

Brief to the Standing Committee on Finance

Sustaining Canadian Media Arts: For Today and Tomorrow

2006 Federal Pre-Budget Consultations

Prepared on behalf of the Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA) by:

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"Today, Canada is a leader. Our businesses, our athletes, our artists, musicians and writers, all excel on the world stage and our country leads by example, standing up for the values that make Canada great -- helping to ensure the spread of freedom, democracy and the rule of law around the world."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper addressing the crowd gathered for Canada Day Celebrations, Ottawa, ON, July 1, 2006.

INTRODUCTION

The Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA) is a national association representing over 80 independent film, video, and new media production, distribution, and exhibition organizations across Canada, who in turn serve over 12,000 independent media artists and cultural workers. (Additional background information and membership list is appended to this brief.) We have member organizations divided into 5 regions in all 10 provinces, as well as in the Yukon and Northwest Territories. This past year, the IMAA formally established the National Indigenous Media Arts Coalition (NIMAC), a new caucus consisting of aboriginal media artists and organizations across the country.

We appreciate the opportunity to present this brief to the Standing Committee on Finance on behalf of our members and the diverse communities that we represent.

The IMAA was pleased to hear that the Federal Government recognized the critical need for increased funding to the arts in the May 2nd 2006 federal budget. This new funding comprises a \$20 million increase to the Canada Council for the Arts in its parliamentary appropriation for the current fiscal year, rising to \$30 million in 2007-2008. The urgent call for increased funding of the Canada Council has been a key message of the IMAA over the past several years and was echoed by many groups across the country, notably by the Canadian Arts Coalition and the Canadian Conference of the Arts.

This is an encouraging first step towards accomplishing the many vital goals held by the arts and cultural sector. Even still, IMAA wants to call the Finance Committee's attention to the need for longer term, sustainable fiscal investment in the arts and we urge the Government of Canada to make this a public policy priority.

The \$50 million pledged in the federal budget will likely bring much needed aid to the major performing arts organizations, which is essential for their sustainability and survival. However, it will not go far enough to relieve the pressures faced by the arts and cultural sector at large, which includes smaller artist-run organizations and independent artists, of whom the IMAA represents those working in the media arts community.

The growth in the media arts is tremendous, as more and more artists are working in film, video and new media to advance artistic creation and innovation in the 21st century. This is in large part due to the pervasiveness of media as a form of audiovisual expression within our culture.

Canada's youth are exposed to and become familiar with television, the Internet, video, film, and other new technologies long before most other forms of visual communication

or artistic production. In view of this “new” reality, many emerging artists are moving to the media arts as a dynamic form of creative expression. The independent media artist chooses to work outside the conventional media industry in order to reflect the true stories from our diverse communities, to illustrate the eclectic landscape of our country, and to foster new, creative ideas to accompany the uses of new technologies. Media art is the visual language of our times. Independent media art is central to our expression of Canadian identity and helps shape our values in relation to inclusiveness, diversity, tolerance and multiculturalism.

Along with the many media arts centres, a lot of which are now over 25 years old, there is also a dramatic growth in new organizations, festivals and artist-run centres working in distribution, exhibition, dissemination, and production. These are exhilarating times, but media arts organizations struggle to keep pace with changing technologies in order to serve their growing memberships. Production standards are constantly changing, which dramatically affects the ability for independent film, video, and new media artists to access festivals, distributors, and broadcasters. Additional Canada Council funding is crucial for audience and market development within the media arts community.

Statutory Funding for Arts and Culture

The cultural sector suffers from unstable funding; we are requesting that funding for the cultural sector be made statutory. We are asking the Canadian government to assure increased and sustained support for the arts and culture in Canada, as it is essential for enhancing cultural productivity in Canada.

A study recently released by the Guggenheim Museum in New York confirms that art education in public schools improves literacy and critical thinking skills among students.¹ This study finally recognizes what has been intuitively known by the arts sector for years, and suggests that cuts to arts programs to increase reading and math programs is not the best solution. Developing a national strategy to underline the importance of arts and culture in Canada would help to establish Canada as a leading country for arts and culture.

In a scenario of economic globalization, a country that does not actively support and promote its own culture will surely be swamped by the exported cultures of other countries. Canada, living next to the US elephant², can ill afford to be complacent in supporting Canadian culture or it will soon find itself subsumed by America.

The arts define who we are as a nation and how other nations see us. They are our calling card in the international community. As the Government's own statistics indicate, every dollar invested in the cultural sector results in a substantial addition (more than 4 dollars) to Canada's GDP (Statistics Canada 2002). Based on the economic stimulus that cultural activity creates, IMAA believes that any increased amount invested in the cultural sector will bring back increased tax revenues.

¹ “Guggenheim Study Suggests Arts Education Benefits Literary Skills” New York Times, July 27th 2006

² “Are We Losing Our Best and Brightest to the U.S?”

http://www.isuma.net/v01n01/frank/frank_f.shtml

Investing in culture would “ensure physical infrastructure in our communities” and to enable “high levels of productivity growth”, making “our communities desirable places in which citizens want to live and work”. With over 700,000 jobs, the cultural sector is now a major and growing part of the Canadian economy. Government statistics show the significant impact of cultural support and the beneficial economic spin-offs. The total investment in the cultural sector from the different levels of government totals approximately \$7 billion, and that translates into a contribution of over \$33 billions to Canada’s GDP and 733,000 jobs.³

Tax Measures and Income Averaging for Artists

Canada’s arts organizations and artists are the backbone of the cultural sector in this country. At the heart of the cultural sector lie not-for-profit arts organizations, mostly receiving their core support from the Canada Council for the Arts and struggling to mount their exhibitions, shows, tours, productions, festivals, under-funded, short-staffed and unable to pay adequate artist fees.

There is an urgent need to improve conditions for artists and cultural workers. Artists have one of the lowest levels of income in the country. Canadian artists and cultural workers on the whole live below the poverty line⁴ and experienced cultural workers leave the sector in large numbers because salaries are below market standards. Cultural workers and artists have high levels of education, and often earn only slightly more than overall labour force workers with only a high school diploma.⁵ Working conditions are difficult, there is little recognition or support for those behind the scenes, and most arts organizations don’t have the means to offer benefits to their employees, leaving little incentive for one to pursue a career in the cultural sector. Studies by the Cultural Human Resources Council have shown that most cultural workers do not have benefits.⁶

A report by Hill Strategies Research, "A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada" based on 2001 census labour force counts, finds a number of significant characteristics about

³ Statistics Canada. *Canada: A Portrait*. 57th edition. 2002, p.9.

⁴ The cultural sector has about 516,000 workers and comprises 3.1% of the total labour force in Canada. One in every 32 people in Canada has a cultural occupation. Incomes are relatively low in the cultural sector, with average earnings in the cultural sector (\$29,951) being about 6% lower than average earnings in the total labour force in Canada (\$31,757). The lowest paid occupations in the cultural sector are among the worst paid of any occupations in the entire labour force.
Source: *Cultural Human Resources Council, Canada’s Cultural Sector Labour Force (July 2004)*

⁵ With average earnings of \$23,500, artists are in the lowest quarter of average earnings of all occupation groups. ... over 40% of the artists holding a university degree.
Source: A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada - Ontario Arts Council:
http://www.arts.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/nts_1_1128_1.html

⁶ Page 119 – "Defiant Imagination" by Max Wyman
"We are approaching a crisis point in the development of the professional arts in Canada. Individual burnout is endemic in a generation whose careers have been spent in the pioneering, often frustrating task of building our non-profit arts organizations and keeping them on an even business keel."

From "*Face of the Future*", CHRC Human resource study available from their website:
<http://www.culturalhrc.ca>

artists, including very low earnings and strong growth in the number of artists between 1971 and 2001:

*"Artists' average earnings are well below the labour force average. In fact, artists, earnings fell further behind the overall labour force between 1991 and 2001. In 1991, artists earned 76% of the labour force average, but this figure decreased slightly to 74% in 2001."*⁷

We urge the government to act decisively by increasing funding for the arts and by implementing legislation which responds to the need for social benefits and tax remuneration for artists.

Increased Support for the Canada Council for the Arts

The Canada Council for the Arts has done an exemplary job in fulfilling its mandate, and is admired and imitated by other countries.⁸ Canada has a strong arts community, many of our artists attribute their international success to the timely support of the Canada Council and of the provincial funding agencies, which recognized their potential in the early stages of their careers, giving them the means to accomplish their goals.

The year 2007 marks a significant milestone for the Canada Council for the Arts. This coming year, the Canada Council celebrates its 50th anniversary. In a recent speech by Simon Brault, vice-chair of the Canada Council for the Arts, he addressed this landmark anniversary and spoke about his future hopes for the Canada Council for the Arts.

*"In 50 years the Council must not have become an empty shell that does not protect artistic freedom, while the market and the economic clout of corporations and the wealthy decide on every detail of our cultural environment and choices. In short, 50 years from now the Council must not have become the antithesis of what had been envisaged by its founders in the mid-20th century and their descendents at the beginning of the 21st. It must not bury the ideal of art as the catalyst for individual and social freedom – it must be, still and always, the champion and nurturer of an artistic activity that raises us to new heights of humanity."*⁹

Government funding for the arts is essential for nourishing artistic freedom and creativity. It must also adapt and develop with the changing landscape of artistic creation. As more artists are working in more complex mediums such as electronic, internet, video and

⁷ Hill Strategies Research, ⁷ "A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada".

⁸ "The Power of Culture," Final Declaration and Plan of Action of the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, held at Stockholm, 30 March- 2 April 1998. <http://www.unesco-sweden.org/Conference/Action-Plan.htm>

"At the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, held at Stockholm in 1998, Canada was recognized for its cutting-edge policies promoting cultural diversity. One example of this is the effort of the Canada Council for the Arts."

⁹ Excerpt from Speech by Simon Brault, Vice-Chair, Canada Council for the Arts, Public Forum on Inter-Arts organized by the Quebec Interdisciplinary Arts Network, Saturday, Montreal, February 11, 2006

multi-disciplinary practices, funding must be increased to match the needs of these diverse practices. The recent injection to the Canada Council does not go far enough to reach the increasing demands within the media art section at the Canada Council for the arts.

So, while we are all celebrating the Council's 50th anniversary and breathing a deep sigh of relief with the recent, however modest, injection of public funding to the Council, we must continue to press the urgent need for federal funds to match the growth and diversification of arts and culture in Canada and to reflect the emergence of new ways of making art.

Investing in our Cultural Spaces

Many not-for-profit arts groups and organizations are currently facing crisis situations in relation to their facilities. The current infrastructure related to physical spaces for the arts is tenuous. Many arts groups and organizations move into less expensive parts of town, seeking affordable spaces in vacated, formerly industrial buildings, only to see the neighbourhood become popular and rents increase so that they must move again. In short, these organizations are the root cause of the sudden growth and revitalization of these neighbourhoods yet they are forced to leave.

Arts groups need support in various ways to allow them to establish permanent venues for the creation and presentation of art works, be they theatrical plays, exhibitions of visual arts, musical performances or cutting edge screenings of media art. The Cultural Spaces Canada component of *Tomorrow Starts Today* provided some support for venues. Another mechanism the government could provide would be guaranteed mortgages for non-profit cultural organisations, as the government does for low-cost housing; yet another important method could be increasing capital programs for purchasing buildings.

The ability for smaller artist-run organizations to purchase space would enable them to build equity, gain long-term stability in order to make long-standing relationships with their communities, to develop community educational programs and to invest additional funds to enhance the quality of their programming. These groups bring immeasurable value to their surroundings and are key players in city revitalization projects.

Support for the Preservation of Media Art Works

The preservation and archiving of film, video and new media work is a major concern amongst all media arts organizations. Throughout Canada's media arts centres reside thousands and thousands of valuable works reflecting the history of media arts in Canada.

Audio/video/film collections include experimental, narrative and documentary works by artists; edited and raw recordings of events, processes and sites; historical and cultural documents; workshop experiments; sponsored projects; compilations of local productions; tapes deposited by visiting artists; and compiled programs.

Archives are used by curators and programmers from across Canada and abroad. Other researchers, writers and critics, as well as students and classes from high schools and post-secondary institutions, and emerging media producers, have, and continue to take advantage of these archives.

Due to the ongoing funding problems in media arts centres, these archives have not been stored in ideal situations. There are few funding sources accessible for maintaining them. Another issue is obtaining/maintaining obsolete playback equipment for the original formats. Additionally, artists in the future will be using other modes and mediums of expression-interactive multi-media and CDs, web-based art, virtual reality, etc. We must, therefore, begin to give serious consideration to how these new forms will be preserved, stored, and accessed, and try to develop a system which will accommodate these new works.

In addition, Canada's Indigenous cultural works are in critical need of being preserved. The loss of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage within the Aboriginal Media Arts Community would be a serious loss for Canada, and an even greater loss for humanity. Aboriginal culture is the foundation of Canadian identity. The visual records of our nation are held on videotapes, film reels and other new media formats that must be maintained.

The preservation of this resource is of urgent concern. If the issue is not addressed very soon, we are in real danger of losing this audio-visual heritage forever. We urge the Federal Government to increase support to the Canadian Audio Visual Preservation Trust, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the National Library and Archives of Canada to expand the process of preservation, archiving, cataloguing, and collection maintenance of Canadian media art works.

Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Canada

Independent media arts groups working in film, video and new media labor tirelessly and ceaselessly, with limited resources, to produce, promote, exhibit and distribute Canadian media art works; and, despite these contributions, Canadian media art works remain largely unseen, underappreciated, and underserved. This is in large part due to lack of funding to support the hiring of media arts curators within our contemporary art institutions. The largest public art institution in the country, the National Gallery of Canada, has not been able to adequately represent the range of media art works with any consistency for close to a decade.

The National Gallery of Canada has the mandate to develop, maintain and make known, throughout Canada and internationally, a national collection of works of art, historic and contemporary, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada; and to further knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of art in general among all Canadians.

While the National Gallery of Canada does acquire, exhibit and program media art works, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of films screened and collected. In addition, the NGC has failed to adequately represent the growing number of works being produced in video and new media.

Canada is recognized internationally for the artworks coming out of the media arts sector with international awards being attributed to artists working in film, video installation and

new media. The National Gallery of Canada must reflect this in their acquisitions and collections programs for contemporary art.

The National Gallery of Canada is lagging behind its international counterparts. In the United States, the Whitney Museum of American Art currently employs Chrissie Illes as Media Art Curator. The Guggenheim has also employs a media arts curator named Jon Ippolito. Overseas, the Australian Network for Art and Technology hosts training sessions for international curators, master classes on media art curation, while the Tate Modern in the United Kingdom has initiated guidelines for the curation and care of media art. The need for a separate curatorial position strictly for media art is timely and essential for the National Gallery of Canada to remain on the world stage.

We urge the Federal Government to increase support to the National Gallery of Canada expressly for the Department of Contemporary Art, in order to increase their capacity to curate, collect and exhibit contemporary media art works.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1 – That the Government of Canada ensure cultural funding is "statutory" spending. The Department of Heritage's funding has the highest proportion of non-statutory spending of all federal departments, and is therefore at a higher risk of being reduced or withdrawn by this or any subsequent Government.

2 – That the Government of Canada implement tax measures for artists, an income tax exemption of up to \$60,000 of annual copyright income, on a sliding scale similar to that which currently exists in Quebec.

3 – That the Government of Canada secure increased funding of the arts through the Canada Council for the Arts

4 – That the Government of Canada increase capital support for arts groups seeking to purchase their spaces and institute a program for guaranteeing mortgages for arts and cultural organizations.

5 – That the Government of Canada assures increased funding for the preservation and archiving of audiovisual and media art works.

6 – That the Government of Canada secure increased funding to the National Gallery of Canada to increase the presentation and acquisition of Canadian media art works and to formally appoint a Media Art Curator.

CONCLUSION

The arts are a public good and should be adequately supported by the Government of Canada. Investments in culture pay off with economic spin-offs, an increased quality of life in Canada, an enhanced reputation for Canada on the world stage, and a heritage for the generations to follow us. The Independent Media Arts Alliance urges the government to make Canada's arts and culture a public policy priority by providing the support required for artists and arts organizations.

BACKGROUND ON THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARTS ALLIANCE

This year, the Independent Media Arts Alliance celebrates its 25th anniversary. Since 1981 the Alliance has worked to improve opportunities for independent media artists at every stage of funding, production, distribution and exhibition. The Alliance defines an independent media art production as being:

“...a film, video, new media or audio art creation, on any format and/or device of presentation envisioned, over which the creator maintains complete editorial and artistic control up to the final version.”

The Alliance supports a diversity of visions in artistic and social consciousness, and the Alliance members make a commitment to take anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic positions in terms of hiring, distribution, production and representation. The Alliance members respect and support the autonomy of Aboriginal cultural representation.

Now over 35 years old, the independent film and video movement has been an essential part of the growth of the Canadian film industry. In regions where the filmmaking infrastructure is limited, media art centres have provided equipment and financial support to Canadian independent filmmakers. Many of Canada's most acclaimed cinematic voices have come from the independent media arts milieu.

The media arts are also an increasingly key part of Canada's arts scene. Canada's video and new media artists have achieved international acclaim, bringing Canada recognition at major art events like the Venice Biennale.

The Canadian Government itself, through the *Status of the Artist Act*, recognizes the *“importance of the contribution of artists to the cultural, social, economic and political enrichment of Canada.”*

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IMAG - Indigenous Media Arts Group

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T (613) 238-7648
sawvideo@sawvideo.com
www.sawvideo.com

SOIL Digital Media Suite

203 - 1856 Scarth St.
Regina, SK S4P 2G3
T (306) 522-7166
neutralground@accesscomm.ca
www.neutralground.sk.ca/soil

SOUTHERN CURRENTS

90 Oxford St. #8
Toronto, ON M5T 1P3
T (416) 966-4989
info@alucinefestival.com
www.alucinefestival.com

SPIRAFILM

541, Saint-Vallier E., C.P. #1
Québec, QC G1K 3P9

T (418) 523-1275
spirafilm@meduse.org
www.spirafilm.com

STRUTS GALLERY/FAUCET MEDIA ARTS

7 Lorne St., Sackville
NB E4L 3Z6
T (506) 536-1211
info@strutsgallery.ca
www.strutsgallery.ca

STUDIO XX

338 Terrasse Saint-Denis
Montréal, QC H2X 1E8
T (514) 845-7934
info@studioXX.org - www.studioxx.org

TAIS - Toronto Animated Image Society

37 Hanna Ave. #231
Toronto, ON M6K 1W9
T (416) 533-7889
tais@bellnet.ca - www.awn.com/tais

TRIBE

12 - 23rd St. East, 2nd floor
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T (306) 244-4814
tribe.inc@sk.sympatico.ca

TRINITY SQUARE VIDEO

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Toronto, ON M5V 3A8
T (416) 593-1332
staff@trinitysquarevideo.com
www.trinitysquarevideo.com

ULLUS COLLECTIVE

RR#2 Site 50 Comp 8
Penticton, BC V2A 6J7
T (250) 493-7181

URBAN SHAMAN

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T (204) 942-2674
www.urbanshaman.org

V TAPE

401 Richmond St. W # 452
Toronto, ON M5V 3A8
T (416) 351-1317

wandav@vtape.org
www.vtape.org

VIDEOGRAPHE

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info@videographe.qc.ca
www.videographe.qc.ca

**VIFVF - Victoria Independent
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Victoria, BC V8W 3S1
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festival@vifvf.com
www.vifvf.com

VIDEO FEMMES

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Québec, QC G1K 3P5
T (418) 529-9188
info@videofemmes.org
www.videofemmes.org

VIDEO POOL

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T (204) 949-9134
vpdist@videopool.org
www.videopool.org

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wamp@wamp.ca
www.wamp.ca

WESTERN FRONT

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Vancouver, BC V5T 1S1
T (604) 876-9343
media@front.bc.ca
www.front.bc.ca

WINNIPEG FILM GROUP

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Winnipeg, MB, R3B 1H3
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