

**ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**  
**QUESTION 259-19(2): Responsibility and Preservation of Government Artwork**  
**May 29, 2020**

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indicative of the question of public art that it's uncertain whether the question should be for Infrastructure or for ECE, but I am going to start with Infrastructure. As I mentioned in my statement, the recent discovery of a hand-painted mural lying on top of a gravel pile on the Stanton campus raises questions about how the government tracks and cares for art that it acquires. My first question is simply: who is responsible for the care and maintenance and the appropriate storage of art from the old Stanton hospital? Thank you. That question is going to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. It's confusing.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are trying to work with the other Minister and the Member to get some answers for her questions here. When it comes to public artwork, it is the responsibility for the department to care for it, to maintain it, to store it, and they can always reach out to the Prince of Wales Heritage Centre for advice. That is where the experts are. That is the situation right now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you to the Minister of ECE for that answer. Is there a policy or are there guidelines in place that describe how art in the government's possession should be cared for?

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Right now, there are no government-wide guidelines. However, not just ECE but ECE in collaboration with all departments has put together the Culture and Heritage Strategic Framework that is 2015 to 2025 as well as four-year action plan that is 2019 to 2022. As part of that framework and action plan, one of the goals is to safeguard heritage, including artwork in government buildings that requires special consideration and preservation. We have put our mind to it, but the work has not quite begun yet. I will leave it there. I won't answer all of the questions in advance from the Member.

**MS. GREEN:** I appreciate that information. I think the time has come to start that work of putting those guidelines in place. My next question is whether there is a formal chain of custody for artwork so that, when they come into the government's possession, they are tracked from the time that they come in to the time that they are disposed of, sold, given away, or in other ways come out of the government collection.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** No, there is not right now. The government has a lot of artwork. There are a lot of government buildings, and they have lots of things on the walls. That means there is artwork that could be worth virtually nothing, and there could be some large pieces, like the Member has referenced, that could be worth quite a bit. There was an inventory taken by ITI, I believe, about 10 years ago, that looked at all of this, but nothing has been done since. I think

the reason for that is because this massive artwork, it would cost more than all of the work combined is worth to inventory it, so I think that what is needed is a focus and identification of some of these special pieces and a system put in place to ensure that we know where those are and that, once they are done their useful life within the government, they can be preserved either by the museum or an appropriate organization.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

**MS. GREEN:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that answer. You know, I am going to say that every artist who does a commission or makes a donation of art to the government feels that the piece is special, so deciding on which pieces are special I think is going to be somewhat problematic. However, I think we owe it to these artists to acknowledge their work in the government's possession, to take care of it, and to make sure that it is stored appropriately when it's not displayed or even that it's displayed appropriately. I am looking for a commitment to begin work on this whole area of managing public art as soon as possible. Thank you.

**HON. R.J. SIMPSON:** Certainly, commissioned art is different from something that someone might buy at the store to fill an empty wall, and there is not much consideration put into that piece of art. No, it is a different level that the Member is talking about. I will work with the Minister of Infrastructure. The department has some expertise in asset management and combine that with the expertise that we have in the culture and heritage division and see what we can do to remedy this problem because it is a shame when you see a piece of art that means a lot to a lot of people buried under the snow and degrading away like that. Yes, I can commit to having those discussions and charting a path forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.