



Embargoed

AREA 17 – National Gallery of Canada

As Canada's preeminent visual arts organization, and comprising the largest collection of contemporary Indigenous art in the world as well as the country's largest Canadian and European collection of art, The National Gallery of Canada represents Canadian identity on a world stage. Coinciding with the launch of its strategic plan to address systemic shifts to their institution, the Gallery engaged AREA 17 to transform its brand to reflect the important work it was doing to decolonize the museum, decenter narratives, amplify new voices and reframe art within a broader and more inclusive context.

The new brand needed to reflect the organization's efforts of reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, as well as encompass a more inclusive perspective of Canadian art and culture. Working with national focus groups across the country, and with an advisory council of Indigenous Elders from the nearby First Nations community of Kitigan Zibi, the National Gallery of Canada developed a brand with AREA 17 that incorporated an Algonquin word into the brand.

“Since the 1960s Canada has defined itself as a bilingual country, so the brand needed to be in English and French, however the National Gallery of Canada wanted to signal its commitment to reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. We wanted to incorporate Algonquin-Anishinaabe into our brand, the language of the caretakers of the land on which the museum is located, which is breaking new ground amongst national arts institutions in Canada. Ankosé is a gift of language from Indigenous elders and a call to action to the museum and its visitors.” - Rosemary Thompson, VP of Marketing, National Gallery of Canada

The word is Ankosé, and it means “Everything is Connected”, “Tout est Relié. It means that we are all connected, to each other, to the land, the water, the sky, to art that surrounds us, to the past, present and future. It is a call to action for people to see beyond the frame of the canon, the building, the narratives to see the limitless connections that exist beyond it.

Like the word ankosé, the brand is an open system of inclusion, and is ever changing. The entire system is devoted to shifting the organization from the geometry of a square (Western WorldView-Westminster Parliamentary Tradition) to a permeable circle (Indigenous World View and Governance System). Canada is a Constitutional Monarchy based on the British Parliamentary System. The system of Government has decision makers sit across from each other, in a room with hard lines of opposition in Parliament (The Square). The National Gallery wanted to shift and embrace the most important geometric symbol in the Indigenous world (The Circle). Indigenous Governance takes place in circles, communities gather and make important decisions in “talking circles' ", or “healing circles”. The circle is the shape of the drum, the womb, the sun, the moon, and Mother Earth. In searching the architecture of the National Gallery of Canada for a circle, you find one in the most important public space of the building, the Great Hall. There is a square at the centre, but the entire floor is circular, and when you look up and out through the glass ceiling, the geometry is shaped like a circular mosaic.

The mother brand evolves through 10 different interpretations through the animation before it returns to the original symbol, denoting the continuous change of the organization and the idea of *ankosé*. The brand is circular, but incorporates the square at the centre and a nod to The National Gallery of Canada’s past. The design is also inspired by Indigenous beading and drums and the ceiling of the Great Hall.

The system is made up of the individual shapes of the logo, denoting the multitude of voices, ideas and perspectives that combine, shift, interconnect to create a larger whole. Creating spaces for artists to share their voices and be heard.

The color palette is inspired by the Northern Lights that connect us all under the sky. It is constructed with 8 colors of the color wheel, linking the 8 shapes of our logo, cycling through the colors, linking them all to further denote how everything is connected through gradient.

Similarly, our visual direction connects artists to each other, to other dimensions and to the public. Putting artists in their context, showing artists in the process of creating, connecting artists with their artworks, showing art that exists outside of the frame, and elevates contemporary indigenous artists and BIPOC artists.

Rather than relying on a system that caters solely to the artwork, we introduced the idea of brand volume to give The Gallery a way to dial up the brand volume when the Gallery wanted to speak and dial down the brand when the art needed to come first. Creating a flexible system for most experiences and use cases.

The brand itself is not just a brand identity but a signifier of a larger strategic transformation of the entire organization and was created with a team responsible for internal transformation and change. The brand strategy linked the internal transformation plan by change agency Nobl with its external expression through a unified brand framework to fully understand the museum's today and future. Outlining key shifts across key pillars, we helped the organization clarify how the brand affected the day-to-day and what questions the organization needed to ask itself to live into the idea of ankosé. We also outlined key experience and content strategies for the organization to put indigenous voices first, elevate voices, and bring the idea of ankose to life through words.

In order for the brand to be fully embraced internally, we built a custom guides platform built on Twill that explained the brand's meaning to all 300 employees, outlined the strategic considerations and the design values for consistent and coherent rollout.

The National Gallery of Canada's new brand represents the transformation of the institution from a colonial organization, to one that is de-colonizing and is opening itself up to the original people of the territory and the country. As 2020 demands museums around the world to consider their role as arbiters of history and truth, we stand with the Gallery as they do the important work to recognize their colonial roots and make efforts to create a more open, optimistic and resilient world.

“AREA 17 showed from the very beginning that they understood where the National Gallery was going. They listened deeply, and were willing to shift and incorporate the advice from

Algonquin-Anishinaabe Elders to bring the brand to life. They've created something that is extremely beautiful, anchored in digital strength through animation and brilliant colour, and tied to the teachings of Elders. We are so grateful to them for helping us ground the institution in a spirit of belonging and reconciliation for years to come,"
-Rosemary Thompson VP Corporate/Public Affairs and Marketing National Gallery of Canada.

About AREA 17

We solve problems to serve people. Our work is designed to simplify and engineered to endure.

AREA 17 is a brand and digital product agency based in New York and Paris. Founded in 2003, we partner with organizations we trust and admire to create lasting value through craft, impact, and soul.

We believe the way we advance digital today is imperative to ensuring a more open, resilient, and optimistic world. By crafting brands and products that are fundamental to our interactions as people, we can make the internet an enhancement of our lives, not a distraction from it.

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