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# REGART:

Cultural Policy Hub  
Case Study  
March 2026

## In pursuit of space, stability and organizational identity

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Founded in 1986 as an artist's collective, Regart, centre d'artistes en art actuel quickly became the only space dedicated to the production, exhibition and dissemination of contemporary visual arts in the Chaudière-Appalaches region of Québec. Like many artist-run centres, Regart has been gone through episodes of deep instability over the past two decades, the result of governance crises, displacement, funding gaps, community disengagement and the constraints imposed by its regional location. Despite these challenges, Regart strives to contribute to artists' professional development, to deepen its connection to its community and to develop organizational resilience in the face of chronic uncertainty.

### Key facts about Regart

Type: Registered charity | Artist-run visual arts centre

Location: Lévis, Quebec

Budget: \$150K to \$300K

Staff: 1 full-time employee, 4 part-time

Community served: ~50 independent artists and 2,000+ visitors annually

In this case study, the Cultural Policy Hub explores Regart's history of transformation and adaption to address chronic precarity. This study is based on an interview with Claire Goutier, who has served as Regart's Executive Director since 2022.<sup>1</sup> It concludes with Goutier's insights for art leaders, government policymakers and funders, drawing on Regart's experiences implementing changes to address the crises it has faced.

## Governance crisis and reforms (2009–2021)

Collectif Regart was created in 1986 by a group of twenty-one artists in Lévis, Quebec, a town of less than 40,000 inhabitants at the time, directly across the river from Québec City. To this day, Lévis's territory is made up of 85% farmlands and forests; but with now over 150,000 inhabitants, Lévis is the largest city of the rural Chaudière-Appalaches region. When it opened, Regart established itself as the only contemporary art gallery in Lévis, and as the only space for new visual artists to meet, create and present their work professionally in the whole Chaudière-Appalaches region.

Eventually registered as a not-for-profit organization, the artist-run centre contributed to building and fostering an artistic community in the region, despite experiencing the same struggles one would expect an emerging arts organization to face. Over the years, public funding became more stable, and in 2006, the City of Lévis and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ) came into an agreement to jointly support the artist-run centre, providing it with a funding of \$60,000 over three years.

Despite this additional funding, Regart was showing signs of strained finances. By 2009, its board of directors suspected its then-executive director of siphoning money from the organization's budget for personal gain. The board brought their concerns to the organization's financial auditor, which prompted a change in leadership (the conditions of the executive director's departure remain unclear to those who have served in the position since). The

<sup>1</sup> All quotes in this case study are translated from French.

outcomes of this alleged deception were, predictably, disruptive, as Regart's finances and leadership were now in disarray.

In an effort to redress the harm done and to manage the risks to the organization, Regart's board chose not to pursue legal action, and never publicized this incident. Instead, the board approached their funders at the City of Lévis and at the CALQ in the spirit of transparency and accountability. Alarmed by the situation but wanting to help save what Regart had built over two decades, funders agreed on a recovery plan to support Regart's board through this precarious time, with some conditions that would lead to change at the artist-run centre. "[The funders] kind of dictated the rules the organization had to follow in order to continue receiving funding", described Regart's current Executive Director Claire Goutier, "the CALQ on the one hand, and the city on the other, so each with their own expectations." But this exceptional support was invaluable for Regart to survive this crisis, and the changes to come were undertaken as part of a process of rebuilding trust with the funders and within the organization.

Anne-Lise Griffon was named Executive Director in 2009 and tasked with restructuring the organization. Coming from a background in music and zines, Griffon brought with her into Regart a group of underground artists "who loved the do-it-yourself mindset." And there was a lot for them to do themselves: in the span of two years, Regart grew its programming from three to six exhibitions a year to fulfill the CALQ's conditions for its support, and committed to continue providing studio space for artists at the request of the City of Lévis. While "artist studios were already part of our mission (...) it's a service that we must still continue to offer under this agreement," explained Goutier.

In 2011, Regart moved from the space it had occupied for twenty years in Old-Lévis to the neighbourhood of La Traverse, an area at the core of some of the City's economic and touristic development plans. While this move wasn't a condition of the recovery funding Regart was receiving from the City of Lévis, it had been strongly encouraged by the City's staff and the CALQ as it brought the gallery to a neighborhood that was experiencing growth and was better connected to Québec City. In its first year in this new building, Regart also started an annual community fundraising event that continues to be offered to this day.

Throughout this period, Griffon also implemented significant governance changes to decentralize power within the artist-run centre, in an effort to democratize, decision making, improve transparency and give power back to the member artists. She created five committees composed of member artists, who were not only in charge of determining the artistic vision for the centre and its gallery, but of making most of its financial, HR and logistical decisions. "She reshaped the foundations of the organization, new charter, all new procedures to make it super transparent, super participatory, super clean", describes Goutier.

Regart publicly described all these changes as coming out of "a deep reflection on its purpose and development."<sup>2</sup> They were fitting for "a time of cultural effervescence", according to Goutier, and members of the artistic communities in Lévis and Québec City came together to support the organization, including physically moving all the equipment from Regart's old space in Old-

<sup>2</sup> Regart's website, "[History](#)" page, in French only.

Lévis to its new one in La Traverse, attending exhibitions and getting involved in the organization's committees.

These governance reforms seemed to be successful: Regart's programming found an audience and was attracting artists and visitors to the centre. The organization slowly stabilized itself financially, though its rent was always a point of financial strain; the team hoped the City would eventually let Regart move into "L'Autre Gare", an old, largely unoccupied river station in La Traverse. This large building, owned by the City, offered unconventional spaces with high ceilings and a lot of natural light, making it an appealing space for art installations. The City had long talked of repurposing the building and renting out some of it to local organizations, but hadn't yet opened a call for projects that Regart could apply to.

In 2014, Griffon left Regart after five years of taxing work leading and transforming the organization. Amélie Laurence Fortin became the new Executive Director, and the CALQ supported her in continuing to transform Regart.

From 2014 to 2019, Fortin began the process of simplifying Regart's complex committee system. An artist herself, Fortin aimed to make the day-to-day management of Regart more efficient so she could spend less time supervising committees and more time on the organization's artistic outputs: the number of committees was reduced to two, one for artistic direction and one for human resources. This also allowed Fortin to take back control of much of the organization's finances and operations. Doing so enabled her to work on developing different revenue streams for Regart, which she planned to use to support a new residency program for international artists.

In parallel, Fortin worked to anchor Regart in the Traverse neighbourhood, developing partnerships with other not-for-profit organizations and with residents. She hoped to "democratize the artistic gesture" and get locals who may not be regular gallery-goers through the door. Regart was not meant to be "a Québec City outgrowth in Lévis" but to reflect "[Lévis's] territory, its geography, its changes and its development."<sup>3</sup>

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*"Rooting us in the community was my motto. I wanted Regart to return to the hearts of Lévis residents, for us to talk together, collaborate, and ultimately become part of the landscape, instead of being an outlier."*<sup>4</sup>

*– Amélie Laurence Fortin*

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## Expropriation, space-insecurity and financial precarity (2019–Present)

Executive Director Fortin's efforts to connect Regart to the Traverse neighbourhood were suddenly halted in May 2019 when Lévis City Council announced that, in order to build a

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<sup>3</sup> Amélie Laurence Fortin interviewed by Le journal de Lévis, October 17, 2019, [Regart s'enracine dans sa communauté](#) [in French only, *Regart creating roots in its community*]

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

funicular up the cliff of Lévis, it was considering expropriating several organizations from the spaces they occupied, including the building Regart rented.

While this announcement was met with some concerns within the artist-run centre, there was also hope that this would mean that they could finally move into the nearby L'Autre Gare space they had been eyeing for years. Fortin, who was about to take a sabbatical to pursue artistic endeavors, started negotiations to secure a space in L'Autre Gare. City Council promised “it was going to work hard on various scenarios to ensure that the contemporary art center remained in the Traverse area.”<sup>5</sup>

At the end of 2019, Regart learned that they would only be getting a small space in L'Autre Gare, one that was too small to accommodate the gallery and artist studios they needed to deliver their programming: they would have to find a space to rent on the private market, putting a new burden on the organization's precarious finances.

According to current Executive Director Goutier, the organization's contacts at the City's Cultural Department seemed to be taken aback by these decisions and how they were communicated: Regart's team felt like they were the victim of a lack of coordination between the City's Cultural Department and Economic Development Department. While the City and Regart had long worked together and Regart's team had felt supported by City staff in the past, the expropriation led to tensions between the artist-run centre and the City.

Relationships soured when the organization was offered just \$8,000 by the City to move out and find a new space. Regart's interim Executive Director Patricia Nadeau—a former CALQ's Program Officer who ran the organization while Fortin was on sabbatical—started legal proceedings against the City to obtain more equitable compensation. According to Goutier, Regart and the City eventually reached an agreement and the arts centre received a settlement of \$240,000.

But in the meantime, Regart had to find new spaces. They decided to take the space at L'Autre Gare they had been promised, which they used as an exhibition space. The main gallery was moved into a private commercial building, and the artist studios were installed nearby into a building belonging to a not-for-profit organization. Regart's own members and team renovated these spaces to adapt them to their needs, and the main gallery was able to reopen in the summer of 2021.

With three leases and three landlords to deal with in a post-pandemic context, Regart was suddenly facing high levels of exhaustion, burn out and staff turnover. Fortin decided not to come back to Regart after her sabbatical; and while interim Executive Director Nadeau stayed longer than originally planned to support Regart through the pandemic, she too left her position as soon as the organization had settled into its new spaces, leaving in 2022 after a brief two-year term. She was replaced by Claire Goutier, a long-time community arts worker in Quebec City. Regart was now being led by its fourth Executive Director in just nine years.

<sup>5</sup> Le journal de Lévis, May 28, 2019, [\*Lien mécanique dans le secteur de la Traverse : la Ville envisage des expropriations\*](#) [in French only, *Funicular in the Traverse sector: the City is considering expropriations*]

In May 2023, the centre found out that the City was not renewing their 3-year lease on Regart's exhibition space in L'Autre Gare. Goutier explains that this came as a shock and a disappointment: the space at L'Autre Gare was configured in a way that allowed them to host installations that wouldn't fit in their main gallery, and it was in the same building as the City's tourism office, which brought visibility and new visitors to the gallery. While the lease Regart had signed with the City offered no guarantee for renewal, the call for projects Regart had applied for to get this lease had specified that organizations granted a space would be considered for renewal and would be consulted before other organizations were awarded a space. This led to differing interpretations of the City's obligations between City staff and Regart, who says they learned another organization had already been selected to replace them in that space.

"I have had a lot of trouble getting our rights recognized" explained Goutier, who spoke to the media about this situation to raise awareness to the strain Regart would face if it were once again displaced. This media coverage caused an uptick in tension with the City Council, but in late July 2023, with the lease scheduled to end in a matter of weeks, the City changed course and renewed Regart's lease for another three-year term. This came as a relief for Regart, and Goutier shared that City officials later "admitted that we had been mistreated, that our case had been mishandled."

But at the same time, Regart was facing issues with another one of its spaces. The building in which Regart rented spaces for six artists studios was sold by the not-for-profit organization that owned it to private real estate investors, and rent was increased "by 127%." Unable to absorb this additional expense, Regart had a year's notice to look for a new space, but struggled to find any that matched their needs.

Finally, in May 2024, Regart came to an agreement with the local not-for-profit community organization Le Filon, who offered them a space in one of their buildings. Both organizations had collaborated on past projects, and they saw this as an opportunity to deepen their cooperation and work on "more inclusive artistic experiences."<sup>6</sup>

While Regart's space allocations are relatively stable as of March 2026, Goutier shared that the centre may be back to square one in a few years. Goutier projects that, by 2031, Regart will most likely have to move the main gallery, its largest space, when its current 5-year non-renewable lease concludes, as a real estate firm has expressed interest in buying the building that currently houses the gallery.

These successive displacements have undermined Regart's financial stability. In the fall of 2024, the centre cancelled two exhibitions and had to lay off a key staff member. It has adapted to this strain and maintained its programming activities in part by leaning on its partnerships with other nonprofits: Regart shares a communication officer with another local nonprofits, and both organizations' leaders are in regular contact to make sure event agendas don't conflict and to avoid overworking their shared employee. Other initiatives to divide employees' responsibilities and compensation between local nonprofits were considered, but did not work out; however,

<sup>6</sup> Claire Goutier quoted by Le journal de Lévis, May 29, 2024, [Un service de Regart sauvé](#) [in French only, *Regart's service saved*]

Goutier is hopeful that Regart will be able to develop more resource-sharing with other organizations in the future.

## Artistic identity and community engagement in the face of regional realities (2021–Present)

Another major challenge Regart has faced since the COVID-19 pandemic has been a feeling of disconnection from its audience and member artists.

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*“I didn’t understand the figures [of visitation] that were recorded before [the pandemic], with traffic sometimes reaching 9,000 people, while I dropped to 2,000 or below. (...) So that was a concern, especially because members [artists] themselves weren’t coming to see the exhibitions.” – Claire Goutier*

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As an artist-run centre, Regart has kept artists’ professional development and involvement in leadership at the core of its mandate. Prioritizing artists’ roles as managers, leaders and curators remained a central focus for the organization under Griffon’s leadership from 2009 to 2014.

But Goutier shares that the times have changed, and she has found herself confronted with some indifference from member artists towards the logistics of running the artist-run centre. During recent strategic planning brainstorming sessions, member artists did not have much to contribute about Regart’s programming: the artistic direction was not a topic of conversation for members, and was neither praised nor criticized. Regart’s exhibitions were attracting fewer visitors than ever before, including from Regart’s own member artists. This lack of interest for Regart’s programming was, for Goutier, a sign of a growing disconnect between the organization and its members.

For Goutier, “the pandemic, followed by a major staff change and a lot of exhaustion (...) [plus] a change in artistic direction that wasn’t clear” caused an important shift in many member artists’ perception of Regart, as well as their relationship to it. Many members simply didn’t know who to talk to at Regart anymore or how to relate to the organization.<sup>7</sup>

This was compounded by the organization’s space insecurity: “it’s really the issue of our premises”, explained Goutier, “that’s what takes up a lot of my time and energy, and that means I have less time to devote to the members and to the development of our artistic direction.” Because Regart’s studio and exhibition spaces are all in different locations, there are fewer opportunities for artists, workers and members to engage and interact.

But beyond these problems, Goutier raised a core issue, one that is no doubt familiar to virtually any artist-run centres: as the organization works to support artists’ “professionalization” and compensate them accordingly and fairly, financial resources have become more scarce. As a result, the organization has been relying more and more on uncompensated labor from artists

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<sup>7</sup> Loss of connection to community is a major issue shared by many arts organizations in Canada, as the Cultural Policy Hub reported in its report [Up from the Roots](#) by Brian Loevner.

and arts workers to meet program delivery demands. And as artists develop their professional skills, they are understandably less likely to be willing to perform their labour for little or no pay.

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*“Professional artists are now much less likely to volunteer (which is entirely understandable), since their work deserves to be remunerated. So in reality, it is often people from more amateur or emerging backgrounds who are more involved in the life of the organization. Their contribution is precious, but this can sometimes create tensions with the desire [of the artist-run centre] to maintain a strictly professional approach to dissemination.” – Claire Goutier*

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The artist-run centre now experiences a dichotomy between the more emerging local artists on one hand, who constitute its reliable membership base, its workforce, but also its audience, and the more established artists or artists from urban centres on the other, who are typically those whose work gets exhibited in the gallery spaces. Emerging artists members who contribute their unpaid labor to Regart might observe that they are not well represented in its public programming. According to Goutier, this could explain the decreased gallery visitation from these artists and their community in the region (the gallery’s main audience), and lower participation and membership numbers in general.

Regart’s artistic committee tends to favour the notion of “artistic excellence” as the main criterion to decide which artists get an exhibition, a curatorial approach that aligns with the expectations outlined by CALQ’s funding criteria. Goutier described a contrast with projects from a couple of decades ago that “could bring together artists of different levels of experience in a freer form of creative collaboration, without a very marked hierarchy.” She observed that “over time, dynamics have become more rigid.”

This situation has led Goutier to start questioning the model of peer curation through an artistic committee. She feels that it may have had the unexpected effect of favouring a “very specialized, even somewhat impenetrable selection” of projects that are “highly intellectual”, to the detriment of more accessible projects by local emerging artists.

To build an audience, Regart must offer an artistic program “that resonates with people”, taking into consideration the community it’s in. Goutier hypothesizes that by catering to an “academic audience” and following the expectations of city-based funders, Regart has been growing more and more disconnected from the rural environment that it is supposed to be rooted in.

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*“If you bring an academic project to a rural environment, it doesn’t translate. You really have to go and find the local DNA, and then it’s going to take on a different kind of color. (...) The artistic value will be expressed on a level that is perhaps more human, for example. And it will be about artistic encounters, and then we will create something completely new, and then there will be the emergence of a local artistic milieu, and right now, we are not able to create that milieu.” – Claire Goutier*

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Goutier shared her view that the lack of representation for rural emerging artists makes them less likely to pursue an artistic career compared to their more-formally-trained urban peers, perpetuating a cycle that impedes the development of local artistic voices.

Regart is starting to ideate on how to shift its approach to better balance “exacting” artistic standards with an openness to the diversity of artistic practices. However this change ends up manifesting in Regart’s programming in the years to come, and whatever building the galleries, studios and offices settle in, Goutier plans to continue advocating to local politicians, funders and other nonprofits for the importance of rural community arts as drivers of connection.

Regart’s specific context as an arts organization in a rural environment in proximity to a major city is at the source of some of the organization’s more unique needs. But its challenges to find stability reflect the ones that so many arts, culture and heritage not-for-profit organizations in Canada face. In this case study, researchers at the Cultural Policy Hub found an organization that has been working to address precarity across the range of dimensions the Hub has been examining in its research: organizational finances, access to stable cultural space, workforce and labour issues, and governance. Regart’s changes and transformations provide insight into how one arts organization has worked to address these difficulties. This artistic centre, like many others, is sure to continue to evolve in order to stay relevant, to support artists and to serve their community.

### Regart’s Insights for Arts Leaders

- **Develop a network of local partners:** Collaboration with other local not-for-profit organizations can enable resource sharing and amplify advocacy efforts; importantly, these partners do not have to be arts, culture and heritage organizations, but can instead be found in a variety of nonprofits that share similar social goals or have complementary strengths.
- **Engage the media strategically:** Talking to local news outlets can be an excellent way to raise awareness about the struggles an organization faces, publicize issues and find partners to work with.
- **Build an organizational structure that works for you:** Organizations need to adapt to shifting needs, challenges, and audience behaviors. The processes and governance models that worked in the past may not be as well suited to the conditions in the present, or may need suit the needs and priorities of current leadership and their team. Feel free to keep the processes that work for your team, and simplify or explore alternatives to those that don’t.
- **Anchor your artistic programing in the realities of your surroundings:** “For art to resonate with another person, there has to be links, there has to be a connection.” For the past ten years, Regart has been navigating the issue of trying to connect with local community and offer programs that are attractive to that community, while also presenting work that reflects conceptual and aesthetic innovations that meet funders’ criteria for “artistic excellence.” Small arts organizations, especially those serving rural communities, should reflect on how their programming can balance local identity and emerging artists’ practices alongside broader provincial, national and international artistic trends.

## Regart's Insights for Policymakers & Funders

- **Assess funding based on impact and community engagement:** Arts organizations, especially artist-run centres, rely on local networks to build membership, audience and community engagement. Goutier feels that Regart has been actively discouraged from exhibiting local emerging artists by funding criteria that favors the presentation of more established artists or emerging artists whose practices are based in urban centres. Building in recognition of local artistic practices into funders' programming expectations can help small and mid-size organizations in rural areas thrive.
- **Communicate early and transparently with organizations:** Arts, culture and heritage nonprofits can face ongoing destabilization as a result of changes in policy or decisions that impact their access to space; providing as much notice as possible about changes in leases, funding, land use, etc. can allow organizations to plan and adapt. Be proactive in clarifying the terms of agreements to avoid misunderstandings and pre-empt conflicts down the line.
- **Ensure cohesive relationship management between your teams:** Regart suffered from conflicting messaging between the Cultural and Economic Development Departments at the City of Levis, causing uncertainties and eroding trust. Working collaboratively across departments and presenting a unified response can enable an organization to better cooperate with policy goals.