



INSTALLATION ADDRESS BY
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PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR OF OCAD UNIVERSITY
CONVOCATION, MORNING CEREMONY (10:30 a.m.)
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Good afternoon everyone.

For me, this is a moment to savour—the transition from being a virtual president of a virtual university, with virtual colleagues meeting in virtual rooms, to being present here, in person.

Given that I spent my entire career in digital media, you might think I relished these past two years, living and working in cyberspace. You wouldn't be completely wrong. But I admit that being here today with all of you, is very meaningful.

To my esteemed peers, academic leaders, honorary doctorate recipients, faculty, staff, graduands and their families, friends and guests, welcome and thank you for gathering with us this morning to celebrate the incredible achievements of our graduands.

Like all of you, my journey towards this moment of being installed as your President and Vice-Chancellor was marked by love and support.

So, I'd like to give a shout-out to the people who have cheered, challenged and sustained me in this adventure that brought me here today: my family and dear friends, colleagues at the Canadian Film Centre and the broader media and entertainment sector, new media collaborators from across disciplines, and those with whom and for whom I have volunteered in service of making our world a better place. You all know who you are.

It's an odd thing to be installed as President of a university two years after you have been in the role. I'm not sure whether this has happened before, but it has given me a distinct advantage.

Instead of speaking about my aspirations in assuming this role, I can speak about how we, this vibrant community of bold, curious and compassionate artists, designers and scholars, also known as OCAD University, are imagining and creating a joyful, equitable and sustainable world.

So here goes:

We live in turbulent times. This is not going to change.

While the phrase “turbulent times” was first used to describe the collapse of the Roman Empire—I think we are at a special moment today where we are mindful that turbulent change is the norm and is constant, and by recognizing this reality, we can find ways to respond and to cope.

And things are certainly much different than those turbulent times of many, many years ago. One is the existential and accelerating threat posed by climate warming. Another is the level of rapid technological innovation.

In both cases, the underlying pace of change—for example, in the level of greenhouse gas emissions, or in the declining cost of silicon chips or solar panels—may stay more or less the same, but the impact of change is more dramatic.

Suddenly, everyone has a smart phone.

Suddenly, the wet-bulb temperature in parts of India is reaching 35°C.

Then add in what Nicholas Taleb has labelled “Black Swan” events, and, suddenly, over 50 per cent of Ontario residents have been infected with COVID.

Suddenly, gasoline prices have risen to \$2.15 a litre.

The consequences of this level of turbulence are often unexpected, as the pandemic has shown us.

In effect, a shock to the system creates a natural experiment. Just as scientists sometimes poke a black box and examine its reactions to see if they can figure out how it works, COVID's natural experiment with Canadian society has not been without heartbreak and has uncovered some harsh truths about society.

As Naomi Klein presciently predicted about shocks in general, the pandemic has highlighted how our society truly works, and some of its fundamental inequities — COVID survivors have included residents in long-term care homes and jails, and “essential workers” earning minimum wage,

Our societal black box does not apparently work as well as we might have thought, and, as a University, we cannot be blind to social injustice.

The challenge in turbulent times, thus, is how we address the injustices they induce, and how we achieve the resilience that allows us to cope with massive change, and indeed to flourish.

This applies to both institutions and individuals, and constitutes a “meta-strategy,” an overarching view of how an optimal culture, structure and organizational processes would look.

I believe that OCAD University is uniquely positioned to flourish, and indeed may be meeting its moment.

Let's consider three preconditions for flourishing.

The first is awareness of the state of the world.

The second is making intelligent choices about what to do and the third is implementing those choices well.

Let me unpack each of these three preconditions.

1. Awareness

One way to create awareness of the outside world is to peer out from behind the parapets of the ivory tower as passive observers.

This is not the OCAD U way.

As artists, designers and scholars, our *modus operandi* is to immerse ourselves in the material realities of a problem, to plunge into various environments and extend the University into the broader ecosystem.

We do this through active experimentation as well as cooperation with other equally bold, curious and compassionate people across different disciplines and sectors via programs, projects and research.

When we create porous boundaries like this we redefine and reimagine what constitutes the University—no longer is it defined by the physical space of the institution, and the activities that occur within it, but it is better defined by its role in the broader ecosystem, in which the university becomes a “vibrant hub” as described by the Academic and Strategic Plan we have recently finalized.

2. Making intelligent choices

Now let’s turn to the question of how we choose as a university what to do. Making intelligent choices depends on having a good understanding of the implications of the information available to you.

Our new Academic and Strategic Plan envisions OCAD University as: “the home of artists, designers, makers, scholars who are shaping conversations about the present and future of Canadian society, and home to creatives who reimagine a world in flux through art and design practices and scholarship.”

This is in the long Canadian intellectual tradition of looking at broad societal consequences of technology, from Harold Innis to George Grant to Marshall McLuhan.

There are scholars here and elsewhere who are bringing new diverse lenses to bear. For a long time now, OCAD U has demonstrated through action its commitments to decolonizing art and design education.

Our Indigenous Visual Culture program, for example, is one of the first of its kind to be established at an art and design university.

We have shepherded new forms of academic inquiry and action-oriented research through our world-renowned Strategic Foresight and Innovation program and award-winning Inclusive Design Research Centre, to name two.

And we will be launching our Global Centre for Climate Resilience through Art & Design, which will involve animating the waterfront at Bathurst Quay where the Malting Silos act as a reminder of the intersection of agriculture and industry that shaped our country in the 20th century.

In short, OCAD University and our amazing faculty keep pushing the boundaries of how we learn to see and what we need to do to fully grasp and apprehend our world.

Through the remarkable leadership of our I-BPOC academic leaders, Deans Foster, Tunstall, Srivastava and Mathur, along with Provost Caroline Langill, OCAD University recognizes and embraces the importance of different ways of knowing, such as Indigenous perspectives, and explicitly works to learn from and harness sources of traditional wisdom through the way we hire, the way we teach, and the way we work with the community.

3. Implementing our choices

Finally, let's talk about getting things done.

OCAD University has significant advantages here, some obvious, some not so obvious. The obvious advantages (besides our unique and well-deserved brand value) are that we are small enough to be nimble, small enough to achieve common purpose, and young enough not to be hobbled by the accumulated weight of tradition.

The more subtle advantage is in the way we approach, innately, the creation of great art and design. It's ironic that our iconic building is identified as the achievement of a single person—Will Alsop—where the more typical and emergent characteristic of what we do is co-creation, the product of teams and respectful partnerships.

Collaboration is in our DNA.

Individual talent and genius will continue to create great things, as many of our medal winners we are celebrating today show, but increasingly, each year, more of them represent robust creative collaborations.

As OCAD University has extended its reach to encompass the creation of complex objects and experiences—urban spaces, VR environments, and interdisciplinary solutions such as in our Design for Health program—we have come to embrace more complex creative processes, where interdependence and trust are essential.

My conclusion is that, in terms of the core functions necessary for addressing issues of social justice and flourishing in turbulent times, OCAD University is uniquely equipped to thrive. I hope to keep it that way.

Turning to the implications for our students, we know that the “student journey” cannot start and end in the four years at OCAD University. In a rapidly changing world, the single learning intervention of a degree simply won’t be enough to keep our graduates positioned for a lifetime of success.

Rather, we must continue to extend our teaching into areas of specialization better suited for post-graduate education or certificate programs.

Ideally, throughout their association with OCAD University, current and future students will become further immersed in a new kind of ecosystem in which there is the potential for a lifetime of flourishing.

So, to today’s graduands I say, “Come back!”

We selfishly hope you will become lifelong members of the University, and an essential component—more eyes and ears on the ground, a sounding board for testing new ideas, and partners in delivery.

In return, you have our commitment that there will always be something new for you to learn, that we can teach you, that we can co-create together.

I will close by stressing the underlying ethos that guides our way forward.

In the country I come from, the Philippines, there is a key word—“*kapwa*”—that underpins the Filipino worldview.

It’s very hard to translate, but it means, roughly, fellow-feeling, or shared identity.

As my great *kababayan* (fellow Filipino), the Nobel Prize winner Maria Ressa pointed out in her acceptance speech, the static value of *kapwa* has to be supported by active processes, in the Filipino case a very deeply-rooted system of reciprocal giving exemplified by *utang na loob*, the “debt from within” or the obligation you feel to others.

Taken together they represent an exact instance of the communitarian spirit that activist David Graeber, in his bestselling book *The Dawn of Everything with David Wengrow*, has identified as integral to many ancient societies, such as the Indigenous people who lived here, in Tkaronto, on the very land we stand on—a communitarian spirit that has been ground down in an age of winner-takes-all competitive capitalism.

The world needs to restore its *kapwa*. The world needs more recognition of mutual obligation. My commitment to living these values is expressed as exquisite markings woven into this robe I wear today.

And similarly, in my two years at OCAD University, I have found the *kapwa* spirit woven throughout the different layers of the institution.

So let us all be loud and proud and shout Yes! We are OCAD U artists, designers and scholars. We will go out into the world to tackle the big problems of our times with boldness. We will approach opposing viewpoints with curiosity and engage in the world with compassion. We are moving forward in the right direction, and we will flourish.

Thank you.