
"... along with celebration, great art, and community, Hold Fast opens up a space for imagination, experimentation, and critical discussion about society and the role of the artist." - Mary MacDonald (The Overcast, August 16, 2016)

HOLD FAST: Thoughts from Behind the Scenes

facilitated by Tessa Graham

HOLD FAST is a four-day celebration of contemporary art practice held in August in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. Now going into its 17th year, HOLD FAST is the province's only festival dedicated to contemporary art. HOLD FAST delivers accessible, meaningful and critically-relevant contemporary art programming across an array of media including: installation, performance, screenings, artist talks, music, dance, community events and artist-led workshops for people of all ages.



Holdfast staff by new mural outside Eastern Edge Gallery. Artwork by Jonathan Green

Part 1: Penelope Smart – Director of Eastern Edge Gallery

1. What was your main role during the days of festival?

I saw my main role during HOLD FAST as the calm and collected host, of course! Our Festival Manager April White was the captain of the ship; she and our Festival Coordinators had most logistical details under control. I took care of anything that came my way in terms of digging things out of the storage room or relieving volunteers during the Art Crawl. As all hosts do, I stayed up late and got up early worrying about small details—mostly about the weather, which mostly went our way. I wanted to make sure everyone was having a great time and that the artists were able to present their workshop or Art Crawl project in the best possible way. You know you want your guests to go home and say good things about you. I was a bit nervous, as this was my first HOLD FAST!



Concept by Penelope Smart, Artwork by Amery Sandford

2. Why do you think it's important to have a festival like this in Newfoundland?

Can you imagine St. John's—a city with one of Canada's largest concentrations of artists—not having a contemporary arts festival? That seems ridiculous to me. I'm new to St. John's and based on the number of festivals here alone, I'm surprised we're the only one dedicated to contemporary art on the island. Eastern Edge is extremely proud to present HOLD FAST because it's integral to the arts ecology on this island. Festivals are about bringing people together to have fun and connect over things they are curious about, passionate about, or often build their lives around—in this case, art. HOLD FAST is an incredible platform to showcase the artistic talent and artistic activity in our city, and also create real opportunities and lasting connections among local artists, visiting artists, audiences, businesses, organizations—you name it. In Newfoundland it's even more important that artists living here have opportunities to meet and connect with artists from off the island, and vice versa. I know I'm coming out of HOLD FAST with memorable experiences and connections with super smart and exciting artists and writers from all over Canada. Festivals remind you how small and also how big the world really is.