. There are so many other ways that the students benefit.

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<sup>5</sup> Caswell, James. Letter to David Frank (May 13, 1982).\*

<sup>6</sup> Frank, Carol. "The Ways in Which Students Benefit from the AMS Art Gallery" (March 10, 1980): 8 \*

<sup>7</sup> Pellizzon. "Report on the Art Gallery Lounge Proposal": 1-2 \*

<sup>8</sup> Programs Committee Letter to Student Council, Regarding Art Gallery Lounge Extension & Proposed Exhibition Schedule (no date): 1 \*

<sup>9</sup> Frank, C. "The Ways in Which Students Benefit from the AMS Art Gallery": 1 \*

\* [The AMS Archives](#)

**GRACE:** It's a student-run space—we get hands-on experience on running a gallery that's “invaluable for anyone who wants to pursue a career” in the curatorial industry.<sup>10</sup>

**FRED:** Yeah, where else are we supposed to learn how to deal with “public apathy” towards art?<sup>11</sup>

*Everyone laughs.*

**FRED:** ...I was serious.

**DAVID:** Well you're not wrong! Have you ever seen anyone stay for longer than five minutes?<sup>12</sup>

**DIANE:** Since turning the space into a lounge, look how many people are in here now appreciating the AMS collection!

**DAVID:** There's always the other option of keeping the collection here in the lounge long-term.

**CAROL:** Oh and have it function as background “muzak”?! That would “run completely contrary to the original reasons for building this collection” in the first place!<sup>13</sup>

*A large cheer breaks out at a nearby table where a group of students are celebrating. They clink glasses and high five noisily. One student gets up and starts doing the robot.*

**SUE:** “Haven't we had various crises on campus due to drunkenness?” How could you be certain that the AMS collection wouldn't be damaged?<sup>14</sup>

**DAVID:** This “isn't going to be like the Pit.” “Beer won't be thrown around.” We want it to be a place where “you can get dressed up a bit.”<sup>15</sup> (*downs the rest of his beer*) I'm going to get another drink.

*David gets up and walks back to the bar. Grace rolls her eyes.*

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<sup>10</sup> Frank, C. “The Ways in Which Students Benefit from the AMS Art Gallery”: 3 \*

<sup>11</sup> Frank, C. “The Ways in Which Students Benefit from the AMS Art Gallery”: 3 \*

<sup>12</sup> Pellizzon. “Report on the Art Gallery Lounge Proposal”: 2 \*

<sup>13</sup> Frank, C. “The Ways in Which Students Benefit from the AMS Art Gallery”: 8 \*

<sup>14</sup> Frank, C. “The Ways in Which Students Benefit from the AMS Art Gallery”: 8 \*

<sup>15</sup> \*Unknown. “Smoke and booze mar art.” *The Ubyyssey* (September 29, 1981) \*

\* In the absence of a credited author, we chose to use Sue Vohanka as a placeholder. She is the author of the name of “Art Worth \$33,000 Gone.” *The Ubyyssey* (October 31, 1974)

\* [The AMS Archives](#)



**GRACE:** To answer your question Sue, yes- we are absolutely concerned about damage to the collection while it exists inside of the lounge space. [There's fourteen thousand dollars worth of art in here.](#) <sup>16</sup>

**FRED:** It's worth fourteen thousand dollars now, but it could be worth millions one day!

**DIANE:** (*skeptical*) This? These... owls?

*Diane points to an oil painting on the wall just next to them.*

**GRACE:** That's actually a really special piece. It was a ["gift from Maclean's Magazine in 1958."](#) <sup>17</sup>

**FRED:** Yeah. PRESENCES IN A THICKET by Jack Shadbolt.

*Fred leans in conspiratorially.*

**FRED:** Did you know that Shadbolt and B.C. Binning went to art school together?

**CAROL:** No way!

**FRED:** Yep, at the Art Students League in New York City!<sup>18</sup> (*Chuckling to himself*) Just a couple of art bros trying to change the game in the Canadian Art world.

*Fred sips his beer.*

**DIANE:** Wait, who's B.C. Binning again?

**CAROL:** The former ["Head of the Fine Arts Department... \[and\] permanent chairperson" for the Brock Hall Art Committee.](#) He retired in '68, but he was *the* key player for getting the whole collection started. Back then, there was a real ["atmosphere of excitement and creativity on campus."](#) <sup>19</sup> (*she sighs*).

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<sup>16</sup> \*Unknown. "Smoke and booze mar art" \*

<sup>17</sup> Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia, Permanent Collection 1948-2008. Exhibition Catalogue: 20 \*

<sup>18</sup> Thom, Ian M. *B.C. Binning*. Douglas & McIntyre (2006).

<sup>19</sup> Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia, Permanent Collection 1948-2008. Exhibition Catalogue: 6 \*

\* [The AMS Archives](#)

*David returns with a whiskey on the rocks. (He must have inspired himself with his comment about Beer not being thrown around.) He sits back on the couch and lights a cigarette.*

**SUE:** What about the effects of smoke on the art? Most galleries prohibit smoking, do they not?

**FRED:** The Ubyyssey reported on that before, right?

**SUE:** Ya, I did! Last Fall! “Smoke and booze mar art”. *(slightly disgruntled)* They left my name off of the byline.

**FRED:** That’s a drag! How will anyone in the future know that you wrote it?

**SUE:** I guess they won’t. They’ll just have to make assumptions.

**DAVID:** Pellizzano’s report specifically mentions that **there has been “no notable damage to the paintings” in the Grad Centre or the Faculty club, and “both [of those] buildings have lounge-type facilities which also display art.”** <sup>20</sup>

**CAROL:** Dave you have to understand that it’s not a sustainable long-term plan to keep the AMS art collection up on the walls of a lounge. Plus Pellizzano does also mention that the SAC might *not* decide to convert the gallery into a lounge.

**DIANE:** He still says that **“change is necessary in the operation of the Art Gallery”** though.<sup>21</sup>

**GRACE:** We’ve thought about that. We have a bunch of different ideas on how to bring more people into the space, and how to create revenue for the gallery itself.

**FRED:** Hosting events that would have an admission price like gallery and artist talks, music nights, opening receptions for shows...

**DIANE:** Wouldn’t you want to have alcohol at those kinds of events?

**GRACE:** We could still have beer and wine!

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<sup>20</sup> Pellizzon. “Report on the Art Gallery Lounge Proposal”: 3 \*

<sup>21</sup> Pellizzon. “Report on the Art Gallery Lounge Proposal”: 5 \*

\* [The AMS Archives](#)

**DAVID:** Well, you'd need a fridge! "Who wants warm beer?"<sup>22</sup>

*David is a wee bit tipsy at this point. He's no longer interested in hiding his disdain.*

**DAVID:** If the Gallery isn't converted to a lounge, and you actually want anyone to come to any sort of event, then the Art Committee is going to need to ask the SAC to invest in "some furbishings to make it more comfortable and attractive to students."<sup>23</sup>

**CAROL:** What the hell are "furbishings"?!<sup>24</sup>

**DAVID:** Furbishings! Furbishings! Nice stuff to sit on! "Mood lighting and plant landscaping"!<sup>25</sup>

*He stamps out his cigarette in frustration.*

**CAROL:** So, "another lounge idea" then.<sup>26</sup>

*Sue's tape recorder clicks off. She quickly flips the tape over to the other side and hits record again. Everyone takes a breath.*

**SUE:** Assuming the lounge-gallery conversion does actually happen, I'd like to come back to the question of security over these works.

**FRED:** Yeah (*gestures to the walls*). Like are we supposed to pretend that this collection doesn't have a history of theft and vandalism?

**GRACE:** It's true. "The damage people have done to some of the paintings is amazing."<sup>27</sup>

**SUE:** "In 1974, there was a supposed heist."<sup>28</sup>

**DIANE:** (*intrigued*) Really?!

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<sup>22</sup> Cost Estimates for the Art Gallery Lounge Permanent Installations (May 19, 1982): 1 \*

<sup>23</sup> Pellizzon. "Report on the Art Gallery Lounge Proposal": 6 \*

<sup>24</sup> (Unknown) Handwritten Edits to John Pellizzon's "Report on the Art Gallery Lounge Proposal": 6 \*

<sup>25</sup> Frank, C. "The Ways in Which Students Benefit from the AMS Art Gallery": 8 \*

<sup>26</sup> (Unknown) Handwritten Edits "Report on the Art Gallery Lounge Proposal": 6 \*

<sup>27</sup> Vohanka, Sue. "Art Worth \$33,000 Gone." *The Ubyyssey* (October 31, 1974) \*

<sup>28</sup> Birnie, Marissa. "From the vault: The AMS permanent art collection's tumultuous history comes with a \$4 million price tag - and you own it" *The Ubyyssey* (November 6, 2018).

\* [The AMS Archives](#)

**SUE:** Mmhmm. The Ubyyssey reported “eight to eighteen missing or stolen works. None of the Brock Hall committee members seemed to know what had actually been stolen. Because of poor record-keeping, the committee did not know how many paintings were in the collection to begin with.” <sup>29</sup>

**FRED:** Even before that there were several pieces that went missing, including one by Binning- CENTENNIAL REGATTA... THE FRASER FROM SAPPERTON by Joe Plaskett also disappeared but was later “recovered in an office in Brock Hall.” <sup>30</sup>

**SUE:** Whose office?

**FRED:** Undisclosed. But whose do you think? (*whispers*) CENTENNIAL REGATTA was never found.<sup>31</sup>

**SUE:** Wait... are you saying...?

*Fred nods slowly. Everyone shares a moment of silence as they mull this over.*

**SUE:** I guess we should wrap things up now. Any last thoughts on the record?

*She leans towards her recorder. Carol, Grace, and Fred look at each other solemnly.*

**CAROL:** Diane. David. On behalf of the AMS Art Committee, we “are requesting that Student Council delay the decision on converting the AMS Art Gallery into a permanent lounge. We feel that it is irresponsible of Student Council to make this decision during the summer months when it affects the student body as a whole.” <sup>32</sup>

**DAVID:** Noted.

*Sue turns off her recorder.*

*Lights Out.*

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<sup>29</sup> Birnie. “From the vault: The AMS permanent art collection’s tumultuous history comes with a \$4 million price tag - and you own it” (November 6, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Binning BC Centennial Regatta Theft Report (April 25, 1968): 2 \*

<sup>31</sup> Binning BC Centennial Regatta Theft Report (April 25, 1968): 2 \*

<sup>32</sup> Letter to Student Council from the Gallery Committee & Many Backers (June 2, 1982) \*

\* [The AMS Archives](#)

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