

Joint Statement Regarding Contemporary Calgary

[Personal Letters and Links \(https://jointletterto.cc/links/\)](https://jointletterto.cc/links/)

We are a group of Indigenous and racialized artists calling on Contemporary Calgary to acknowledge, examine and address their complicity with systemic racism and enlarge their capacity to offer meaningful support to the artists they work with.

This letter addresses events that took place on the land where Elbow River and Bow River meet, home to many millennia of caregivers and shaped through its many names as Kootsisáw (Tsuut'ina), Mohkínstsis (Blackfoot), and Wincheesh-pah (Stoney Nakoda). We would also like to acknowledge that there are a lack of Black voices and perspectives in this letter, which reflects the absence of Black artists in these art institutional spaces and systems. No Black artists were part of the residency and exhibition, and during our time working with Contemporary Calgary and in our pursuit for acknowledgement of our experiences, we failed to bring in a multitude of Black perspectives into our process.

As artists previously involved in the 2019 Collider residency and the 2020 Planetary exhibition who have felt compelled to remove our work from the exhibition, we feel strongly that:

- Contemporary Calgary has failed to provide adequate and respectful support for local artists engaged in Collider and Planetary.
- These failures have had the greatest impact on the Indigenous and racialized artists involved, signalling Contemporary Calgary's lack of capacity to honour a responsibility to create safe, accountable spaces through equitable, anti-oppressive practices.

This letter was drafted to encourage Contemporary Calgary's board and staff to publicly take accountability for their failures to support local artists in a way that is equitable; for effectively causing harm to our local Indigenous and racialized arts communities, and to walk a path to healing being led by Black, Indigenous, racialized and equity-seeking artists moving forward.

As part of this process of collective action, we wish to individually highlight our experiences having worked with Contemporary Calgary in our own words. These personal testimonies will be shared over the coming days and weeks found [<here> \(https://jointletterto.cc/links/\)](https://jointletterto.cc/links/). We also offer a consolidated summary timeline of events leading to this collective action, which can be found [<here> \(https://jointletterto.cc/timeline/\)](https://jointletterto.cc/timeline/). For now, we offer the following list as an overview and orientation to our specific shared grievances:

- Lack of adequate support for Indigenous, racialized, and equity-seeking artists.
- Lack of basic support for artists accessing their gallery and work spaces.
- Unclear expectations and protocols from Contemporary Calgary for the artists.
- Compromised integrity of artworks due to disrespectful curatorial suggestions and lack of care
- Lack of communication and engagement with the artists throughout residency, exhibition, and closure during the pandemic.
- [BLM statement \(https://www.instagram.com/p/CBlliL7JQdi/\)](https://www.instagram.com/p/CBlliL7JQdi/) lacked meaningful action and acknowledgement of their own complicity in systemic racism.
- Failure to engage with Indigenous and racialized artists who were working with them at the time

about how they might be able to better serve the community.

The list of grievances can be read in further detail [<here> \(https://jointletterto.cc/list-of-detailed-grievances/\)](https://jointletterto.cc/list-of-detailed-grievances/).

Despite concerted attempts on our part to create a shared space for us to address these issues with Contemporary Calgary internally, the organization has yet to articulate or demonstrate any meaningful actions. Contemporary Calgary has continued their programming under the pretense of business as usual with no public acknowledgement of these conversations, and aside from a vague and seemingly performative statement of support for Black Lives Matter, there has been no acknowledgement of how they might address the power structures and policies that enable the oppression of Black, Indigenous, racialized, and equity-seeking individuals in their spaces. At the release of this letter, there is no indication that Contemporary Calgary will publicly acknowledge the events and issues we have highlighted, nor publicly commit to addressing their own systemic racism inherent to their institutional model. Has Contemporary Calgary begun the work to develop a succession plan for the predominantly white board and staff into accountable structures, relationships and roles that equitably center Black, Indigenous, racialized, and equity-seeking community leadership?

In closing, despite the fact that it is retraumatizing and is stagnating healing for us as those affected by these oppressive systems to have to undertake the work of correcting them, we take on the labour of this process in pursuit of a vision of all the communities that calls this place home, having the full benefit of each other and the transformative power of all of our artist communities. We call on everyone to help Contemporary Calgary by holding space for them to acknowledge their failings and for healing, including funders like the Ministry of Canadian Heritage who fund the organization through the Multiculturalism Cultural Spaces Fund. We call on our community to meet us in breaking the cycles that continue to perpetuate systems that stifle people and communities from flourishing.

Artist personal letters will be released soon, others will be posted in the coming weeks. A collective list of the letters can be found [<here> \(https://jointletterto.cc/links/\)](https://jointletterto.cc/links/).

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Artists:

Alia Shahab, Brittney Bear Hat, Dan Cardinal McCartney, Richelle Bear Hat, Rocio Graham, Teresa Tam