

Call For Papers

Parallel: The History and Archives of Artist Run Centres in Canada

RACAR special issue to be published October 2026



Cohésion, participatory workshop with Anne-Marie Ouellet, Forum du RCAAQ 2024, Langage Plus, Alma.
Credit: Amélie Brisson-Darveau. Editing Jason Ranaghan.

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Deadline for proposals: November 25, 2024

Deadline for final contributions: June 15, 2025

This special issue of *RACAR* addresses the important historic and contemporary contributions of artist-run centres (ARCs) in Canada. Established in the 1960s, the ARC model quickly spread across the country. ARCs operate as not-for-profit galleries or cultural institutions and are usually managed by artists themselves. Despite their long presence in the cultural landscape and their central role in the evolution of contemporary art in Canada, ARCs have been sorely understudied in art history and museum studies and their important histories are not well-known by Canadians more generally.

This special issue aims to produce a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the complex histories of ARCs and to ensure the continued sustainability of artist-run centres for

future generations. Together, let's fill the gap in scholarship on ARCs in Canada, examining the period from the 1960s to the present with the hope of addressing ARC histories in more peripheral regions, such as the Prairies and the Maritimes. Artist-run centres emerged in Canada in the late 1960s and '70s to provide much-needed opportunities for contemporary artists. ARCs have played a pivotal role in the contemporary art ecosystem in this country and have been key in supporting emerging artists by offering an alternative to commercial gallery representation and fostering alternative exhibition practices, and they have been instrumental in the building of regional arts communities. ARCs have also been at the vanguard of dematerializing practices such as performance art, conceptual art, and video art. Over the past fifty years, ARCs in Canada have transformed the social, cultural, and political landscape of the country, but while their vital contribution is felt, it has not yet been written.

ARCs have historically been at the forefront of discussions about equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. Currently, these conversations are flashpoints in the larger global contemporary art world and make this project particularly pressing today. If ARCs truly were, and continue to be, parallel institutions, how have they challenged hegemonic discourses of authority, artistic agency, equity, and accessibility? How do these challenges contribute to a richer understanding of cultural history in Canada? This study aims to highlight the importance of ARCs for those interested in Canadian cultural history and to signal the ways that ARCs, while sharing some common traits, are not a monolithic whole. From Western Front (Vancouver) to Urban Shaman (Winnipeg) and from A Space (Toronto) to Eyelevel Gallery (Halifax), what are the individual identities of ARCs, and what do their archives and histories say about their similarities and differences? What do the varied histories of ARCs reveal about their relationship to provincial and national arts funding, large-scale and commercial art spaces, and artistic production on a local, national, and international scale?

Given the significance of artist-run centres in the shaping and understanding of Canadian art, this special issue invites papers, interviews, and artists' portfolios that engage with the histories and contemporary issues of ARCs. *RACAR* is an international, bilingual journal, and the editors of this special issue seek contributions that reflect this fact. The editors encourage French and English submissions and welcome creative formats.

We are soliciting written (maximum 7,500 words, including notes) and creative contributions (maximum 10 images and 1,000 words, including notes). Articles will be submitted for peer review.

Please submit your proposals of a maximum of 300–500 words and a short CV before November 25, 2024, to amber.berson@gmail.com and devon.smither@uleth.ca. If proposing a creative contribution, please include 2–5 images.