

NEWS RELEASE

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Out from Under

Disability, History and Things to Remember

ROM presents exhibition on Canadian disability history, April 17, 2008

(Toronto, Ontario – April 1, 2008) The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) is proud to present ***Out from Under: Disability, History and Things to Remember***, a powerful exhibit exploring Canadian disability history. A display of 13 diverse objects reveals a rich and nuanced history that pays tribute to the resilience, creativity, and the civic and cultural contributions of Canadians with disabilities. The first of its kind in Canada, *Out from Under* was produced in collaboration with students, scholars and alumni from Ryerson University and will be on display on Level 3 of the ROM's historic building from **Thursday, April 17, 2008 to July 13, 2008**.

“This important exhibition explores the rich history of persons with disabilities, drawing attention to their struggles for survival and remembrance,” William Thorsell, ROM Director and CEO. “We are pleased to work with Ryerson University to bring these histories to a broader Museum audience.”

Out from Under is curated by faculty members from Ryerson University's School of Disability Studies. Their work was supported by the RBC Foundation through the Ryerson – RBC Institute for Disabilities Studies Research and Education. The curatorial team, Associate Professor Kathryn Church, Professor of Distinction Catherine Frazee, and Director Melanie Panitch, launched a new special topic seminar designed to uncover the hidden history of disability. Students were invited to identify an object representing a particular era or moment in Canadian disability history and explore its significance.

“No one can come away from *Out from Under: Disability History and Things to Remember* unaffected and unchanged. What began as an assignment and a discussion among Ryerson students and faculty

became a powerful and compelling exhibit with a message for us all," said Sheldon Levy, President of Ryerson University.

"I'm proud to be a part of this collaborative effort that pays tribute to the contributions of Canadians with disabilities," says Dr. Marie Bountrogianni, President and Executive Director, ROM Governors, "both in terms of what the ROM is striving to do with our accessibility initiatives, as well as my personal history of passing the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act as a Minister of the Provincial Parliament of Ontario."

The 13-panel installation premiered in October 2007 at the ten-day Abilities Arts Festival in Toronto.

"The reclaiming of history is a project of celebration and struggle, of solidarity and subversion," said co-curator Catherine Frazee. "Disabled people don't seek merely to participate in Canadian culture – we want to create it, shape it and stretch it beyond its tidy edges."

About the exhibit:

Each of the histories unfolds from a one word title, for example:

Labouring draws attention to the unpaid labours of three women inmates at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane during the early 1900s.

Dressing features 16 identical sweatsuits that were typically worn by inmates in Ontario's 16 residential institutions and brings attention to the thousands of Canadians with intellectual disabilities currently living in conditions equally drab and formless.

Measuring brings into the question the increasingly complex methods used to diagnose, categorize and place people by measuring certain kinds of intelligence.

Packing presents a trunk sent with a seven year-old boy to the Orillia Asylum for Idiots in the early 1950s. Between 1876 and 1950, almost 10,000 lives were crammed into trunks as people with intellectual disabilities were institutionalized.

Breathing features a rigid fiberglass chamber used by people with respiratory paralysis. This section focuses on the contributions of Reverend Roy Essex, who travelled throughout Ontario for over 30 years repairing these machines.

Out from Under is fully accessible. The exhibit will include special features, such as a video podcast of all exhibit text in American Sign Language; audio podcasts of all exhibit text with detailed visual descriptions;

and touch stations profiling selected objects. Podcasts will be available through the ROM website at www.rom.on.ca/media/podcasts.

Other information:

A 60-page catalogue entitled *Out from Under: Disability, History and Things to Remember* (2008), accompanies the exhibition. Written by the curatorial team and produced by the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University it will be available in soft cover for \$30 (plus applicable taxes) at the ROM Museum Store and, as of April 17, at the Ryerson University Bookstore, 17 Gould Street, Toronto.

The ROM's Accessibility Initiatives:

The ROM is committed to accessibility for all visitors and has developed a comprehensive accessibility policy. To ensure that all visitors can enjoy the collections and allow for greater physical access, the Museum aims to be barrier-free in all public areas. The main entrance is stair-free and all floors are accessible by elevator or platform lift. The Museum's wayfinding system includes Braille and tactile elements. The ROM offers visitors complimentary wheelchairs, large-format floor plans, captioning of the digital donor wall, sign language podcasts, descriptive audio guides, tactile elements in the galleries and increased seating throughout the Museum. Service animals are welcome. The Museum is working towards expanding its offerings, including a tactile-tour for visitors who are blind and those with vision loss and the addition of tactile models to accompany the museum's descriptive audio tour.

Ryerson University and the School of Disability Studies:

The Ryerson University Disability Studies program is the first of its kind in Canada to provide degree education from a disability studies perspective. It is based on the premise that the disadvantage typically experienced by those who are disabled reflects, primarily, the way society defines and responds to disability.

Ryerson University is Canada's leader in career-focused education, offering close to 90 PhD, master's, and undergraduate programs in the Faculty of Arts; the Faculty of Communication & Design; the Faculty of Community Services; the Faculty of Engineering, Architecture and Science; and the Ted Rogers School of Management. Ryerson University has graduate and undergraduate enrolment of 25,000 students. With more than 64,000 registrations annually, The G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education is Canada's leading provider of university-based adult education.

The exhibit is generously supported by:



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The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) is an agency of the Government of Ontario.

Opened in 1914, Canada's largest museum combining both natural history and world cultures holds six million objects in its collections and presents public galleries showcasing art, archaeology and natural science. Renaissance ROM is an ambitious expansion and heritage renovation project that reasserts the Royal Ontario Museum as one of North America's great museums and a leading cultural attraction for the city, province and country. Renaissance ROM continues until 2010 with several new and renovated galleries to be created at the Museum.

For 24-hour information in English and French, please call 416.586.8000 or visit the ROM's web site at www.rom.on.ca

Upcoming ROM Gallery Openings:

April 5, 2008	Shreyas and Mina Ajmera Gallery of Africa, the Americas and Asia-Pacific
April 16, 2008	Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles & Costume
December 2008	Teck Cominco Suite of Earth Sciences Galleries
Early 2009	Schad Gallery of Biodiversity: Life in Crisis

Upcoming Exhibitions:

April 26, 2008	<i>Shanghai 1860-1949: Historical Photographs</i> , exhibit sponsor Manulife Financial
May 4, 2008	<i>Shanghai Kaleidoscope</i> , presented by Manulife Financial
October 25, 2008	<i>Diamonds</i> , presented by De Beers Canada
November 29, 2008	<i>Ancient Ukraine: Mysteries of the Trypillian Culture</i>