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Artist First is Mercer Union's commissioning platform, and the first of its kind among artist-run centres in Canada.

We gratefully acknowledge our 2025-26 Annual Supporters, Funders, and Sponsors:

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TD Communications & Engagement Assistant is made possible with Leading Support from TD Bank Group

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Mercer Union acknowledges the support of its staff, volunteers and members, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Arts Council, and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council.

Mercer Union is a non-profit, artist-run centre dedicated to commissioning and producing new works of contemporary art, and providing an engaging program that encourages critical inquiry and conversation. We champion ambitious exhibitions that empower diverse Canadian and international artists in formative and established stages of their practice.

Mercer Union
a centre for contemporary art

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Curator & Head of Exhibitions: Aamna Muzaffar
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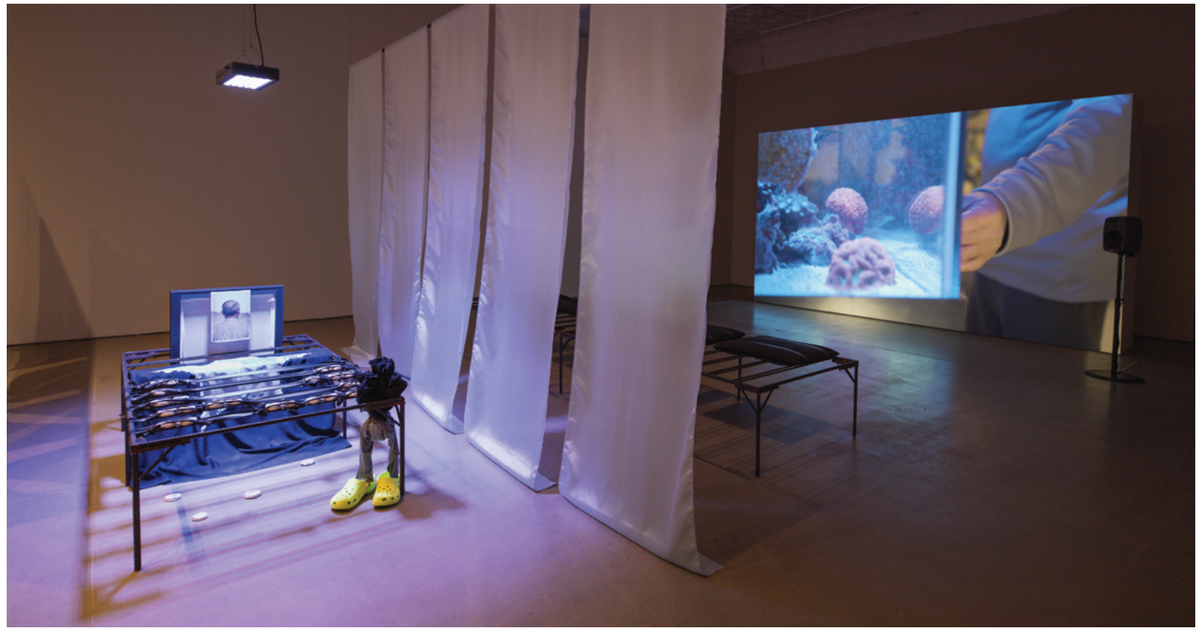
ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT
FY2025–26

Mercer Union
a centre for contemporary art

HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander, *How Is Where You Are*, 2025. Installation view: Mercer Union. Courtesy the artists and Franz Kaka, Toronto. Photo: Vuk Dragojevic.



Alvin Luong, *DEPHINITELY PARADISE*, 2026. Installation view: Mercer Union. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Vuk Dragojevic.

groundwork, 2025. Installation view: Mercer Union. Courtesy the artists. Photo: Vuk Dragojevic.

SUPPORT FOR ARTISTS

In 2025–26, Mercer Union presented the inaugural edition of *groundwork* in collaboration with Luis Jacob, EMILIA-AMALIA working group, and Kate Wong; presented new commissions by HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajandar and Alvin Luong; and a yearlong *SPACE* billboard commission by Alize Zorlutuna. Across our exhibitions and public programs, we supported:

28 CREATIVE PRACTITIONERS

25 COMMISSIONED ARTWORKS

$55K ARTIST, PRODUCTION, & WRITER FEES

This year's artistic programming benefited from sponsorship and project support from the Canada Council of the Arts; TD Bank Group; Partners in Art; and RBC Foundation. *Artist First* Commissions were generously supported by:

20 INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES

$23K COMMISSIONING CONTRIBUTIONS

Artist First COMMISSIONS

Alize Zorlutuna: *Surface Tension*
17 October 2025—23 September 2026

A series of three works by the Toronto-based artist exploring the relationship between bodies and ecologies, presented on our *SPACE* billboard platform.

HaeAhn Paul Kwon Kajander: *How Is Where You Are*
18 October 2025—17 January 2026

First institutional solo exhibition by the artist duo based in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia; a sculptural installation engaging with the inherited technologies that quietly organize our lives.

Alvin Luong: *DEPHINITELY PARADISE*
13 February—9 May 2026

First institutional solo exhibition by the Toronto-based artist; a film and installation of sculptures and frottage works dealing with histories of migration and trade.

PARTICIPATION & REACH

We connected communities and fostered engagement around contemporary art and its role in society. In doing so, we cultivated new audiences for arts and culture. Our audiences enjoy a wide range of our programming, from public talks and workshops to artist-led exhibition walkthrough videos and publishing initiatives.

6.5K VISITORS ENGAGED

2.4K WORLDWIDE READERS

15.8K ONLINE VIEWERS

16 TALKS & WORKSHOPS

25 GUIDED TOURS

413 COMMUNITY GROUP ATTENDEES

We engaged local audiences through partnerships with CONTACT Photography Festival, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, and York University. Our exhibitions received extensive local, national, and international media coverage, including *Artforum*, *CBC Arts, Cornelia Magazine*, and *Akimbo*, among others.

INVESTING IN ARTISTIC RISK

This year's program exemplified how Mercer Union fosters a culture of experimentation and artistic risk, encouraging artists to pursue new directions and to produce their most ambitious work to date. Our 2025–26 *Artist First* commissions backed milestone projects, with a record number of commissioned artworks by Canadian artists, each developed under our dedicated curatorial and technical guidance.

That same willingness to experiment and meet the moment extended to our own institutional form. Last June, we launched *groundwork*, an incubator program for defining emergent grounds for contemporary art. The inaugural edition invited three groups of cultural practitioners to develop their projects concurrently in our gallery over time. Activated by an exhibition and 13 public programs delivered over 10 weeks, *groundwork* brought artists into direct conversation with educators, urban planners, government officials, and members of the general public on the conditions impacting artistic and cultural production in Toronto, such as censorship, austerity, and isolation. The program has since been presented as a case study at Fogo Island Arts and in several academic journals, affirming Mercer Union as a site of responsiveness and critical discourse for the artistic community.