

# PSYCHEDELICS



*Psilocybin Rabbit*, by Xiaojing Yan. 2022

**ROM**

# Introduction

Mushroom man cave painting.  
Algeria, 7000–5000 BC

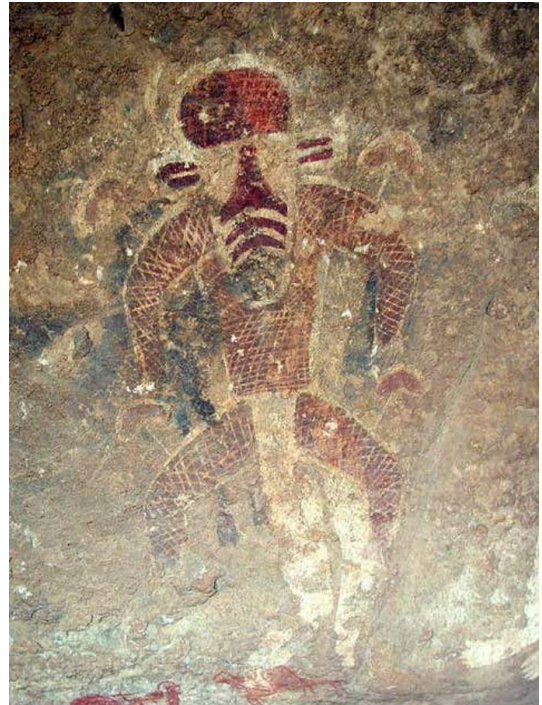
Medicine.

Mind-manifesting drug.

Hallucinogen.

There is no simple way to describe “psychedelics.” From sacred traditions stewarded over millennia to mental health research today, psychedelics mean many things to many different people.

How we understand psychedelics has cultural, scientific, and political consequences. And it is critical that our understanding encompasses multiple perspectives.



ROM’s thrilling new exhibition is a thought-provoking, transdisciplinary journey through the science and cross-cultural uses of psychedelics. It spans centuries, cultures, and continents to place the boundless nature of psychedelics into focus. It will also evoke the unnerving, colourful, and downright “trippy” experience of these substances.

The exhibition’s goal is to prompt reflection and invite dialogue about the role psychedelics could, should, and should not play in our shared futures.

*Currently in development, the exhibition will open at ROM in Summer 2026 and will be available for tour in 2027 and 2028.*

# What Are Psychedelics?

The exhibition begins by offering visitors both scientific and cultural definitions for psychedelics. They are contextualized within the human pursuit of altered states of consciousness. Psychedelics are not presented as a novel, groovy obsession but an essential part of longstanding cultural practices.

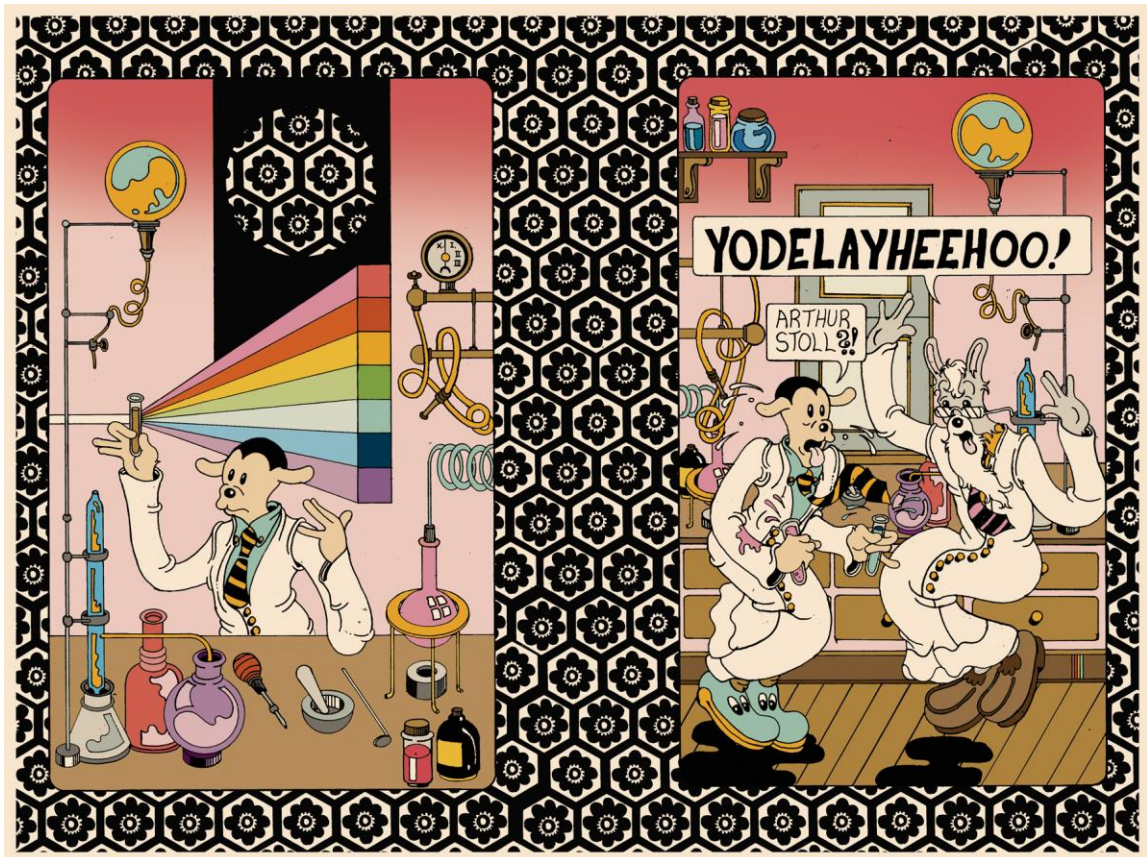
Objects and media will include a yarn painting from the Huichol, an Indigenous group of northern Mexico; a historic exchange between famed writer and psychonaut, Aldous Huxley, and the psychiatrist who coined “psychedelics,” Humphrey Osmond; and artworks and artifacts connected to states of transcendence.



Huichol Yarn Painting, c. 1975. Mexico. ROM

# How Do Psychedelics Work & Where Do They Come From?

Informed by close consultations with some of today's leading researchers in the field, the exhibition explores how psychedelics are thought to affect brain communication. Visitors encounter the natural sources of psychedelics (plants, fungi, and animals!) that grow around the world. The exhibition uses specimens, models, and botanical illustrations to share the vast diversity of these species and how psychoactive compounds serve their ecosystems.



*Bicycle Day* by Brian Blomerth. 2019. *Anthology Editions*.

# How Have People Used Psychedelics, Past & Present?

Visitors explore historic and traditional practices involving psychedelic substances by examining the objects and belongings that accompanied their use. The exhibition shares the history of psychedelics as revered substances and integral components of ceremonies, rituals, and prayers across ancient civilizations for many millennia.



Covered Censer with Butterfly-masked Warrior Lid, 450-650 CE. Mexico. Gardiner Museum

The living cultural practices that incorporate these substances are explored. Media, cultural belongings, and firsthand perspectives from the Huichol in Mexico, Bwiti practitioners in Gabon, Native American Church in Canada, and Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto expand knowledge of the contemporary use of psychedelics and the interrelationship between science and spiritual practice.



Huichol Men's Ensemble, 1969. Mexico, ROM

# What Is A Psychedelic “Trip”?

A mind-bending, immersive AV installation delves into the sensory phenomena associated with “tripping,” like intensifying colour and expanding fractal patterns.

This section presents the risks of taking psychedelics and shares the cultural and clinical importance of “set and setting” – the mind space and environment ahead of a psychedelic experience.

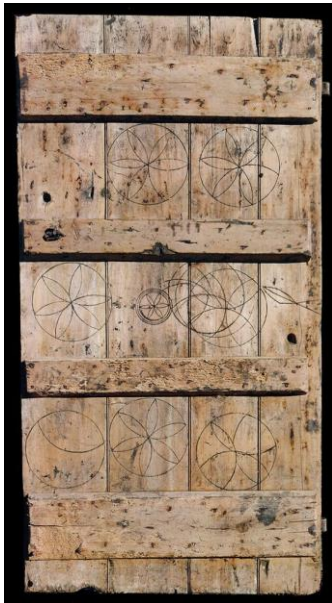


Geometric patterns. Adobe Stock Images.  
Image for reference only.

# How Do We Protect People & Psychedelics?

## What is Our Psychedelic Future?

Visitors explore the historical relationship between counterculture, psychedelics, and social punishment with stories of witchcraft and hippies. In addition, the exhibition presents human threats to psychedelic species and Indigenous cultural practices. Visitors focus on the near endangerment of the peyote plant and conservation efforts led by Indigenous communities to preserve their ways of life.



Calf shed door marked with magical symbols, c.1800. England. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Cole

*Jimi Hendrix: Explosion, 1967.* Martin Sharp. England. ROM

Finally, we ask visitors to consider the future of psychedelics as they explore ethical questions about their use, regulation, and accessibility. Interactive activities inspire reflection and dialogue as psychedelics enter retail spaces, stock markets, and clinical settings.

# Curator: Dr. Justin Jennings

Justin Jennings, Senior Curator of Latin American Archaeology at ROM, has conducted archaeological fieldwork in Peru for the last 25 years, publishing 14 books and more than 100 articles and chapters based on his research. His latest book, entitled *Rethinking Global Governance: Learning from Long-Ignored Societies* was published in 2023. His interests include the spread of early civilization, the first cities, feasting, globalization, and archaeological tourism.



Dr. Jennings has curated exhibitions on the ancient peoples of the Americas including *Ancient Peru Unearthed: Golden Treasures from a Lost Civilization* (2007), *Maya: Secrets of their Ancient World* (2011), *Toronto Underfoot: 10,000 Years of Our History* (2014), and *TSARNITUT! Music Born of the Cold* (2023).

Dr. Jennings is an Associate Professor at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Toronto. Prior to joining ROM in 2006, Dr. Jennings taught at Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania and the University of California, Santa Barbara.

*Advisors: ROM has consulted an extensive group of cultural, scientific, and medical advisors. A list of advisors can be provided upon request.*



# Fact Sheet

**Objects:** approx. 90. Includes: 1960s/1970s posters; paintings; costumes; textile arts; sculptures; anthropological objects; archival material (letters, magazines, film/TV footage); botanical specimens; models and props

**Highlight experiences include:** immersive psychedelic trip; interactive world map; peyote terrarium; recreation of modern dosing room; window-monitors that depict and describe commonly recorded visuals linked to psychedelic trips; poll stations to spark contemporary dialogue among visitors

**Size:** 5,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (460 m<sup>2</sup>)

**Loan Fee (upon request) includes:**

- All objects, mounts, hanging systems
- English/French didactics, sent digitally
- AV content supplied digitally
- Bespoke AV equipment for psychedelic trip

**Additional costs to venue:**

- Casework
- Graphic production
- Translation
- Insurance
- Inbound shipping
- Courier costs for installation and deinstallation (est. 2 weeks each)
- Lender courier costs (if any)
- Security oversight
- Local costs
- Travel costs for 1 ROM VIP for opening

