

## **Workman Arts Presents #BigFeels: Creating Space for Mental Health in the Arts**

TORONTO, May 15, 2018 – How do we better support artists with mental health lived experiences? That's the primary question being asked at an upcoming symposium hosted by Workman Arts, a Toronto-based charity that is the longest-running multi-disciplinary arts and mental health organization in North America. The *#BigFeels: Creating Space for Mental Health in the Arts* symposium takes place over two days from May 29-30 at Artscape Wychwood Barns, with an opening reception at Artscape Youngplace on May 28, coinciding with Workman Arts' Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival exhibition, *MINDSET 2018: EXPOSURE*.

Workman Arts carried out three public consultations into local community needs in terms of learning, support and space relating to intersections of mental health and the arts. Both the Canada Council for the Arts and the Toronto Arts Council provided funding for the consultations and symposium. "We know there are some difficult conversations to be had," said Workman Arts Executive Artistic Director, Kelly Straughan, "but we hope this will result in a greater understanding, acceptance and inclusion of people living with mental health and addiction experiences in the arts sector."

#BigFeels features keynote speaker Syrus Marcus Ware; a group workshop on Sacred Aboriginal Healing and one-on-one participant discussions with Elder Little Brown Bear; an exploration of Mad Art and the Political Aesthetics of a Social Movement with Jenna Reid, Twoey Gray and Cassandra Myers; and a session on Building a Culture of Positive Workplace Mental Health, led by Mike Prosserman, who had this to say about the symposium: "The #BigFeels conference is vital for leaders in the nonprofit, arts and any sector, for that matter. The arts community does not have access to high quality professional development; the lack of support often causes us to bottle our stress, struggle and feel very alone. Mental health is everybody's business and we need to give people a voice and let those who struggle know that they are not alone."

The symposium also includes a Community Resource Sharing area, connecting participants with organizations that support mental health. Netta Kornberg, Program & Education Coordinator at the Artists' Health Alliance, and one of the symposium presenters, says "[t]hese spaces of vulnerable conversation are so important and, contrary to popular belief, so rare for artists. Being an artist too often means operating in highly competitive and precarious environments where mental illness is an open secret that is too risky for any one artist to address head-on. We need to model how to hold space for these conversations across art sectors, and #BigFeels is doing it."

All venues are fully accessible and ASL interpretation is available. Subsidized admission is also available for those that require it. For a full schedule of presenters and registration information, visit: [workmanarts.com/bigfeels](http://workmanarts.com/bigfeels). For accessibility requests, interviews or images, please contact [parul\\_pandya@workmanarts.com](mailto:parul_pandya@workmanarts.com).

Workman Arts is the longest-running multi-disciplinary arts and mental health organization in North America, and supports the professional development of aspiring, emerging and established artists with lived experience of mental health and addiction issues.