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Chair: Lisa Hepfner



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• (1635)

[*English*]

The Chair (Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.)): I'm going to call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 14 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Before we begin, I'd ask all in-person participants—all of us are in person today, I believe—to please read the guidelines written on the cards on the table. They are measures in place to help prevent audio incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters. You will notice that there is a QR code on the card that links to a short awareness video, should you need it.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before you speak. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Before we begin, I need a mover to adopt two operational budgets. One is in the amount of \$25,700 for our study on the effects of influencers and social media content.

Monsieur Champoux, thank you.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The second one is an additional amount of \$2,000 to cover snacks and meals for our study on the effects of technological advances.

Are you moving that, Mr. Myles? Will you move for snacks?

David Myles (Fredericton—Oromocto, Lib.): I'll move for snacks, yes. Let's make sure there are good snacks.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: That's good.

On to today's meeting, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, October 29, this committee is meeting for the consideration of the audit of the indigenous art collection.

We have with us today, from the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Valerie Gideon, deputy minister; Rob Wright, associate deputy minister; and Stephanie Barozzi, chief audit and evaluation executive.

I will note, for committee members, that our original motion asked for the director of the Indigenous Art Centre. That position is vacant, so we were unable to fulfill that request.

Am I giving the deputy minister and the associate deputy minister five minutes each? No, you're going to present together, and then we'll hear from the auditor of the report, Ms. Barozzi.

We'll start with the deputy minister. You have the floor for five minutes.

Valerie Gideon (Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): Thank you very much to the chair and to members of the committee. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to speak about the Indigenous Art Centre and its stewardship of the indigenous art collection by Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada.

[*Translation*]

With me today are associate deputy minister Rob Wright and chief audit and evaluation executive Stephanie Barozzi.

The indigenous art collection is a national cultural treasure. It consists of more than 5,000 contemporary pieces created by first nations, Inuit and Métis artists from across the country. These pieces express identity, history and resilience. They are an important economic engine for artists and communities and are an essential element of reconciliation, since they honour the cultural rights, artistic expression and self-determination of the indigenous people.

[*English*]

Over the last several years, our department has undertaken significant modernization of how the collection is cared for, documented and shared with Canadians. We have relocated the collection to a secure, climate-controlled facility that meets professional standards. We have put in place strengthened environmental controls, digital tracking systems, condition reporting and professional storage and handling procedures consistent with current national museum standards. We also maintain a robust loan program that supports national and international exhibitions, ensuring that indigenous artists and their work reach audiences across the country and the world.

[Translation]

Some time ago, our department commissioned an internal audit in order to do an exhaustive examination of the management of the indigenous art collection. The audit was not triggered by a single incident. Rather, it is part of our risk-based audit plan and reflects our commitment to transparency, accountability and continuous improvement.

The audit confirmed numerous strong points, including the roles and responsibilities established within the Indigenous Art Centre for collection management, secure storage, emergency plans and pest management, and inventory processes improvement.

The audit also revealed a number of things to be improved, and thus led to a number of recommendations that include complete resolution of gaps in recordkeeping that were inherited from earlier decades, documentation of the deaccession and disposal process, and an analysis of long-term lifecycle costs for preserving and promoting the collection.

[English]

We fully accept the recommendations of the audit, and work is well under way to implement all of them. This includes reviewing and updating policy instruments, establishing stronger contract and oversight frameworks, and reconciling historical records. Importantly, the audit also encouraged us to reflect on whether our department is the right long-term custodian of the collection or whether a transfer to a long-standing national institution with indigenous governance should be explored. We welcome that conversation.

For more than 30 years, the indigenous art collection's mandate has included the possibility of indigenous custodianship. We are just at the initial stages of looking at alternative models, such as indigenous-designed approaches, that uphold artistic integrity, public accountability and cultural sovereignty. Again, we welcome feedback in that context. One important consideration will be the importance of maintaining the integrity of the collection.

[Translation]

Throughout this work, we remain determined to support indigenous artists. The Indigenous Art Centre has directly contributed to the living earned by artists for several decades, through acquisitions, exhibition expenses and reproduction royalties. We will continue to ensure that artists receive fair compensation and the collection continues to support indigenous cultural and economic development.

[English]

Stewardship of the indigenous art collection is a responsibility that we take seriously. We acknowledge the legacy challenges identified by the audit, and we are acting on them with urgency. We also recognize that reconciliation requires listening, adapting and being open to change, including the possibility of indigenous-led custodianship of the collection in the future.

Wela'liek.

I'd be pleased to, with Rob and Stephanie, answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do we have an opening statement from Stephanie as well?

Stephanie Barozzi (Chief Audit and Evaluation Executive, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): No, I don't have one prepared.

The Chair: That's fair enough.

I will turn, then, to Mrs. Thomas to begin our round of questions.

You have the floor for six minutes.

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

My first question here is for Ms. Gideon.

There are five recommendations that were given in the action plan outlined in the audit. The planned implementation for those five recommendations was March 31, 2025.

You're saying that things are well under way. However, with a March 31, 2025, deadline, they shouldn't be well under way; they should be completed. Why aren't they?

• (1640)

Valerie Gideon: We do have a number of actions that actually have been completed.

Rachael Thomas: I'm not asking about the ones that have been completed. I'm asking why there are some that have not been completed.

Valerie Gideon: In terms of the first recommendation, we do have a draft of the policy document clarifying roles and responsibilities, and we expect that to be approved certainly prior to the March 31, 2026, timeline that we've adjusted in the management response action plan.

We have signed the contract with our third party storage suppliers, so that action has been completed, and we are continuing to work with Public Services and Procurement Canada on the next storage facility after 2027, when we will have to vacate the Tunney's Pasture Goldenrod facility. That is something that we are working very closely with PSPC on.

In terms of the biannual report to the corporate secretary, that is going to be completed by next month or January 2026, and an annual report to the deputies is going to be institutionalized by March 2026. I can assure you that I do meet regularly with the corporate secretary, who reports directly to me. We also have had discussions and presentations about this audit and the indigenous art collection on a regular basis at our senior management committee meeting.

We have completed the baseline cost analysis, providing various scenarios for the third party contractor for the storage facility, and we have completed the fact that this cost analysis would be updated every five years.

We are continuing to work on other things. We've instituted security cameras—all of that has been completed. We have also drafted new standard operating procedures, and final approval of those will be by March 2026.

Rachael Thomas: Ms. Gideon, in the interest of time, I am going to move on.

I think what's clear, though, is that there were recommendations that were signed off on to be completed by March 31, 2025, and they have not been. In fact, they will not be completed, you're saying, until the spring of 2026 and maybe even beyond. I do think some further answers are needed there, but I don't know that we'll get those today.

Ms. Barozzi, are you able to identify the pieces that are missing? You said in your report that there are 132 pieces that are unaccounted for. Do you know which pieces those are?

Stephanie Barozzi: I do not know which pieces they are. In our audit, we were provided with a list of what was called “unaccounted for”. There were various reasons. We were told that some of them were missing, but we did not do any further audit work on it, because the value was not as high compared with the rest of the collection. We focused our work on the pieces that were in inventory and in the vault.

Rachael Thomas: Ms. Gideon, are you aware of which pieces these 132 missing artworks are?

Valerie Gideon: We do have an inventory of those that are identified as the 132. The work of the team continues with respect to being able to determine this. Some of these are duplicate records. Some of these are based on when we transitioned in 2010 to a new information management system. Some of them have been located. At least 12 pieces have been located, and 20 are reproductions of existing artworks. We do have a list.

Rachael Thomas: You have 132 pieces missing, with maybe 12 recovered. That brings us to 120 still unaccounted for. You have a list. Therefore, you know the artists of these pieces. Have they been notified?

Valerie Gideon: I would just say that in terms of the unaccounted pieces, because we are following the category A federal heritage collection rules and procedures—

Rachael Thomas: With all due respect, you're actually not following that. As was mentioned in the audit, there aren't proper security cameras. Three pieces were damaged by water. There's no temperature control. None of this is according to protocol for category A.

Valerie Gideon: We did receive category—

Rachael Thomas: I'll go back to my original question, Ms. Gideon. Have you identified which artists' pieces are missing, and have you told those artists? That's my question.

Valerie Gideon: Under the federal heritage collection rules and procedures for category A—we received an inspection of the current facility that validated the category A status—the pieces have not been, to use the technical terminology, deaccessioned. We are not notifying, because the pieces are not deaccessioned.

I want to correct one thing. Twenty of those are reproductions, not original pieces of art. That also needs to be factored into the total assessment.

• (1645)

Rachael Thomas: You used the word “deaccessioned”.

Valerie Gideon: That's correct.

Rachael Thomas: What does that mean?

Valerie Gideon: That is where the piece would be identified and categorized as missing with certainty. These pieces have not yet met that threshold.

Rachael Thomas: How will you determine whether or not they are missing with certainty?

Valerie Gideon: As we continue to work on the inventory and continue to get information with respect to the location, if we are not able to confirm the location, then at that point they would be under the deaccessioned categorization.

Rachael Thomas: Some of these pieces have been missing since 1980. How many more years do you need? It's been 40 years.

Valerie Gideon: The unaccounted for would not be since 1980.

Rachael Thomas: According to the minister's testimony, she said it was since 1980. Either she is misleading us or you are.

Valerie Gideon: I was sitting next to the minister. The minister was indicating that some of these pieces were loaned during the 1980s to different regional and headquarter offices. She was not indicating that they had been unaccounted for since 1980. They were part of a loan program that was completely suspended in 2017 and that had had an earlier moratorium because of the fact that a review had been conducted by the Canadian Conservation Institute indicating that an internal loan program provided too much risk to the collection. As a result, that loan program no longer exists and has been discontinued.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Al Soud, you have six minutes.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's great to see you, as always.

Thank you to our witnesses for taking the time to be with us today. Your time is appreciated.

The collection represents not only artistic excellence but also cultural knowledge, intergenerational memory and the responsibilities that come with stewardship.

Deputy, in an interview with CBC/Radio-Canada, you said the following:

[*Translation*]

“Reconciliation is picking up speed, because when you change the nature of the conversation to recognition of self-determination, you build trust....”

[English]

How do you believe trust-building and the recognition of indigenous self-determination should concretely appear in the oversight of the indigenous art collection? Do the audit's findings indicate that these principles are currently being met?

Valerie Gideon: It's an excellent question. We often think about self-determination from the perspective of section 35 rights holders, and here we're looking at individual artists. The focus of the indigenous art collection and the centre has been making sure that the collection is maintained, from the perspective of its integrity, for the artists, and that the economic benefits go to the artists. We don't retain copyright. We are very much focused on ensuring that the collection is accessible at no cost to the artist.

From a governance perspective, when you think about the collection, it is going to be a way to balance the interests of indigenous leadership and nations but also the perspective of the individual artists. I'm always working in an environment where I'm discussing policy initiatives and funding and services with section 35 rights holders, but in this case, I have to remind myself that we are talking about individuals, how they identify themselves and the connection they have to their art.

Fares Al Soud: Fantastic. Thank you, Deputy.

In another interview with CBC/Radio-Canada, you stated this:

[Translation]

"I am the messenger. ...I am a spokesperson, essentially, within the system."

[English]

In your role, how do you assess whether those priorities are reflected in the policies and governance practices surrounding the indigenous art collection? What changes would strengthen the alignment between community expectation and departmental action?

Valerie Gideon: That's a very interesting question. You're using my words to question me. I'm trying to remind myself of the interview.

We are going at the pace of our core partners. Over the last number of years, we have really been setting up some strong, stable fora for working with indigenous partners at the nation level and also at the national table. The indigenous art collection has not come up as a priority at this point in those contexts, because indigenous leaders have been very focused on addressing the long-standing equity gaps they have faced. That has been a core priority. As we continue to transform the relationship and invest in reconciliation, this is an area where there's huge potential to be able to provide greater indigenous sovereignty in terms of the collection itself.

Fares Al Soud: Fantastic. Thank you, Deputy.

The audit raises the possibility that the indigenous art collection may no longer be best housed within CIRNAC. Has the department conducted an analysis of whether an indigenous-led organization or museum institution is better equipped to steward the collection? If not, why has this not been prioritized?

• (1650)

Valerie Gideon: We have been having regular meetings with a number of different national institutions to explore the feasibility, the viability and levels of interest. However, we have not yet launched a more formal process. Part of that, of course, as I noted earlier, is the very strong priorities of first nations, Inuit and Métis leadership and our wanting to keep pace with them. That said, we have certainly been increasing the number of conversations and meetings we have had in the last few months.

Fares Al Soud: I'm not sure you've given this much thought as of yet, but what criteria would you use to determine whether retaining or transferring the stewardship would best support indigenous cultural sovereignty?

Valerie Gideon: The first criterion would be acceptance by indigenous artists. Reaching the majority of indigenous artists represented in the collection would probably be a difficult threshold to achieve, but it is a necessary one. Then, of course, there are the issues with storage capacity, human capacity and the ability of resourcing and funding to make sure the integrity of the collection can be maintained. Those would be other criteria I would use to assess the future of the collection. It wouldn't be just me alone, of course, making that decision.

Fares Al Soud: Fantastic.

Mr. Wright, the deputy has spoken to this already. I'm curious. The audit identifies 132 artworks that are unaccounted for, some possibly missing, yet also notes that there is no clear policy governing timely recovery efforts. What specific actions has the department taken to locate these works? Why was no recovery protocol established earlier, given the cultural value of these pieces?

Rob Wright (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): One thing that's very important, as the deputy mentioned, is that we are going through a reconciliation process. Of the 132, 12 have been identified as duplicate records, and 20 have been identified as reproductions. Part of the reason for the timing of that, as the deputy minister mentioned, is that there was a legacy internal loan program that was terminated in 2017. Therefore, items were returned between 2017 and 2023. The pandemic was in the middle of that return. It's really in recent years that this reconciliation process has been able to be rectified. We are going through that process now.

It's also important to note that the unaccounted-for artworks represent an assessment value of about \$49,000 of the overall collection value of \$14.4 million, or about 0.34% of the overall value of the collection. That helps to put it in context. As far as standard operating procedures and protocols are concerned, the team is working on those rapidly. The process of moving to deaccessioning items is one of the elements being worked on now.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for six minutes.

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses.

Ms. Gideon, I admit that I am rather surprised by what I am hearing and reading about the issue that has led to us studying this situation today. Do you consider what has happened to be serious?

Valerie Gideon: The collection has evolved. Originally, the objective of the collection was to purchase artworks in order to place them in federal offices.

Martin Champoux: Ms. Gideon, do you think it is serious that all trace of 120 works of art that were in your custody has been lost? Do you regard that as trivial? That is the impression I get. I listened to Mr. Wright say that they represented a small percentage of the value of the collection, as if that meant they were less important than the others. That concerns me. I would like to hear your comments on this.

Valerie Gideon: First, I think it is a documentation problem arising from the fact that this collection was created several years ago, in 1965.

Martin Champoux: Have you ever been to the National Gallery of Canada here in Ottawa?

Valerie Gideon: Yes.

Martin Champoux: Do you know how many artworks it holds?

Valerie Gideon: No.

Martin Champoux: Of the tens of thousands of artworks that the gallery has in its warehouses and on its walls, regardless of their value, do you think it has lost any?

Valerie Gideon: I can't answer that question.

Martin Champoux: I understand, but I find it concerning that someone who has artworks in their custody would manage to lose some of them, if only a few. I understand that these indigenous artworks were lent to government offices, but the fact that there was no mechanism for recording them gives me the impression that they were not assigned any value and they were lent to someone who needed them to decorate a wall because nobody knew what to do with them.

When the truth and reconciliation process emerged, we suddenly started assigning importance to first nations heritage. That was when it was found that 132 artworks had been lost from a collection that was in our custody. People seem to be satisfied that 12 have been located, but that leaves 120. Despite this, we are told it is not very serious because it is a small part of a \$14 million collection.

So I have a lot of questions, and what I am learning today is much more concerning than I was expecting. In addition, we are told that in most cases, the last location of the artworks in question is known, but they have not been located. I don't understand that sentence. I would like you to help me understand it.

How can you say that you don't know where something is and it isn't where it was the last time, but it hasn't been lost? Enlighten me a bit.

• (1655)

Valerie Gideon: It is also important to note that we have transitioned to a new information system, so we think that in some cases these are duplicates.

When the federal government put these initiatives in place, not much value was placed on works of contemporary indigenous

artists in Canada. The federal government therefore showed leadership by finding a way to offer remuneration to indigenous artists in an environment where there was not a lot of demand for these artworks. So it is nice to see that things have evolved and the members of this committee see the significant value of this collection. We take this very seriously, I assure you.

Martin Champoux: Okay.

What have you put in place to locate the unaccounted for artworks as fast as possible and avoid this happening again? What compensation or reassurance can you offer the artists whose works were put in your care at a time when they were not worth anything? They actually must not have been very happy that their works were not worth anything. An artist's works are worth something to them. An artist puts their heart and soul into what they create. Whether a work is worth \$500 in your eyes or \$50,000 in someone else's eyes, that is not what motivates the artist.

What process have you established for recovering these artworks? Regardless of value, it has to be done.

What is your relationship with the artists who have been hurt in this tale?

Valerie Gideon: You have asked several questions, but I can talk about the measures we have put in place.

We are now using an automated system to make sure we manage our collection properly, a system used by other museums and by Global Affairs Canada. We have received a Category A designation based on the protocols we have to put in place. We also follow Treasury Board Secretariat policies and directives. These are measures that we have implemented. In addition, we have a team in our department that continues to refine the information about the collection to maintain its integrity.

Martin Champoux: Have you identified the artists? Do you have any contact with the artists?

Valerie Gideon: Yes, we have a lot of contact with the artists.

Martin Champoux: I'm talking about the ones whose works have been lost.

Valerie Gideon: We have over 560 artists with whom we maintain communication.

Martin Champoux: You have contact even with the ones whose works have been lost, right?

Valerie Gideon: I would have to check whether those artists are all living and are among the ones who receive communications directly. We have 560 artists with whom we communicate regularly, as well as 489 institutions, the provinces and territories, cultural centres, museums and libraries.

Martin Champoux: If I were an heir of an artist who had created works in your custody and I heard your testimony, I would think that there seems to have been no effort to locate those artists and compensate them.

I think my time is nearly up, but we will definitely come back to this. I am stunned by what I am hearing today.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Schmale, welcome to the heritage committee.

You have the floor now for five minutes.

Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, Deputy Minister. Thank you for joining us here today.

I am picking up on where we left off on Monday with Minister Alty, when we were talking about this exact subject.

Deputy Minister, the audit picked up on a number of gaps within the handling of these very valuable pieces, one of which was governance. At the time, there was no clear senior-level accountability for this collection. There was nobody who actually reported to the deputy minister.

You said that this is now fixed. Is that correct? You actually have someone reporting to you about this collection now.

• (1700)

Valerie Gideon: For several years, the director of the Indigenous Art Centre would report to the corporate secretary, who would report to the deputy minister. That is still the structure we have now. The issue is that the position of director of the art centre has been vacant for a few years, so the corporate secretary has ensured that an executive within the corporate secretary office is now also helping to support that team.

When Rob and I started in the department, we did have someone who was acting as the director of the art centre. We were hoping that that individual would become permanent in the role, but the individual decided to move on for another opportunity. That happens in the public service.

Jamie Schmale: We still have some pieces that went missing, which we didn't find out until an audit actually happened. This has been happening for a while. As the minister pointed out on Monday in committee, in INAN, this has been happening for quite some time.

We have a storage facility that was very insecure in terms of gaps within security protocols and otherwise.

Has anybody been held accountable for the failures along the way?

Valerie Gideon: When you complete an internal audit, as part of the management response action plan you actually identify the senior leaders who are accountable for each of the actions in the action plan. Ultimately, that action plan reports not just to the deputy, but we also have a departmental audit committee that will review the progress with respect to the action plan commitments that are made in the audit. That's also why these audits are public.

Jamie Schmale: Has somebody been held accountable?

Valerie Gideon: Do you mean for this particular audit that is in place?

Jamie Schmale: No, I mean for the result of the audit.

Valerie Gideon: We are accountable.

Jamie Schmale: You have 10 employees and over \$1 million in budget to look after a collection that's missing over 100 pieces. Some of them are recovered, yes, but there are some gaps here with a lot of zeros behind these numbers—millions of dollars.

Has anybody been held accountable for these failures?

Valerie Gideon: Could you specify what dollar value you're referring to that is millions of dollars?

Jamie Schmale: You can talk about the 900 pieces. You can talk about the number as \$50,000. The entire collection is worth \$14 million. Regardless of what the number is, there are pieces missing, worth money, worth value to people who created that art. This doesn't happen in the National Gallery, as was pointed out by the Bloc before me.

Who has been held accountable? Has anybody?

Valerie Gideon: Just to correct that, the pieces have not been identified as missing. They have been identified as unaccounted for.

Jamie Schmale: Has anybody been fired?

Valerie Gideon: No, no one has been fired.

Jamie Schmale: Has anyone been suspended?

Valerie Gideon: No one has been suspended.

Jamie Schmale: Has anybody maybe been told to come in the office five days a week as the ultimate penance?

Valerie Gideon: I think the purpose of an internal audit, and the reason we do risk-based audit, is to proactively identify areas of risk so that management can put in place actions to remedy those risks.

Jamie Schmale: Okay.

This would not happen in the National Gallery. Just to say that some pieces have gone missing and it's okay.... Why has nobody been held accountable?

Valerie Gideon: Again, the origin of the collection was decades ago. The purpose of that collection was not to set up a national gallery; it was to set up—

Jamie Schmale: You're storing these pieces. You take responsibility for these pieces.

Valerie Gideon: This is why we have changed the way the art has been managed. We have suspended the internal loan program that was the source of why 91 of these pieces became unaccounted for.

Jamie Schmale: This went on for decades, as was pointed out. The minister talked about the 1980s. You got the IAC in the 1990s. This has gone on for decades. We have missing pieces. Nobody is being held accountable by their current, past.... When are we going to see somebody take accountability and say, "Yeah, this was my fault. This should have been better"? I know you're putting in processes—I get it.

We have a storage container by a third party here. Was there even a contract with that provider?

Valerie Gideon: Only 8% of the artworks are in that third party storage. We have repatriated almost all of the artworks now in our vault, including all the pieces that were still held in regional offices.

Jamie Schmale: Would you have done that if it had not been for the audit?

• (1705)

Valerie Gideon: We were already doing that before the audit.

Jamie Schmale: Were you already doing that?

Valerie Gideon: We have been doing that for years.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schmale. Your time is up.

Ms. Royer, you have five minutes.

Zoe Royer (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses here today.

From what I understand, a majority of the art pieces mentioned were loaned to government offices in the 1980s, and the loan program has been cancelled. Given that, at that time, a lot of the documentation of the pieces was by pen and paper—it wasn't digitized or computerized—I would imagine that some of that documentation is missing, hence the difficulty in finding the pieces.

Recognizing that Canada's history from that time.... We still had residential schools operating in the 1980s, and that is a shameful part of our history. I mean, it's hard to put myself into the position of those working at that time. It was not computerized, and there was a different level of understanding and respect. This wasn't a lapse in security. It was really about old systems and that different...that non-recognition of First Peoples, which is truly sad.

I also understand that measures have been put in place today to make sure that this never happens. Can you talk a bit about how the department—and maybe this is a question for you, Valerie—today is ensuring that indigenous protocols, spiritual care and community input guide the preservation and exhibition of sacred or culturally sensitive works?

Valerie Gideon: Thank you so much for the question. I would say to you that I think we can do more. There's a lot of engagement with indigenous artists with respect to the collection and their own art within the collection, but I really think that, in the area of governance—from the question that was raised earlier—there is more we could do.

For example, we are working on a public catalogue of all the artwork that people could browse through. We published, just before the pandemic, *The Indigenous Art Collection: Selected Works 1967-2017*, a beautiful book that you can go through and actually see all of the artwork. However, I think that, still, we could do more for the visibility of the collection.

We've had a gallery space in our permanent facility at 10 Wellington, which, of course, we've now had to temporarily move out of because they are refurbishing the exterior of that building. That gallery itself, when we reopen it, is one area where we can do exhibitions. We have a really robust external loan program, which is also very helpful. We also engage indigenous artists and curators to do workshops and special events. We've had several success stories that we can speak to. We've done partnerships, also, with other museums and galleries in that context.

However, as I was mentioning earlier, I think that, ultimately, an indigenous-led approach to the governance of the collection would be more ideal than my speaking to you, here, as the representative person responsible for the management of the collection today.

Zoe Royer: I really appreciate that. I think it is very important to the Canadian people how we move forward in this.

Thinking about the cataloguing.... You raised an important point, that that's what you're doing now, and I'm sure that it's being done, but in the record-keeping of the works, regardless of whom they were loaned to at different times, whether they were properly identified may also be called into question. If you can't properly identify a piece and if you don't have the technologies or the ways in which we would assess works today, I imagine that would contribute to the difficulty in finding these works.

Can you just assure us again...? Actually, I'll shift a little bit, because I'm running out of time.

• (1710)

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Zoe Royer: Maybe when we come back, you could talk about the life-cycle funding, how that's being managed and what's required to complete the baseline costs and things like that.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Gideon, I asked you two questions earlier to which I did not get answers.

Is there a plan to compensate the artists who have been hurt in this tale?

Valerie Gideon: At the moment, as I said, we have not documented the disposal of any artworks. We are not at the stage of having those conversations with the artists.

Martin Champoux: On that point, have there been conversations with the indigenous communities?

Valerie Gideon: No one has had a conversation directly with me, no. The people in the indigenous communities have not asked us about it at all. No one has communicated with me to get more details about this.

Martin Champoux: The audit talks about the recommendations that were made and it says they have not been entirely implemented, so I have questions about this. The report also says: "The audit also observed unclear roles and responsibilities related to follow-up actions to take in the event of unaccounted for art pieces." I will skip the rest of the paragraph, which you will be familiar with.

Why have the recommendations in what was actually a rather harsh audit not yet been put in place, when you have had this report in hand since November 16, 2024? This situation has been known for longer than that, from what we know.

Valerie Gideon: As I said earlier, we have a draft document. We first have to ensure that we get feedback from all sectors. Everything is then essentially subject to my approval and the approval of the senior management committee.

It's not that the measures have not been implemented; it's that the policy is still being written.

Martin Champoux: How many other artworks can disappear like this? After realizing that some artworks had disappeared, did you continue to acquire indigenous artworks? Have you made any other acquisitions?

Valerie Gideon: Since the audit last year we have not made any other acquisitions.

Martin Champoux: How long have you known that there were works that had disappeared?

Valerie Gideon: We realized this early in the transition, just before the pandemic. I don't remember the precise year. We had asked that the Canadian Conservation Institute, which is associated with the Department of Canadian Heritage, as you probably know, review the space dedicated to the collections in 2013. That was when we started to discover that there were too many risks associated with the internal loan program and recommended that it be terminated, there having already been a moratorium in place since 2012. In 2017, after the review by the Canadian Conservation Institute, the loan program was officially abolished.

Martin Champoux: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Waugh, you are next. You have five minutes.

Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Do you have any idea who has the 120 pieces of art that are missing and that have been borrowed? Do you have that?

Valerie Gideon: Yes. Obviously, they are not listed item by item, but we know that we have 48 artworks that were part of regional and headquarter displays. We have nine items that were part of regional displays, but two of them are reproductions. We have the specific years. The first set of 48 artworks were between 1994 and 2004, and the nine items were from 2005 and 2006.

I'm just giving you an example, but we do have documents with categories by year of where they were.

Kevin Waugh: Have they been contacted?

Let's say I had an art piece in my office. I leave and all of a sudden that art piece is missing. Have you reached out in the last number of months to connect the piece to where it was and who had it?

Valerie Gideon: We had already proceeded with respect to repatriating all of the artwork from regional offices to bring them all into the vault. All the offices that had held artwork were contacted. They were directed to actually bring or send back the artwork, which was a complex logistical process, in order to be able to repatriate all of them back into the vault.

• (1715)

Kevin Waugh: For those that didn't get returned and you do know who had them last, have you contacted police about this? Have you started the search professionally by going to the police and saying, "That piece is over there. We're not hearing from that group or that person, and we need to get that piece back"?

Valerie Gideon: There's no indication at all of any type of theft or criminal activity associated with this process. This was a documentation process, and we are continuing to go through the inventory. We have had absolutely no evidence that anyone appropriated this artwork in an inappropriate way.

Kevin Waugh: How many pieces have been brought back? You just said, I think, that 132 were missing. You've recovered 12.

For the other 120, 20 are reproductions. Do you have an idea about the other 100, then?

Valerie Gideon: We know that 91 were part of this internal loan program. Some were part of regional displays. Some were part of headquarter displays. Some were part of regional and headquarter office loans. We do have a drill-down list of those categories.

Kevin Waugh: Have you reached out to any of these groups to find the 100 that were left unaccounted for?

Valerie Gideon: It's 91.

Kevin Waugh: What are you going to do to recover the 100 pieces?

Valerie Gideon: We are looking at the records we have. The first order is to confirm which ones are duplicate records that were part of the transition that we did in 2010 to the new information system.

Kevin Waugh: You should know what's missing. It wouldn't take that much.

Valerie Gideon: Again, they are not categorized as missing; they are categorized as unaccounted for. It is different with respect to the designations.

Kevin Waugh: It's wordsmithing.

Let me ask you this. The Vatican is going to send over 62 indigenous pieces. It's been in the news lately. Would you be in charge of that when it does arrive?

Valerie Gideon: No, we don't have a role in the repatriation of the pieces from the Vatican. That was something that was negotiated with other partners. We have not been implicated.

I did see the national chief's engagement at the Vatican and so forth, but we were not called upon.

Kevin Waugh: Thank you. That's good.

I don't know about the value. When I look at indigenous art today, it has tripled in value in the last five years. When you give me the number of \$49,000, I really question that. If you look at indigenous art in this country, it has tripled. Allen Sapp pieces that probably came here for \$3,000 are now \$15,000, hanging in certain offices.

I don't know where you're getting this number of \$49,000, but I can tell you it's low. You have \$14.4 million that you suspect is the total amount you have. I'm going to really question the \$49,000 that is connected with the missing 100 pieces that we don't know where they are today.

Would you agree with me on indigenous art? It is the hottest—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Waugh. That's five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor for five minutes.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good evening, everyone.

Ms. Gideon, if I understand correctly, the fact that some works were unaccounted for was noticed in around 2013. Is that correct?

Valerie Gideon: In fact, the risks associated with the collection had been assessed in 2013. However, a moratorium on the internal loan program had been instituted in 2012. I was not in office at that time but I imagine that people wanted to make sure the collection was better protected.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Okay.

From what I understand, you inherited a situation that you had not created. You are in the process of looking for ways to reorganize everything. That brings me to my question, which is: What mechanisms have been put in place? Mr. Champoux asked that question earlier, but the answer was not complete. What mechanisms have been put in place, today, by your department, under your direction, to avoid losing or searching for other works?

Valerie Gideon: The place where the artworks are physically protected at present has been given Category A designation. That meets the RCMP's security requirements for storage of artworks: restricted access to the warehouse, temperature and humidity controls, 24/7 monitoring, motion detection system, pest control management, and emergency response. All these criteria are assessed to make sure we are in compliance with that designation.

As I said earlier, we also use an automated collection management system that we share with other museums and Global Affairs. As we have seen, documentation is very important. We must continue to guarantee the quality of our documentation, particularly in digital format.

• (1720)

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: I also noted that the recommendations were to have been applied beginning on March 31, 2025. At the start of the meeting, however, you told my colleague Mrs. Thomas that one part of the recommendations was to have been implemented in conjunction with our government, if I understood correctly. What measures have to be taken quickly by the government or the House of Commons to help you properly implement the various recommendations?

Valerie Gideon: That is an excellent question, and I thank you very much for your offer.

I would say it is important to continue requesting the infrastructure and the operational funding that will enable us to press on with

our efforts to protect the collection and at the same time promote it. We also need help in negotiating with the artists and partners to see what the best possible avenue would be to ensure the collection prospers.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: September 30 is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. What does that day represent in connection with these works that are still recorded as lost, and your efforts? Has that day resulted in a special connection with your department? What would you say about the importance of that day, obviously after 2013?

Valerie Gideon: Our department is responsible for coordinating the federal response to the calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. For example, we were responsible for moving forward on the bill to establish the National Council for Reconciliation, an organization independent of the federal government that will report annually on the efforts being made by our country toward progress on the calls to action. Some calls to action are specific to indigenous art. There is much discussion of indigenous language and of preserving that language, and that is very important. However, I would say that it is equally important to put emphasis on indigenous art.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you, Ms. Gideon.

Valerie Gideon: Thank you, Mr. Ntumba.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Diotte, you're next for five minutes.

Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's still so confusing to the public. If they were listening to this meeting today, trying to figure out how 14 million dollars' worth of art... A bunch of it goes missing. It's almost inconceivable that this would happen at the National Gallery of Canada, obviously. This is indigenous art. It's very valuable.

Walk me again through what happened here. Where did it go missing from? Give me addresses. We just want some basic answers, and we need it in plain talk as well, plain English.

Valerie Gideon: Sure.

For decades, the collection was established in order to purchase contemporary indigenous art and place it in federal offices across the country. In that context, it was not established as a gallery or as a museum. After several decades of this evolution, there was of course a modernization of the approach to identify that the artwork was of value and needed to be repatriated and safely secured and meet designations relating to a federal heritage collection. That was an evolution—

Kerry Diotte: Let me just interrupt. I'm sorry.

I think the public wants to know how this art could just go missing and why you have not been able to identify where the missing stuff is.

• (1725)

Valerie Gideon: I think the public would say that, over all of these decades, the incredibly significant national contemporary indigenous art collection has been preserved, with over 5,000 indigenous art pieces valued at \$14.4 million. The government is committed to continuing to work with indigenous artists to preserve the integrity of the collection, and it has also provided economic benefits to indigenous artists.

Kerry Diotte: I'm sorry, Madam. You're not answering the question. Can you tell us how this valuable artwork could go missing? Explain again what you're doing to recover these pieces.

Valerie Gideon: They are not missing. They are unaccounted for. We are continuing to look at the documentation, which has evolved from paper-based files to information systems and digital records over long-standing decades of the building of this collection. Again, a very small proportion, less than 1% of the collection—

Kerry Diotte: Madam, how can something you can't find not be missing? That's complete doublespeak.

Valerie Gideon: These are the categories that are set for pieces that are unaccounted for, which means we are looking at the documentation of their precise location. There is no certainty that we will not be able to identify those pieces or that they are not duplicate records. Until that threshold is passed, the designation is “unaccounted for”.

Kerry Diotte: It sounds like doublespeak to me.

How come nobody has been disciplined for these pieces that are missing but, in your view, aren't really missing? How come they haven't been disciplined? Did anybody even get an angry memo from the boss?

Valerie Gideon: The reason internal audits are conducted is for departments to proactively identify areas of risk so that we can proactively mitigate them and address them. An audit is not intended to be a punitive exercise in the system; it is intended to support quality improvement.

Kerry Diotte: When you look at the audit and find out somebody screwed up, then is it not your duty or somebody's duty to say, “Come in here and explain yourself”? If you can't explain yourself, maybe you're looking for a new job.

Valerie Gideon: Again, these artworks were loaned, the majority in the 1980s, to regional and headquarter offices. That was the intention of the collection. The department has since modernized the approach to repatriate artworks and to store them in an RCMP standard and category A vault. The redress has occurred.

Kerry Diotte: Speaking of the RCMP, why haven't police been notified about the artwork you can't find? You can't find it. Isn't it the job of the police to investigate things like this? If I steal this chair and walk out with it, do you think the RCMP or somebody might be interested in talking to me?

Valerie Gideon: For a piece of artwork that was legitimately loaned to an office in the 1980s and repatriated in 2017, it was not a criminal intent—

Kerry Diotte: It wasn't legitimately returned, was it?

The Chair: Thank you. That's your time.

Mr. Myles, you now have the floor for five minutes.

David Myles: Thank you very much.

Thanks for being here today.

These are important questions. I want to go to what Martin was asking about, the relationship between the works and the artists themselves. Obviously, with the role of the office now, it is about maintaining a relationship with the artists. As Monsieur Champoux said, the value is relative. It's very much the work that matters to them. How do you rebuild trust? Has there been a difference in the relationship, given this? Is there an exercise in rebuilding trust between those artists and your office, with regard to the collection?

Valerie Gideon: I myself have not been contacted by any artists who have raised questions with respect to the relationship with the art collection and the art centre. We maintain relationships with 560 artists across the country. We have received a lot of positive feedback about the art collection and the art centre's work in terms of, again, not retaining copyright and providing significant economic benefits to artists. For example, \$5.6 million has been provided to indigenous artists as a result of the way in which the art collection is maintained.

The external loan program is very robust. It engages the artists specifically in terms of where artwork is loaned and ensures that they receive revenue from that loan program. I do think that artists want to ensure that there will be continued resources to help support the maintenance of the integrity of the collection and to ensure that we have the category A designation with respect to facilities that store their artwork.

I don't know, Rob, if you have more you would like to add.

• (1730)

Rob Wright: Yes, thanks very much.

As the deputy indicated, on average a little over \$250,000 goes directly to indigenous artists through this program—a combination of acquisitions and all the loans and exhibits—and the CARFAC program is used to allocate the appropriate amount of funds—royalties, if you will—to the artists.

Under the modern external loan program—which is very different from the legacy internal loan program that operated from the 1960s to 2017—there is a chain of custody, a protocol and standard operating procedures in place. The borrowers provide the funds directly to the artists. They have to have insurance for all of the items. There has to be a certain standard of handling all of the artwork. The legacy loan program and the current loan program that we operate are like night and day.

The audit period for this was from 2019 to 2024. Within the audit period, there were no items that were designated as unaccounted for. These are legacy issues that we're trying to reconcile now. We're trying to take that very seriously to reconcile these important issues, but it is important to understand that in the five-year audit period, there were no artworks that were itemized as having gone missing or unaccounted for during that period.

There is still room for improvement. We are leaning forward and trying to make those improvements, and a number of improvements have been made over the past number of months. We took the results of the audit quite seriously and have tried to respond to those in a way that meets the objective, whether we're talking about making sure that the storage is top quality and meets category A and RCMP standards, or whether we're talking about tightening up the policies and standard operating procedures for the loan program. We are really trying to make sure that we're running this in a professional manner.

David Myles: So the relationship is strong. That was more what I wanted to ask, how to maintain that strong relationship between the artists and the collection, because that's obviously a really important thing for it to move forward.

It seems to me that part of—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Myles, but you're out of time.

David Myles: That's no problem.

Thanks very much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Gideon, my colleague Mr. Diotte spoke earlier about lost artworks. I would like to come back to that. You have said several times that those pieces are not lost, and rather are not accounted for. Have I understood your remarks correctly? So you don't know where they are, but they are not lost. If they are not lost, do you know where they are? Have they been identified?

I would like to stop playing word games and for you to tell us that you have no idea where these artworks are, they are lost and we are trying to locate them. We are sitting as a committee here. I think we are all relatively intelligent people and we are capable of not playing word games. We can dispense with this manipulation of information as well. Can we agree that these artworks are unaccounted for because they are lost?

Valerie Gideon: I don't agree with you on that point.

Martin Champoux: If you don't agree with me on that point, do you know where the artworks are?

• (1735)

Valerie Gideon: What I can tell you is that our team of employees is working on completing the documentation.

Martin Champoux: Do you know where the pieces are? Yes or no? It's easy: yes or no?

Valerie Gideon: Our team can't—

Martin Champoux: Ms. Gideon, I have two and a half minutes of speaking time and you are not answering a simple question. Yes or no: do you know where the pieces that have been lost are? There are 120 left to be found.

Valerie Gideon: If I answered your question the way you are asking it, I would not be giving you information that would be practical—

Martin Champoux: It's information we want to be given honestly.

Valerie Gideon: —and representative of the assessment of the situation done by our team, who are experts in this field.

Martin Champoux: The briefings before coming to the committee are appalling.

You said earlier that the problem had been known since 2012-13. In 2017, you revised your practices. The 2024 internal audit covered the period from 2019 to 2024, according to what Mr. Wright said earlier. Despite that, recommendations made following the audit have not been applied in full. In short, your organization has been aware of the problem since 2012-13. In 2017, you revised your processes, but there are still deficiencies. If this were a private business, I think it would have gone bankrupt.

The problem in question is a relatively big one, since it is the subject of a parliamentary committee meeting today. Do you acknowledge that you have been aware of the problem for 13 years but you have not yet implemented concrete processes to solve this major problem and reassure everyone?

Valerie Gideon: The audit was not about this issue alone. The recommendations that came out of the audit are broader than that. They relate to things like the importance of the roles and responsibilities of various employees and the various sectors of the department that play a role in the collection.

For example, the audit sought to make sure that the people managing the collection report to senior management annually so they can look into not just that issue, but also all the initiatives the Indigenous Art Centre has put in place, such as organizing numerous activities. The audit also looked at things like our understanding of the economic benefits for artists.

So the audit was broader in scope than the specific issue you are raising.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Thomas, you're next for five minutes.

Rachael Thomas: Ms. Gideon, what we've heard from you is that, according to the audit, there are 132 pieces that are “works not accounted for”. According to you, they're not missing and they're not lost, but according to the audit, they're unaccounted for. It's word salad, a refusal to refer to what's really going on here. You don't want to use certain words, but at the end of the day there are 132 pieces that are unaccounted for, according to the audit.

Has any initiative been taken to recover those 132 pieces?

Valerie Gideon: I think I've mentioned several times that our team is looking at the reconciliation of those particular records and documents, which is what led them to be able to confirm the location of 12 pieces and confirm that 20 pieces are reproductions. Those are active efforts. The reason we're not changing the designation is that the exercise is not complete—

Rachael Thomas: Ms. Gideon, I'm sorry. This is my time, and I'll just interrupt you there. Thank you.

According to the audit, the last location of many of these pieces is known. What work has been done by you and your team to make sure those pieces can be recovered?

Valerie Gideon: The team is dedicated exactly to looking at identifying the location of those pieces by reviewing whether or not these records are duplicated from previous records held, along with those that were transitioned into the information system in 2010. They're looking at photographs. They're looking at all of the records and documentation to be able to trace back where those were—

Rachael Thomas: According to the audit, and according to your own admission here today, it's known where these pieces last were. It seems rather simple, then, to just go back to that source—knock on the door, pick up the phone, send an email—and take some sort of initiative to make sure those pieces are recovered. Has any of that been done?

Valerie Gideon: Yes, as I mentioned before, when there was an identification that the loan program needed to be suspended, there was an effort to repatriate all of the artwork. The artwork was initially stored in our original building location of 10 Wellington, and we've had a transition into the Goldenrod vault facility. That is also part of the reconciliation efforts, just to ensure that we have a very robust inventory management system—

• (1740)

Rachael Thomas: Again, Ms. Gideon, how many of those pieces have been repatriated? Was it only 12?

Valerie Gideon: Of the 132 that have been identified in terms of their location, it is 12, but there were many more artworks that were repatriated that were part of the former internal loan program. I don't have the exact number of the full set of artworks that actually came back into the national capital region that are stored in our vault.

Rachael Thomas: No, let's not muddy the facts here. Out of 132, even though you know the last location where many of those art pieces were, only 12 have been recovered.

Valerie Gideon: For twelve, the location has been confirmed. It doesn't mean that they.... It's not a recovery issue.

Rachael Thomas: So it gets worse. It's not even that they've been brought back in. It's simply that they've been located.

Valerie Gideon: They're in the vault, but the issue is where we've been able to confirm that those pieces are no longer unaccounted for.

Rachael Thomas: Okay, so 132 pieces are gone—unaccounted for. Of those, 12 have been found and brought back in. That still leaves another 120 that are unaccounted for.

Valerie Gideon: Twenty are—

Rachael Thomas: There's no question there. It's just a statement. Those are the facts that have been laid out here today. That's incredibly shameful, and what I hear you saying, Ms. Gideon and Mr. Wright, is “Don't worry, Canadians. It's only worth \$49,000.” Never mind the cultural value. Never mind our pursuit of reconciliation as a nation. Never mind any of that. It's just 49,000 dollars' worth of art. You shrug your shoulders, and you pretend that it doesn't matter in comparison to the other 14 million dollars' worth of pieces that you have in your care.

Are you expecting that Canadians should just turn a blind eye to this?

Valerie Gideon: What we are expecting is for Canadians to understand the history of the collection, how the collection was built and what its original intent was, and for Canadians to know that we have modernized and are investing in preserving the integrity of this collection in 2025, according to the standards of 2025, to avoid any instances like this in the future—

Rachael Thomas: Ms. Gideon, I'll just interrupt you right there.

There was a report done in 2013, another in 2017, another in 2019 and now in 2024. There's been ample time to correct this, Ms. Gideon, and no correction has been made. Today you've admitted that there are pieces that have been unaccounted for since the 1980s. Here we are, in 2025, 40-plus years later, and those pieces are still not recovered, even though, in many cases, according to the audit, the last location is known. That's despicable.

The Chair: Mr. Myles, you have the floor for five minutes.

David Myles: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I had a question about the history. Part of what is clearly becoming a challenge here is the fact that the original intent in the 1960s and 1970s was that it was not a collection. I know we've talked about this a bit. Part of this is the fact that these were purchased and then sent out. I think we need some clarity on what that regional loan program looked like. There was no intention to keep an eye on where these things went. They were purchased and then just sent around the country.

At some point, there was a decision to say, “Okay, we want to have a collection,” so it was actually in turning it into a collection that there was responsibility taken for these pieces because, up to that point, there was no responsibility for these. They were purchased and loaned. Is that the idea?

Valerie Gideon: I'd say that's an accurate description of the fact that the intention was to create opportunities for contemporary indigenous art and bring value and revenue to artists by purchasing art directly from indigenous artists and displaying it in regional offices, instead of purchasing other art in federal offices. As the value of that collection grew, however, and as general standards changed in office buildings—there are much more rigorous and robust standards with respect to how art is acquired, displayed, maintained and insured in office settings—the department repatriated and brought back all of these artworks.

It took years for that exercise—just going back to the previous question—because of the logistical complexity of being able to safely transport artwork from across the country back into the national capital region. It was also a very resource-intensive exercise to then be able to establish it as a collection.

• (1745)

David Myles: I'm curious about what prompted that. I know you were saying it was because the value had gone up. Is that what actually prompted turning it into an official collection? I'm trying to figure out when that happened, in what exact year.

Valerie Gideon: In 1994, they started to build an inventory. It took 10 years to build that inventory.

Having been in the federal public service for many years, in indigenous portfolio departments, I know we have offices all over the country. I used to manage.... We had hospitals. We had nursing stations. We had health centres. We had different offices. There isn't the same location variability that you would necessarily consider if you were visiting an office here in Ottawa. There was a lot of geographic.... We had northern offices, and we still do. We had satellite offices.

It is a very resource-intensive exercise to identify, document, locate and transport the artworks, given their size and everything else, and then also ensure that the storage capacity is safe enough. It took 10 years to inventory it, and it was at that point that they started to actually look at planning for it as a collection.

David Myles: They weren't purchased for archival purposes.

Valerie Gideon: That's right.

David Myles: MP Al Soud, did you have a question you wanted to add to the mix?

Fares Al Soud: Thank you, MP Myles.

I ask this strictly because the work in this indigenous art collection is very much founded on everything that is a relationship. With every relationship, it's a matter of confidence and a matter of trust. I latched on to something you mentioned earlier, Deputy Minister, that you haven't been contacted by any indigenous artists with negative feedback.

Is that accurate? Do I recall that accurately?

Valerie Gideon: Not myself, but with respect to the audit, I have not been contacted, as far as I'm aware.

Fares Al Soud: Are you aware of any negative feedback on this from indigenous artists since the audit?

Valerie Gideon: That's a good question. I cannot say that I have received any.

Stephanie, have you heard anything as the audit executive?

Stephanie Barozzi: No, I have not heard any comments from anybody else, other than what we're talking about here today.

Rob Wright: I have not heard any critiques on the basis of the program.

Fares Al Soud: That's interesting.

I only have 10 seconds left, so I will cede my time.

The Chair: Are members up for a fourth round of questions?

Starting with the Conservatives, Mr. Schmale, it's over to you for five minutes.

Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Deputy Minister, we talked about the pieces that are unaccounted for. How many artists have been notified that their pieces may be unaccounted for?

Valerie Gideon: I'm not aware of any notifications that have gone out.

Jamie Schmale: Are you or is your department planning to notify these individuals?

Valerie Gideon: If we were to receive certainty that we are unable to account for the piece, then we would have a responsibility to notify the indigenous artist.

Jamie Schmale: What is your target for recovering or identifying the 100 or so pieces that are still unaccounted for?

Valerie Gideon: I don't have a specific target at this point.

Jamie Schmale: Are you setting a deadline for when that might happen? If you aren't able to find them in a certain amount of time, say in six months or a year, then will you be notifying those artists that their pieces may be missing at that point?

Valerie Gideon: It's a fair point. I do think it's something I will take back to the team to see what their best advice is around setting up that time frame.

Jamie Schmale: Are you going to table with the committee here what timeline you come up with?

Valerie Gideon: We will have to consult our parliamentary relations folks to see what their advice is on that point.

Jamie Schmale: You can let us know right now, if you want.

Valerie Gideon: I will consult.

Jamie Schmale: You're going to consult. We're going to continue consulting. Okay.

We've had, according to page 19 of the audit report, a number of previous audits here.

Going back to the other question I started with, when I asked if anyone had been suspended or fired or if anything else had happened, it looks like the department had some idea that there could be risks associated with the collection and there could be issues of damage or potential fixes that, if not made, would cause pieces to deteriorate. This goes back to 2013, if not before. Nobody picked up on it along the way. It just kept going all the way through, yet we get to here and we have 10 people tasked with looking over this collection at a budget of \$1.2 million.

We've had decades when these problems have gone unanswered. At what point is someone held accountable?

● (1750)

Valerie Gideon: Actions were taken after that 2013 review that you're speaking about around the Canadian Conservation Institute to significantly improve the storage facilities. As I mentioned before, the official suspension of the loan program was informed by that review. There are several actions that continue to be taken in order to follow through on those review recommendations. The recommendations have been and continue to be followed through. There have been investments in terms of the storage facility to ensure that, as I noted, it is evaluated as meeting the category A designation, as well as the RCMP secure storage protocols. So there were actions taken.

Jamie Schmale: There were actions taken, but we have these missing pieces that went around for decades as well. I'm still a little thrown off here that we haven't gotten to the point of letting the artists know their pieces might be missing. I think there could be some value to the artists, the creators themselves. Given the fact that they believe their pieces are being held properly by the government, and then they're unaccounted for—they're gone—I think we owe it to these artists to tell them, probably sooner rather than later.

Valerie Gideon: Is there a question?

Jamie Schmale: Would you agree with that?

Valerie Gideon: I think the artists' interests are—

Jamie Schmale: I know you said you will have a timeline, but I would think that would be something that would be up front: “Maybe we should let these people know now,” rather than coming up with another strategy for it.

Valerie Gideon: I think this team has been working very diligently to ensure that when they communicate with the artists, they have reached a conclusion of certainty that they are not able to account for that artwork. They take that responsibility very seriously.

Jamie Schmale: In the records where, as Ms. Thomas was talking about, you have the last known individual or group to sign out a piece, how many more do you still have left to go through? You have 100 still. I'm going to focus on the 100. How many more do you have? Are there 50 left and you can't find the other 50? What number are we looking at?

Valerie Gideon: Sorry, I'm trying to understand the question, sir.

We have already identified the pocket of time and the number of artworks and where they were situated. The team has been very focused on assessing what could be duplicate records, and that has been a big part of the focus they have now.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor for five minutes.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Gideon, in my last turn to speak, I understood that the realization that pieces had been lost first dawned in around 2013. From 2013 to today, however, there have been several governments. What support have you had from the various governments, up to today, for finding the lost pieces?

Valerie Gideon: It isn't really a question that has been raised by the political leaders or other departments. Personally, I think our team is well equipped to continue its work, by consulting the documentation in the archives, for example, so it can eventually lead us to a definitive conclusion regarding the artworks we are discussing today.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Have you made a plan to publish the list of lost pieces, so the artists who created the pieces, or their estates, are aware that they have been lost or that a search is under way to find them?

• (1755)

Valerie Gideon: I think your question is about whether we have made communication plans for various outcomes. I can ask my

team what specific steps we will be taking for that communication and provide you with the answer later in writing.

As I said, we are in regular contact with 560 artists, so our team is used to communicating with the artists. We do it regularly, mainly in connection with our lending programs or when we support them in various ways. So I am satisfied that our team has the expertise needed for having conversations like that with the artists.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Along the same line, we were talking about loans between museums or cultural institutions. Are there partnerships between museums and cultural institutions to improve the visibility and protection of the existing pieces?

Valerie Gideon: That is an excellent question.

We work a lot with the cultural centres, for one thing because they do not have a lot of funding to procure art. We make sure they have access to artworks without it costing them a lot of money. That is an example of an initiative that we engage in with the cultural centres.

We have also created partnerships with Canadian Heritage to organize special events in the national capital region. At one of those events, the artists used reproductions of artworks in various public spaces. The events included the Courtyards Exhibit and Art in the Tunnels, part of which involved artists making special presentations.

We also took part in the Morrisseau Project with Carleton University, to exhibit pieces on campus that the artist produced from 1955 to 1985. Artworks have also been put on view in Canadian Geographic and Canada's History and at the Art Canada Institute. These are all initiatives we undertake to try to demonstrate the value of the collection.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Right.

There was an audit and recommendations were made. Today, what key recommendations would you and your team say emerged from the audit, and what is the timetable for implementing them?

Valerie Gideon: Thank you for the question.

It is very important for our department to have an internal policy. As I said, we have an update of the draft policy to clarify the roles and responsibilities within our department. For example, if we are to continue using a private company to store a small percentage of the artworks in the collection, 8% right now, it is very important for us to clearly specify in the contract all the requirements that the company must meet in terms of its responsibilities. In addition, as I said, we are working very hard to obtain a new space by 2027, because the space we now have will no longer be available.

Regarding the cost analysis we have completed, it is important that our department update it regularly. We must always work proactively to make provision in the department's budget for the resources that are needed in order to put all the measures for protecting the collection in place.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you, Ms. Gideon.

The Chair: I now give the floor to Mr. Champoux for two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Gideon, in fact, several points keep coming to my mind in today's meeting, including one in particular: the last location of the unaccounted for pieces that had been placed there or lent. Essentially, what kind of location were they in? Were these pieces in government offices or in businesses, for example?

Valerie Gideon: It was federal offices.

Martin Champoux: It was only federal offices. Right.

Were there no contracts or documents of that nature where it said we are sending you a piece by such and such an artist and they sign a bit of paper for you?

Valerie Gideon: There was documentation because that is how we knew, in general, the name and address of the regional office. I can't say with precision whether we got the office numbers in all those cases.

• (1800)

Martin Champoux: We know they are government offices, however.

So this is about unaccounted for pieces. I don't dare to say the pieces are "lost" any more, because I think that term has been banned. Is there negligence or incompetence? I am trying to be polite and not be mean, but again, I can't imagine how a hundred pieces could disappear like that. I just don't get it.

I am going to quote my Conservative colleague Jamie Schmale, who is here. He was talking to a journalist from the Canadian Press, in an article published on the Radio-Canada website, where he said he was certain that if a Group of Seven piece had been on display in a government office, there would be people who would know where it is and would expect it to be returned to them at some point.

Why would these indigenous artworks have been treated negligently when unbelievable attention would have been paid to a work by a well-known artist? I find that hard to explain, and I would like to know whether you have an explanation for it. I really just don't get it, seriously.

Valerie Gideon: I think it is important to recognize, again, that the initial purpose of the exercise was really to provide artworks for federal offices.

Martin Champoux: Ultimately it was decoration. You could have gone to Winners.

Valerie Gideon: Yes, it was a program to decorate federal offices and the priority was to provide an income for indigenous artists. This was in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Martin Champoux: Riopelle, too, that was in the 1960s.

Valerie Gideon: At that time, the intention of the exercise was not to establish a national art collection, but that is how it evolved.

Martin Champoux: But they were still artists. I do want to believe that the intention was not to create a national art gallery, but—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

Martin Champoux: —they were still artists.

I will conclude by saying I hope I am able to get home, because I am unable to account for my car keys.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, you have five minutes.

Rachael Thomas: I share my colleague's concern. At the end of the day, you still have these works of art, and they've just gone missing. There was no contract, apparently—you were saying—that was created with regard to where those pieces went or under whose care they were put. Now you just shrug your shoulders and say, "Well, you know, it's only worth \$49,000. Don't worry, folks."

I wonder if you would be willing to table with the committee the works that are unaccounted for.

Valerie Gideon: I don't know, Rob, what your thoughts are.

From my perspective, I think we are not able, under the Access to Information Act, to disclose the specifics with respect to the artwork and the artists. I think we would be able to share a list that would be quite generic, but we are not in a place where we would be able to share specifics with the committee.

Rachael Thomas: Okay. Ms. Gideon, would you agree to seek a legal opinion on that and return that legal opinion to this committee, along with whatever you might be able to table in terms of that list of unaccounted works?

Valerie Gideon: A legal opinion...?

Rachael Thomas: Yes.

Valerie Gideon: I have not sought legal advice with respect to this particular issue.

Rachael Thomas: You're offering a legal opinion right now in terms of access to information. It's your opinion, so I'm wondering... If you're not able to provide this committee with a list of the unaccounted works, then the committee would request that you supply us with a legal opinion.

Valerie Gideon: I am not offering a legal opinion. I am offering an assessment by the Access to Information Act experts and team that we have about what our department can provide under the act.

Rachael Thomas: I'll pose my question to your colleague, Mr. Wright.

Will you agree to table with this committee a list of unaccounted works?

Valerie Gideon: We have provided and are providing a response to an Access to Information Act request on this particular issue.

Rachael Thomas: Ms. Gideon, you're not answering my question.

Will you table with this committee a list of the unaccounted works?

Valerie Gideon: I am unable to table with this committee a list of unaccounted works that provides specifics with respect to the artists or anything that could disclose the proprietary information of those artists.

Rachael Thomas: Why are you saying to me that you are unable to provide that?

Valerie Gideon: We have received advice from our access to information team about what can be provided publicly with respect to this information as a result of receiving a request.

Rachael Thomas: As a committee of Parliament, we do have the right to ask for such information, and there are certain laws that do not hinder us.

If you do not provide that list to us, then we would ask for a legal opinion. Is that understood?

Valerie Gideon: I understand what you are saying to me.

Rachael Thomas: That's excellent, and is that agreed to?

Valerie Gideon: I am not able to agree to that at this time. I do need to better understand what you are referring to in terms of the legal opinion and the legal basis. I am sharing with you that, under the Access to Information Act, we are unable to provide that information.

• (1805)

Rachael Thomas: If you do not provide us with a list, the list that is being asked for today, then that would mean there are legal grounds to deny us that, so we would ask for that to be sent.

Valerie Gideon: I appreciate that you have made a request to me. I do need time to be able to consider it and my response.

Rachael Thomas: I'll allow the clerk to follow up on that. I don't think you understand how these requests work.

The other thing I would ask you to table with this committee is a copy of the contract. If there was a past contract used for the loan program, we would ask for that. Mr. Wright, based on your testimony today, my understanding is that there is now a current loan program contract. We would ask for a copy of that contract as well. Again, if you refuse to provide this to the committee, then we would ask your lawyer to send us a legal opinion with regard to why that information cannot be disclosed.

The third thing I would ask you to table with this committee is which artists have works that have gone missing. Again, Ms. Gideon and Mr. Wright, if you are not able to table this information with this committee, as we are requesting you to do under parliamentary procedure, then we would ask that you provide a legal opinion as to why that information cannot be provided here today.

With that, I will hand the mic over to Mr. Gagnéux.

[Translation]

Bernard Gagnéux (Côte-du-Sud—Rivière-du-Loup—Kataskomiq—Témiscouata, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Gideon, let's assume I am an artist who sold you a piece in 1979. The Government of Canada paid me, as an artist, to sell you a piece. So your department is responsible for the piece you acquired. Today, almost 35 or 40 years later, you don't know where my piece is, even though it has been stored or lent to a government office.

Have you had it happen that people from some department or other have refused to co-operate in returning a piece that was displayed on a wall or stored, or whatever?

The Chair: Mr. Gagnéux, there is no time left to answer your question, but you will have another opportunity to ask it in another round of questions.

I now give the floor to Mr. Al Soud for five minutes.

[English]

Fares Al Soud: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Associate Deputy Minister, you've previously emphasized that economic reconciliation is about indigenous communities determining their own priorities and strategies. When you testified at the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, you stated:

...there are a few key components that drive our activities to work with indigenous peoples to ensure that there's full participation in decision-making, that indigenous peoples are able to enjoy their own means of subsistence and development, and that indigenous peoples are able to determine their own priorities and strategies and to shape their own economic future.

How is indigenous self-determination reflected in decisions about storage, preservation, deaccession or the potential transfer of the collection?

Rob Wright: Thank you very much for the question. That is a very important point.

When the artworks are acquired, there is an indigenous jury of expert artists who provide advice on the artworks that would be acquired. Indigenous artists set their own price for the pieces of art that are acquired to make sure that it is a fair approach.

When those works are acquired, there is now a professional loan program. The Government of Canada doesn't charge any money for the loaning of these artworks, in order to reduce the barrier to the loan of these artworks so that money will flow to the artists from the borrowing organization, whether a museum or a cultural institution. There is also support from indigenous elders as part of the program to help ensure that there are indigenous elements at the heart of the program.

Now, it is still administered by the Government of Canada. It is important to consider whether, in the future, that can shift over time. That is something we will be doing. As the deputy minister indicated earlier, we have to find the right balance between self-termination and stewardship of this very important collection, and I have confidence that it can be done, to make sure that this important collection, as it is now, is retained as a collection.

One other small point to make is that there are a number of partnerships that are done. In fact, last year there was a partnership with Parliament, with the Senate of Canada, which acquired artwork through the program we administer. That is about helping to make sure that indigenous art is in very important places across our country, so that the profile of indigenous art is raised, which is an important part of reconciliation and partnership while also providing benefits directly to the artists.

• (1810)

Fares Al Soud: Once it is acquired, what mechanisms exist to ensure that indigenous communities continue to shape the priorities?

Rob Wright: We are looking now at governance models that would enable more indigenous partnership and control as part of that.

I would say that when pieces are loaned, the artist has to agree to that piece being loaned. Not only does money flow to the artist, but there's also a discussion and an agreement as part of the loan contracts that are developed with each loan. There is not one framework loan contract; the loan contracts are developed for each and every loan that is put out. As items are loaned, the artists are in control of whether they are loaned or not.

Fares Al Soud: Perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: Colleagues, we have finished four rounds. We have time for maybe a half-round if members are interested in posing another question.

We'll do a half-round of five minutes, five minutes, and two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor for five minutes.

Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Gideon, I want to go back to the example I gave earlier. I am an artist. The Government of Canada buys one of my pieces and passes it on to an office of a department somewhere in Canada. Your department has a contract with the department that has rented the piece.

If I understood correctly, of the 132 lost pieces, 12 have been located, to date, and 20 pieces are reproductions. So that leaves about 100 pieces to be located.

Have you had any refusals from particular departments? Have any departments told you that they once had a piece, but they no longer knew where it was? Has a piece ever disappeared from the office where an employee worked after the person left?

Valerie Gideon: That is a good question.

I am not the person who had the conversations directly with the people at that time. It was ten years ago, at the time when efforts were starting to be made to have all the artworks returned. So I can't answer your question yes or no.

Bernard Généreux: You say, however, that you have identified and recovered 12 pieces. From what date to what date was that done, approximately?

Valerie Gideon: When we tried to have them returned—

Bernard Généreux: Was that after the last audit?

Valerie Gideon: No.

From 2012 to 2017, there was a moratorium on the art lending program, which was abolished in 2017. Since then, we have been gathering up all the artworks that were in regional and national offices of the department and in certain other departments.

Bernard Généreux: So of the 132 artworks identified, 12 have come back. Am I understanding correctly?

Valerie Gideon: We have found the documentation for 12 artworks, which means we know where they are located.

Bernard Généreux: They still have not come back to Ottawa.

Valerie Gideon: No, that is not the case. What I mean is that we have been able to identify where the pieces are, but that doesn't mean they are not in Ottawa.

Bernard Généreux: The language that gets used is bizarre. Let's start again.

Let's take the example of a lost piece that was under a rental contract. Did it come back to Ottawa once it was identified? We are talking about 2017. So that's eight years ago, not 45 years ago. Has the piece in question been recovered and put in the warehouse here in Ottawa, yes or no?

• (1815)

Valerie Gideon: I would have to check whether the 12 artworks are actually in our warehouse.

You have to remember that for some of the pieces in question, there were two files. In those cases, the pieces are already in our warehouse.

Bernard Généreux: So there were an original file and copies.

Valerie Gideon: That's right.

Bernard Généreux: To be able to know today that the 132 artworks are, let's say, "absent," there has to be a record of all the works lent out in Canada. We know that 132 artworks are missing. Twelve have been located and are somewhere between Ottawa and the office where you found them, and 20 others are reproductions. So that leaves 100.

With respect to those 100 missing artworks, do you know where they should be? If so, are you in contact with the people who rented the pieces? Have they refused to return them to you because they no longer have them? Have you had any answers to this? These are simple questions.

To go back to my example, you lent an artwork to someone in a department; you signed a rental contract. So you know where it should be and you talk to the person to tell them that they have a work that belongs to the department and you want to bring it back to Ottawa. Does that person still have it, yes or no? Have you got those answers?

Valerie Gideon: Of the artworks that were part of the internal lending program, there are 91 for which we have not yet been able to determine whether they are in our warehouse, whether there are duplicate files on them, or whether we are not able to determine their location.

Bernard Généreux: You referred to 91 artworks out of the 100. If I understand correctly, you know where nine of them are.

Valerie Gideon: Twenty of them are reproductions. The original artworks are with us.

Bernard Généreux: You referred to 91 artworks. Where did that figure come from? Does it include the 12 pieces you referred to at the beginning?

Valerie Gideon: The 91 pieces are included in the 132.

Bernard Généreux: I am trying to do the math. You have recovered 12, or they are in the process of being recovered. You have 20, which are reproductions that you consider not to be important. In any event, you do not seem to be treating these reproductions as important. So that leaves 100. You say there are 91 pieces that you are not sure you will be able to recover someday, because you don't know where they are. Regarding what Ms. Royer said earlier, however—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux. Your time is already up. Yes, I know, it's hard.

Ms. Royer, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[English]

Zoe Royer: I used to own an art gallery. It closed during COVID. It was in my riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam and featured the work of professional and emerging west coast artists, local indigenous artists and artists of different ethnicities. Many times, I was asked if I would consider a rental program. I researched it, actually, and looked into some of the community galleries in neighbouring municipalities. It's a lot of work, but the reason the artists were asking is that it's a revenue generator for them. Some of them are quite prolific, and they would much rather have their work on display than sitting in their studio on racks, in sheds or anything like that.

I understand that decades ago, indigenous artwork was purchased, or there was an opportunity created for their work to be rented, so that they would have revenue back from that. You mentioned that the work was placed in federal or regional offices and some hospitals, etc. Is it possible that any of the works went into MPs' offices at that time?

Valerie Gideon: I honestly don't have the answer to that. I apologize.

Zoe Royer: I'm really intrigued by the conversation, but I am actually quite disheartened by the fact that it's being politicized. I think that, to really get to the heart of the issue, we would have to

bring people in here from 40 years ago. A lot of it will be reliant on memory because of the way our systems operated.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action 67 and 69 remind us that preserving indigenous cultural heritage is essential. It calls on the federal government to modernize museum practices to ensure preservation and accessibility, which we are doing. The audit confirmed that the department has accepted all five recommendations.

Can you update our committee on the progress toward a life-cycle funding plan—it's the question that I started to ask much earlier—and how that work reflects the TRC's emphasis on sustainable, long-term stewardship of indigenous heritage?

• (1820)

Valerie Gideon: We did complete the baseline costing analysis. That costing analysis takes into account storage, continued monitoring and all of the conditions required for us to be able to continue to meet our designations with respect to the collection itself and preserving its integrity.

Being able to update that baseline costing analysis every five years is absolutely fundamental. It offers different options about storage, for example, by comparing the costs of whether the Government of Canada continues to fund the storage versus looking at expert third party storage. It also talks about costing with respect to what the cost will be if the collection has to be moved: how many truck shipments you would need, etc. You would need 58. There is a lot. There's also the human capacity related to being able to safely move and store the collection.

There are a lot of factors that the team has included in that baseline. It's not just straight salary and O and M costs. It's all the things we need to build into our approach to make sure we don't have a break in terms of support for the collection that could expose it to risks.

Zoe Royer: Obviously, you weren't there all those years ago. I know that if you had been—and certainly if you had access to the technology that we have today—you would have done things differently. What might you have done differently, decades ago?

Valerie Gideon: The internal loan program, when it was examined, even prior to 2013, was found not to be sufficient to really maximize the economic benefits to the artists. Loaning to offices is not the same as loaning to people who will do exhibitions in galleries and museums. I think that's important.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Gideon, I am going to add some things to what Ms. Royer just said. I admit that I disagree with her when she says that if you had been there at the time, you would have done things differently, because the tools would have been different. That is not at all the case. At the time, everybody had the same tools. The museums that kept inventory records of artists' works had the same tools, so I do not see at all how the situation would have been different with other tools. In other words, here again, I am a bit bowled over by all this, because I think it is just improbable. One might think we were in the madhouse.

You have pieces that were lent to offices under signed contracts, probably written on paper napkins, that can't be found. You know the last location of the pieces, but when you contact those people, they have no idea where the pieces are. Have those people even been contacted? We don't really have an answer to that either. You don't know exactly where you are in the work of identifying the lost pieces. The impression it gives is that you don't even know what pieces are lost. You are not even sure who the artists are whose pieces have been lost. This is all extremely confusing and it is incomprehensible that it should be this confusing. That is why I say it's a madhouse.

We will have spent two hours discussing this matter and I am not convinced that anyone around the table here can say they have received a satisfactory answer. I'm sorry to say, but I do not get the impression that we have got satisfactory answers to the questions we have repeatedly asked. What I have heard is nearly all members from all parties repeatedly asking the same questions concerning the location of the pieces. You knew the last location, and that's all. And yet a detective would find the solution to this problem in five minutes: They would start from the last known location and then they would rub their hands together and say the case is solved. Sadly, no: This has been going on for years and years.

Earlier, my Conservative colleague asked you to provide documents, because, again, you did not have the answers to the questions asked, in particular regarding the timetable and progress of the work. I also think it is extremely important, with full transparency, for you to provide this committee with the documents requested regarding the timetable.

First, where do you stand in implementing the recommendations made in the November 2024 audit? There seem to be major deficiencies still. Where are you with that?

What is your timetable for locating the artworks that have been lost? Where are you in this process? What efforts are you making to locate the artists who have been hurt? Some may be deceased, some may be still living and not even know that their pieces have disappeared. I can't even imagine how you or a museum or any museum conservator could have treated an artist's pieces in their custody with this lack of respect.

A lot of questions have been left unanswered and I hope you are going to respond to this committee's request and provide the documents requested. You have an obligation to do that. This committee is entitled to request those documents and if you do not provide them, as my colleague said earlier, you will at least have to provide a legal opinion to justify your refusal to provide the committee with the documents requested.

Thank you. I know these two hours were not easy for you, but I think this is a sad situation. Honestly, I came here full of good faith and goodwill, with an open mind, thinking there would be an explanation for what happened, but I have not found one. I am still left in the ambiguous gulf between the word "lost" and the term "unaccounted for" and I think we have hit a new high in the manipulation of information.

That is what I wanted to add. Thank you, and I hope the committee will be entitled to the documents requested.

• (1825)

[*English*]

The Chair: With that, I would like to thank you all very much for participating in our committee today.

As Mr. Champoux has reminded us, there were several documents that committee members have asked you to provide to us, and the clerk can be in touch with you in the coming days to help facilitate all of that.

Again, we appreciate your time today in helping us get to the bottom of that issue.

With that, I will adjourn this meeting.

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