

July 9, 2025

Jean-François Bélisle
Director and CEO
National Gallery of Canada
380 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON, Canada
K1N 9N4

Dear Mr. Bélisle,

Re: Stewardship of the National Gallery of Canada's Designed Landscapes by Cornelia Hahn Oberlander

On behalf of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA), we would like to take this opportunity to respectfully bring to your attention the current condition of the designed landscape surrounding the National Gallery of Canada (NGC), and in particular, the Taiga Garden conceived by the late Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, a recipient of the Governor General's Medal in Landscape Architecture ([Cornelia Hahn Oberlander \(2016\) | CSLA](#)).

As you know, the National Gallery is not only home to one of Canada's most treasured art collections but is also celebrated for its remarkable architecture and landscape. The gardens, particularly the Taiga Garden, are internationally recognized as a significant work of landscape architecture, thoughtfully designed to reflect the Canadian identity and inspired by the Group of Seven's iconic depictions of the northern landscape. The garden was created as the first experience of art upon approaching the Gallery—a living extension of the Gallery's mandate.

During the recent CSLA Congress in Ottawa, John Zvonar, Chair of our Cultural Landscapes Committee, delivered a presentation and led a tour of the NGC landscapes. The tour and discussions with other landscape architects and horticultural specialists highlighted a shared concern: the original design intent of this nationally significant landscape is at risk of being lost. Observations and comments received suggest that the gardens are currently in a state of disrepair, with evidence of neglect in maintenance practices and site stewardship.

At the same Congress, the CSLA proudly awarded the Jury's Award of Excellence—the highest honour in our national awards program—to Kiwekì Point – Big River Landscape by Janet Rosenberg & Studio. This transformative project, located immediately adjacent to the National Gallery of Canada, is an inspiring example of how landscape architecture can elevate public spaces, invite engagement, and contribute meaningfully to the cultural fabric of the nation's capital. While we celebrate this new addition to the Capital's landscape, we are reminded of the importance of caring for the landscapes that have long contributed to the National Gallery's story, including the significant landscapes designed by Cornelia Hahn Oberlander.

As a professional organization, we recognize that landscape management is complex, especially in the face of challenges such as climate change, evolving horticultural practices, pest pressures, changes to site programming, and budget constraints. However, the condition of the NGC's landscape appears to have reached a tipping point. Without timely intervention, this critical piece of Canada's cultural and design legacy may deteriorate beyond recovery.

The CSLA respectfully encourages the Gallery to view the Taiga Garden and the surrounding landscapes as integral to the NGC's collection and to approach their care and conservation with the same rigour and curatorial stewardship as the invaluable works housed inside. We believe that a review of the current maintenance program, development of a site-specific landscape management plan, and immediate remedial work would significantly improve the landscape's health and restore its alignment with the original design intent.

The CSLA and our volunteer members would welcome the opportunity to support the National Gallery in this endeavour. We are prepared to offer advice, connect the Gallery with local and site specific experts, and to share best practices in landscape conservation and maintenance. We are committed to fostering an appreciation for the value of designed landscapes as essential components of our shared cultural heritage.

We hope this letter is received in the spirit of partnership and advocacy with which it is intended. The CSLA is eager to see the NGC's extraordinary outdoor spaces thrive once again and remain a proud reflection of Cornelia Oberlander's legacy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Matthew Mills, APALA CSLA
President, CSLA



John Zvonar, OALA, FCSLA
Chair, CSLA Cultural Landscape Legacy Committee