

Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art: What We Heard

asa art gallery of alberta

2022



About the Survey

The Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA) is committed to equity, diversity and anti-racism. Since 2020, the AGA has conducted roundtable conversations and outreach initiatives to learn more on these subjects. This survey is part of the continuous effort. It focuses on the *Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art*, and is meant to broaden the AGA's understanding when planning for future exhibitions.

Background

Since 1996, the Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA) has presented the *Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art* exhibition. It has presented new and exciting works by Alberta contemporary artists, and has promoted and drawn national attention to Alberta artists and the province's art scene. In 2020, the scope of the *Biennial* exhibition expanded beyond the provincial borders to encompass artists living in two provinces and five treaty territories.

In the history of the *Alberta Biennial*, however, there have been no Black artists represented in the exhibition. As part of the work the AGA is doing to acknowledge and address this history, and to work toward a more equitable future, the AGA has been seeking feedback through roundtable conversations and outreach initiatives since 2020. In June 2022, the AGA conducted a one-month public survey to broaden its understanding and to continue to learn from the community. This effort is part of AGA's commitment to equity, diversity and anti-racism.

The [survey](#) was open from June 1 to July 3, 2022 to the public, including AGA Members, artists, curators, gallerist and people working in the arts and cultural sector. It was promoted through AGA's social media channels and email outreach.

Quick Summary

- There were 306 surveys completed. 52 percent of the respondents identified as associated with the arts and cultural sector, and 48 percent identified as AGA Members or the general public.
- All respondents see value in continuing the *Alberta Biennial*.
- Respondents of all segments think that the role of the *Alberta Biennial* is to promote and celebrate art and artists in Alberta. At the same time, some expect it to support emerging artists.
- 39 percent of the respondents think that the intent, structure and/or process of a *Biennial* exhibition are inherently inequitable.

Highlights of Survey Results

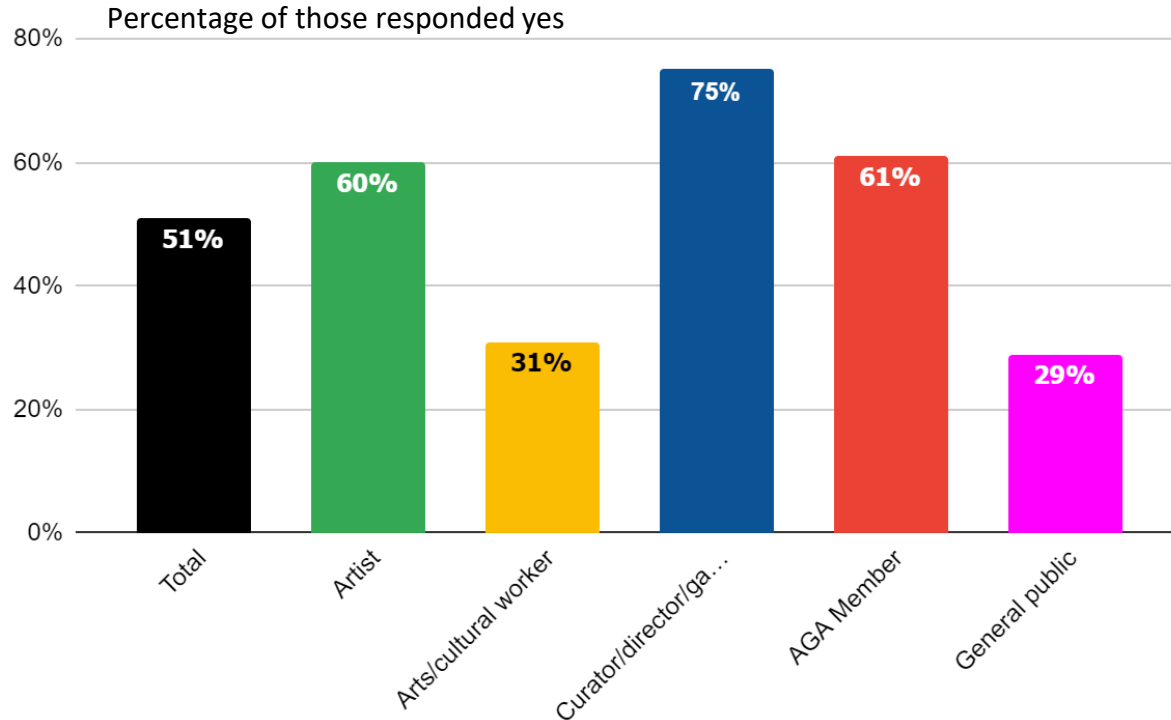
How many surveys are completed and by which segment?

| Segments | Number of surveys completed | % |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|
| Total | 306 | |
| Artist | 120 | 39% |
| Arts/Cultural Worker | 29 | 9% |
| Curator/Director/Gallerist | 11 | 4% |
| AGA Member | 57 | 19% |
| General Public | 89 | 29% |

52% of the respondents identified as working in or associated with the arts and culture sector.

48% identified as AGA Members or the general public.

Do you make a point of coming to the AGA to see the *Alberta Biennial* exhibition?



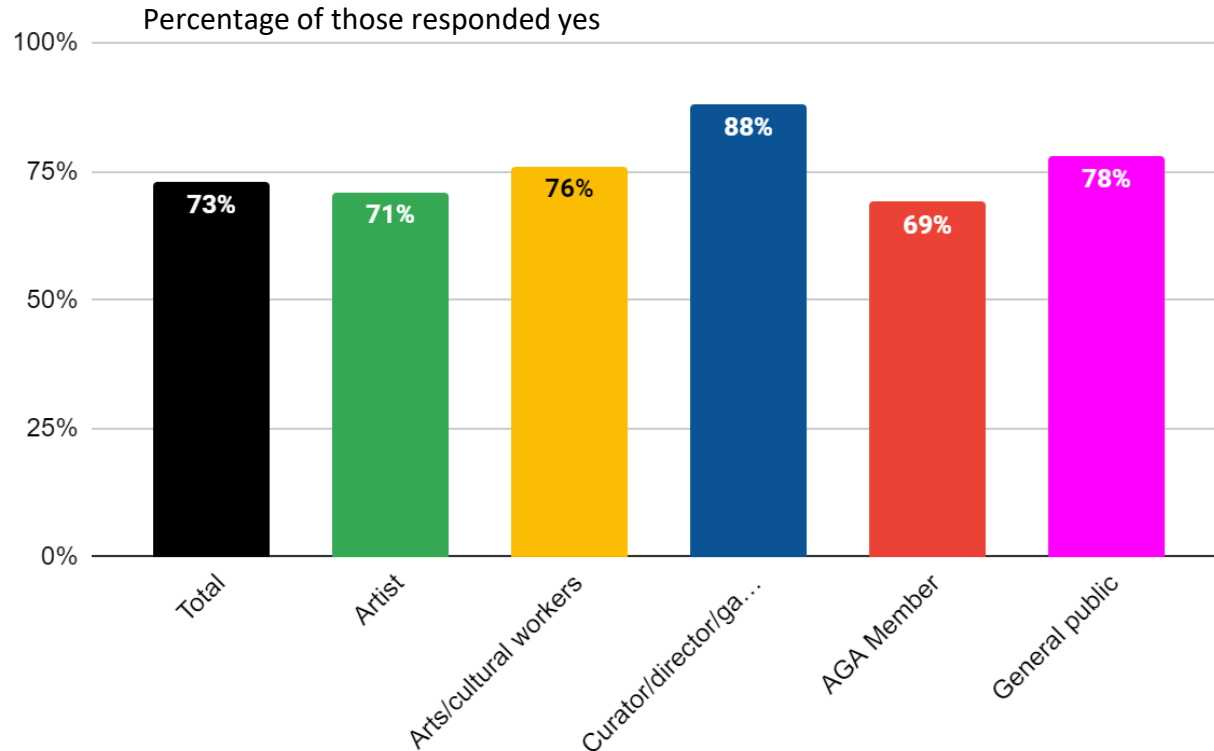
51% said they would make a point of coming to the AGA to see the *Alberta Biennial* exhibition.

What do you think it means for an artist to be included in the *Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art*?

One common theme emerges across all segments: the *Alberta Biennial* gives artists recognition and exposure.

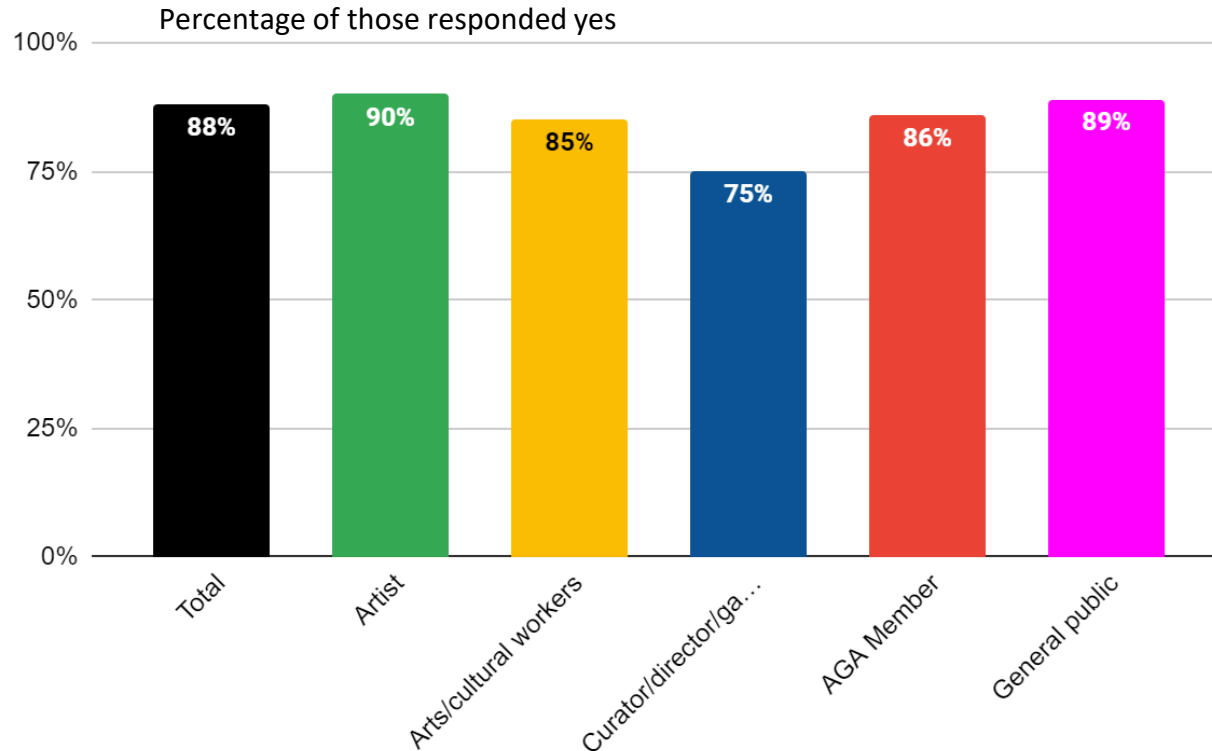
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|----------------------------|--|
| Artist | Honour, validation and publicity |
| Arts/Cultural worker | Profile, revenue, prestige |
| Curator/Director/Gallerist | Excellent promotion of the artist's work |
| AGA Member | Profile, exposure, honour |
| General public | Great visibility and a career boost |

Do you think that being included in the *Alberta Biennial* is different from being included in other AGA exhibitions?



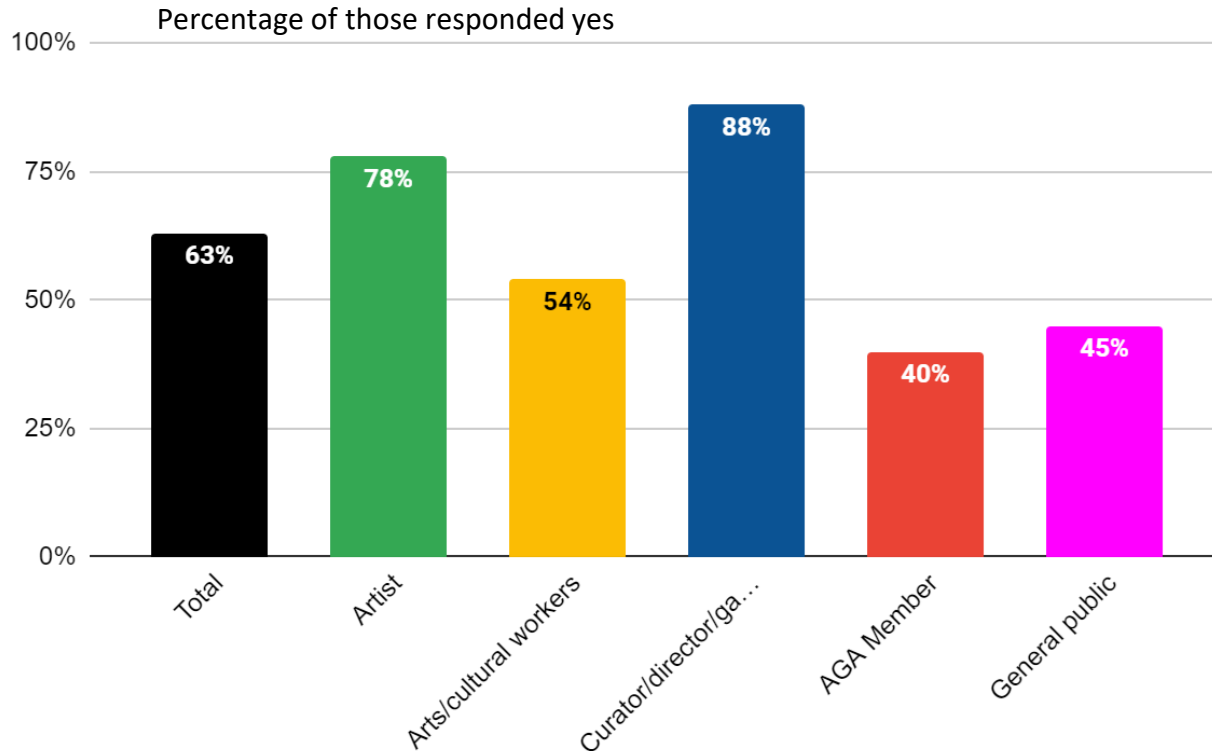
Majority of the respondents think that being included in the *Alberta Biennial* is different from being included in other AGA exhibitions.

Do you think there is value in continuing with the *Alberta Biennial* exhibition?



Most respondents see value in continuing with the *Alberta Biennial* exhibition.

Do you look for who is included in the *Alberta Biennial* exhibition before the exhibition opens?



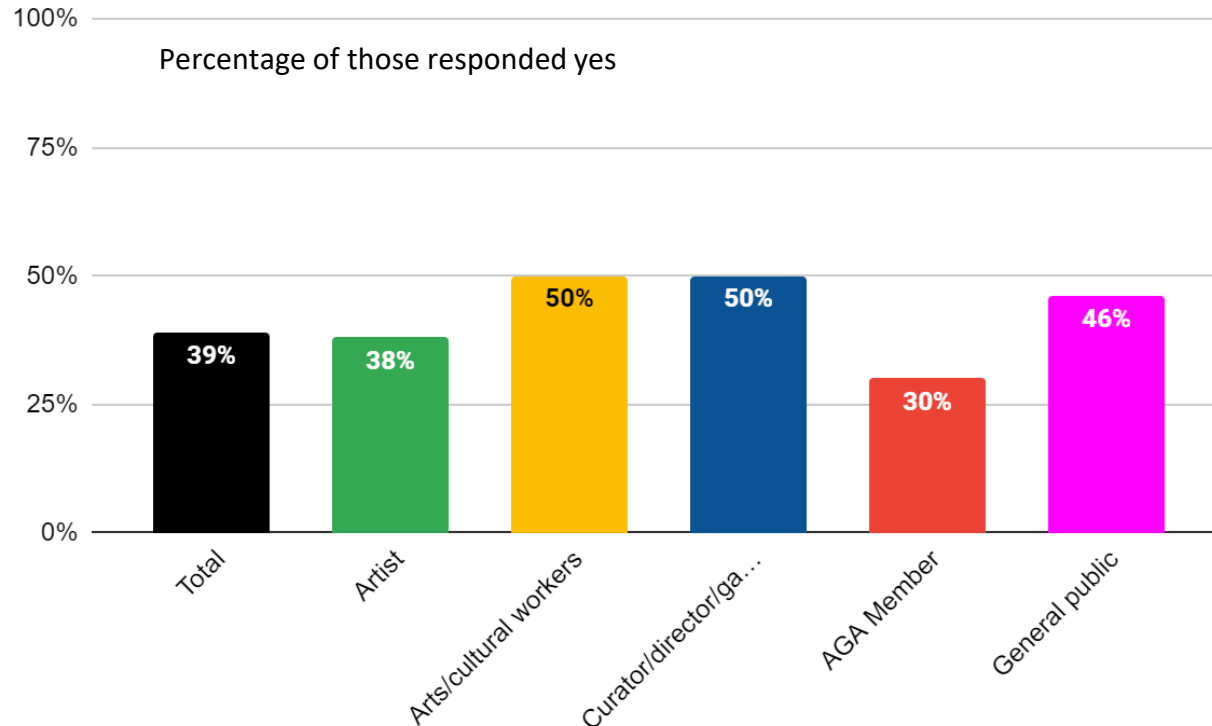
Responses differ with AGA Members and the general public showing less interest in looking for who is included in a *Biennial* exhibition before it opens.

What role do you see *Alberta Biennial* exhibitions playing in Alberta arts communities?

One common theme emerges across all segments: To support emerging artists, enlighten viewers and celebrate the visual art and artists in Alberta.

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Artist | Showcasing the state of the visual arts and artists in the Alberta |
| Arts/Cultural worker | Promoting and celebrating art and artists in Alberta |
| Curator/Director/Gallerist | Promoting and celebrating art and artists in Alberta |
| AGA Member | Support emerging artists, enlighten viewers, show the public the state of the visual art in Alberta |
| General public | Support emerging artists, promote and celebrate the visual arts and artists in Alberta |

There has been a lot of debate about the value of *Alberta Biennial* exhibitions. Do you think that the intent, structure or process of a *Biennial* exhibition is inherently inequitable?



39% of the respondents think that the intent, structure and/or process of a *Biennial* exhibition are inherently inequitable.

Is there anything else that you want the AGA to know about *Alberta Biennial* exhibitions?

Some quotes:

"Outside of Edmonton, the Alberta Biennial is one of the most recognized and inclusive programs associated with the AGA. It is also the only exhibition that brings the Alberta art community together. It is definitely worth continuing."

~ Artist

"If you get rid of a biennial, something with a larger call for submissions would be good to maintain."

~ Arts/Cultural worker

"I think the entire process and vision needs to be reimaged to make it something that is valuable to artists and to the community."

~ Curator/Director/Gallerist

"...I really am never concerned what race or nationality an artist is. I am interested in the artist as a talented human who has taken the risk to display his/her work. Focus on the race or nationality of the artist is wrong. Look at the art and choose based on criteria about the ART. The only criteria for the artist is that he/she is living in Alberta and perhaps trained ie. art education."

~ AGA Member

"Keep it simple based on residency in the Province of Alberta. Separate the art from the artist. Let the art speak for itself. Less barriers (judgement) and more volume. If you wish to expand to different geography (outside Alberta borders) or focus on increasing participation of a group (e.g. black artists) create a different show, call it something else."

"Advertise it to the general public in Alberta"

~ General Public

Thank you!

Notes:

- This presentation shows a snapshot of the questions applied to all respondents.
- For open-ended questions, common themes are highlighted in this presentation, and they *can* be interpretative.
- For questions, please email marketing@youraga.ca.