ARTS ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS THE LOWER MAINLAND MOURN LOSS OF LONGTIME ARTS SUPPORTER

Michael O'Brian Remembered as a Dedicated Patron of the Arts Instrumental in Shaping Arts & Culture in Vancouver

OCTOBER 16, 2023, VANCOUVER, B.C./ / Traditional territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations – Arts organizations across the Lower Mainland are recognizing the passing of longtime arts supporter Michael O'Brian. Remembered as an avid art collector and music enthusiast, Michael O'Brian enriched arts organizations across Canada through patronage, philanthropy, and personal relationships with individual artists. He was a Patron of the Arts who shaped the arts community across Vancouver and beyond through decades of commitment, passion, and unwavering support.

Following a corporate career working as director and vice-president of Canaccord Capital and CEO of C.M. Oliver Group of Companies, he volunteered as a director of numerous arts and educational organizations including the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Opera, Museum of Anthropology, the National Art Gallery of Canada, and Emily Carr University. Michael contributed financially to these and many other arts and educational organizations through the Michael and Inna O'Brian Family Foundation.

Michael O'Brian served on the Vancouver Opera Board of Directors starting in September 2011 and was elected to a three-year term in August 2012 which he completed before retiring in 2015. In 2019 he was appointed member to the Order of Canada for his extensive work with dozens of organizations and artists.

"We, along with all our friends and colleagues in the Vancouver arts community, were shocked and saddened to learn of the sudden passing of our dear friend and supporter, Michael O'Brian," said Tom Wright, General Director, Vancouver Opera. "Michael was so much more than a long-time board member and donor — he was a trusted advisor to our General Directors, a tireless champion of the arts, and a beloved member of the Vancouver cultural community. His leadership and generosity were unparalleled."

Many other arts organizations across British Columbia acknowledged his support of arts and culture.

Audain Art Museum's Director & Chief Curator, Dr. Curtis Collins, reflected on his long-time support. "Michael O'Brian was a passionate supporter of the visual arts in British Columbia and a Founder at the Audain Art Museum. Michael's generosity as well as easy-going manner will be missed."

Ballet BC's Artistic Director, Medhi Walerski, recognized the unique qualities he displayed through his passion for the arts. "The art community has lost a remarkable advocate and incredible supporter, and we have lost a cherished friend. Michael was truly one-of-a-kind. He will be remembered for his unwavering dedication to the creative world, to places of culture and belonging, and to those he held close. He will be deeply missed."

Bard on the Beach's Founding Artistic Director, Christopher Gaze, honoured his personal grace. "Michael was a prince among men. Generous, kind, enthusiastic and thoughtful. He cherished his family, his friends, and the pleasure he took in seeking ways to make meaningful contributions to make the world a better place. We shall not see his like again. He will live on in all of us who loved and admired him."

Emily Carr University of Art + Design's Interim President and Vice-Chancellor, Trish Kelly, expressed gratitude to the man who received an honorary Doctorate from ECU. "We were all of us saddened to hear of Michael's passing. He was a genuinely gentle, humble man who was a steadfast ally and champion of the arts throughout his life. As with his work with so many arts organizations across the country, his dedication and generosity benefited countless ECU students through the development of programs, facilities, and events. Michael was a pillar of the arts community in BC and beyond. He will be deeply missed."

Museum of Anthropology at UBC's Director, Dr. Susan Rowley, admired his devotion to the arts. "MOA is deeply saddened by the loss of this visionary man. We are honoured to have been counted among the arts organizations that Michael held close to his heart. His devotion to and passion for the arts in Vancouver won't be soon forgotten; they are reflected on the walls and in the collections of our Museum for all to appreciate."

The Polygon Gallery's Director, Reid Shier, reflected on his spirit and the work Michael did with his wife by his side. "The Polygon Gallery is honoured and grateful to recognize Michael O'Brian among its most engaged friends and donors. Together with his wife Inna, Michael's tremendous philanthropic vision contributed to the success of numerous projects celebrating the work of local artists. Michael keenly understood the importance of planning for a sustainable future for the arts, and most recently made a major commitment to The Polygon's Endowment Fund, to help ensure that generations to come would enjoy the benefits of a life enriched with transformative art experiences, as his had been. We will miss his infectious enthusiasm, his youthful charm, and the warmth of his generous spirit."

Vancouver Art Gallery's CEO & Executive Director, Anthony Kiendl, recognized the O'Brians' impact on the cultural community in the city. "The Vancouver Art Gallery family is saddened by the loss of one of our leading supporters, Michael O'Brian, CM. Mr. O'Brian, along with his partner Inna, who is a Trustee of the Vancouver Art Gallery, have been instrumental in the development of Vancouver's rich cultural community, supporting not only the Gallery and other institutions, but numerous artists as well through advocacy, commissions, and friendship."

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