

Musagetes' Manifesto

A Declaration to Launch the Musagetes Foundation

Musagetes is a new public foundation established in Canada, open to the world, and focused on the arts, creativity, and community.

The Musagetes Foundation is concerned with the role the arts can play in addressing the *faultlines* of modern society, the deep and perplexing problems that beset contemporary life, including:

- the significance we ascribe to instrumental reasoning, which can calculate the costs, but not the value, of everything;
- our reliance on the economy as the most important measure of meaning;
- the diminished sense of community in a world dominated by individualism and fear of “the other”; and
- our neglect, even at times disdain, for the intangible, the difficult-to-measure: intrinsic values, human feeling, inventiveness and imagination, the life of the spirit.

The Musagetes Foundation recognizes that egocentric and mechanistic values can alienate people from their own inner reality and deprive them of a sense of shared belonging to the human community.

At its origin, the Enlightenment recognized the importance of imagination and spirit in human life, but the overwhelming emphasis on rationality and efficiency common in our era has left little space for that life force. With the emptying-out of mystery, spirituality is assumed to be dead except in organized religion. Some people fill this emptiness by taking refuge in fundamentalism or intolerance and hatred, others through a frenetic “busy-ness” that keeps thought and feeling at bay.

The *faultlines* play out in a variety of battlegrounds in our daily life, notably in:

- our schools, city planning, and economic and political decision-making, when policies and actions act not as an impetus to creativity but as barriers;
- a superficial understanding of creativity as style, as fashion, as controversial for its own sake;
- the lack of leaders of vision and inspiration and a cynical view of leadership as the ability to manipulate process and people;
- an insidious and growing mistrust of institutions and structures — the state, the church, the media, political parties, education systems, public institutions, science and technology.

The Musagetes Foundation believes that the modern world is vastly poorer because the arts and culture are not central and meaningful realities in most peoples’ lives. By focusing on artistic creativity — the soul of the arts and the source of art’s transformative power — Musagetes wants “to start sparks, cause explosions...and make a difference in the world” — a difference in how we think about ourselves, how we lead our lives, how we conduct public affairs, how we relate to one another, and how we shape the world around us.

Musagetes believes that artistic creativity embodies values and attributes diametrically opposed to the narrower concepts of efficiency and rationality that have contributed to the modern crisis, concepts reflected in the prominence of words like objectivity, calculation, measurable, predictable, quantifiable, replicable, efficient, cost-effective, profitable, rational, and linear.

The distinct attributes of artistic creativity are profoundly different from, if not opposite to, this world-view. The human values artistic creativity embodies are what gives the arts deep significance for individuals, communities, and even, over time, history.

These are the fundamental attributes of artistic creativity that the Musagetes Foundation believes are capable of transforming modern life and reviving the roots of meaning and belonging:

- Artistic creativity involves a journey, which artists are impelled to undertake, not knowing where it will lead or if and how they will arrive — a quest for the profound and true.
- Artistic creativity has no calculated purpose, it is not goal-oriented, nor measurable in easy ways, nor fully explicable rationally.
- Its outcome is unpredictable — it accepts ambiguity, mystery and paradox.
- Artistic creativity calls upon humility; it endures the tedious and repetitious so as to reach mastery; it contains loneliness and the potential for failure.
- It recognizes that something beyond the rational exists; it offers glimpses of the (non-supernatural) sacred.
- It gives spirit a connection outside itself; while it originates in the self, it aims to create work that enters the common space of humanity.
- It proclaims that humans have the right to pursue freedom and urges confidence in exercising that right — it inspires others to be brave.
- It champions originality and authenticity but opposes vanity.
- It accepts the potential for epiphany and exaltation and for fun and delight.
- It lives in the “now” — it takes place in the moment.
- It is transgressive and disruptive of the existing order — not as a pose or to flaunt difference, but as a necessary reality.

The Musagetes Foundation is profoundly convinced that these attributes and values do not rest only with artists — they are available to any person, community or society open to the arts and fully willing to engage with and explore them.

Embodying Beliefs in Action: How Musagetes will Operate

The Musagetes Foundation will reflect and model the values of artistic creativity in the way it thinks about itself and how it operates — in its philosophy, ethos and actions.

It will encourage and take part in serious, action-focused, intellectual inquiry related to artistic creativity and its transformative effects. But it will not be a traditional think tank, research institute, or funder of others' projects.

Instead, Musagetes will be a hub for activist interventions that advance the role of the arts in modern life. It will operate mainly by convening - by creating living experiences, some small, some large, that bring people together to articulate social needs, generate ideas and spark action.

The Musagetes Foundation will favour unexpected combinations of people and ideas and will take a transdisciplinary, cross-boundary, cross-sectoral and inter-generational approach to its work. Its major strategy will be connecting people, sectors and activities to ignite or provoke change.

Like artistic creativity itself, Musagetes will need to be eclectic, exploratory, catalytic, adroit, brave and humble. It may very well make mistakes, take roads that lead nowhere, and expose itself to being mocked. But if it does not take such risks, it will fail.

Because Musagetes' mission and focus are new and radical (to our knowledge, not replicated elsewhere), it will have to trust its "creative hunches." While its mission and focus will be clear, it will be tactically flexible and will discover its evolving role in part through doing.

Musagetes wishes to avoid becoming institutionalized; it wants to remain flexible and open to activities and collaborators beyond the already converted. It also wishes to be rooted without being parochial, housed in Canada but not restricted to Canadian issues and open to the best thinking world-wide, to all those who can bring insight and imagination to its mission.

To this end, Musagetes' image of itself is that of a gathering place such as a café — a place where people come in, connect and interact and then move on, taking their knowledge and experience elsewhere, while other people arrive to begin other conversations — in a potentially continuous cycle of new experiences with new people.

In its convening actions and in support of them, Musagetes' work will include:

- Definition — involving inquiry, documentation, investigation, intellectual positioning; for example, clarifying and communicating the power, possibilities and results of artistic creativity.
- Fellowship/solidarity — creating communities of concern; giving a sense of solidarity to people doing similar work around the world in bringing the values of artistic creativity into human and societal development.
- Transformative events/calls for action — involving persuasion, movement, engagement, often through unusual combinations of people, sectors or activities.

The Musagetes Foundation has been created out of the strong commitment of its six founders to advancing the role of the arts and artistic creativity in contemporary life.

The founders are deeply devoted to the foundation and intend to be closely involved with it as it develops. They will engage others to lead and advise Musagetes who share their beliefs and values.

While ensuring Musagetes' independence and clarity of purpose, the founders will also work with other partners to widen and strengthen the circle of those dedicated to change through the transformative power of artistic creativity.

A manifesto developed during a retreat in Quebec City in March 2006 by the members of the Musagetes Foundation, Michael Barnstijn, Louise MacCallum, Yeti Agnew, Valerie Hall, Doug McMullen and Joy S. Roberts, in collaboration with the participants invited to the retreat, Simon Brault, Tim Brodhead, Jocelyn Harvey, Jude Kelly, Charles Landry, Gaetan Morency and Marc Pachter.