



**Independent
Media Arts Alliance**
Alliance des arts
médiatiques indépendants

Pre-Budget Consultations 2008

Prepared on behalf of the IMAA
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Submitted To:
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INTRODUCTION

The **Independent Media Arts Alliance** (IMAA) is a member-driven non-profit national organization working to advance and strengthen the media arts community in Canada. Representing over 80 independent **film, video, audio** and **new media** production, distribution, and exhibition organizations in all parts of Canada, the IMAA serves over 12,000 independent media artists and cultural workers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation from the IMAA to the Standing Committee on Finance for the Pre-Budget Consultations 2008:

The IMAA recommends to the Standing Committee on Finance that the funds allocated to the Department of Canadian Heritage for the support of the arts and culture that are up for review over the next two years (evaluated at \$343 million) be renewed, at a minimum, at the same level.

THE CONTEXT

It is an indisputable fact that culture is inextricably woven into our daily lives and at the core of our national identity. Canadian artists and art organizations are developing exciting works of arts, reaching a large public and enriching the lives of our diverse communities, from coast to coast. This is directly contributing to the strategic objectives of the Department of Canadian Heritage by offering Canadians a way to “*express and share their diverse cultural experiences with each other and the world*” and “*to live in an inclusive society built on intercultural understanding and citizen participation*”¹. The impact of the creation of an environment in which cultural production is valued, supported and nurtured is profound and multifaceted. Stunning results can be achieved when public institutions are there to support the creative projects brewing in our communities and this brief’s objective is to remind the readers of the **extraordinary potential of arts and culture organizations**, the **growing strategic importance of the creative sector in Canada** and the **crucial responsibility from the part of our government to support our artists** here and abroad.

While the positive social effects of culture are well documented, another perspective on the influence of culture is starting to be acknowledged by Canadian citizens and their representatives, as noted in a recent national study:

In today’s global reality, identity and sense of place matter. Distinctive places attract and retain talented people, encourage development and growth, and drive tourism and migration. Culture brings vitality and resilience to places, and is vital to turning a place into a community (...) Canadian communities need to sustain culture to achieve vibrant, secure and sustainable cities and communities. Instead of seeing culture in isolation, we need to understand its link — both actual and potential — to Canada’s competitiveness. A more effective harnessing of our cultural strengths to our economic vitality could yield enormous gains.²

Thus culture’s influence on our quality of life is also a prime structuring element to enable the economic development of our communities. Supporting culture at the federal level helps to foster local bustling scenes that will in turn convince executives from here and abroad to invest new money in thriving Canadian cities like Calgary. Supporting culture ensures that the world will be seduced by a rich display of diverse Canadian works of art when all eyes will be turned towards Vancouver in 2010. Supporting culture secures the role as creative incubators of established international art centres like Toronto and Montreal. Supporting culture empowers smaller communities from Victoria, BC to Sackville, NB to Yellowknife, NWT to retain their young leaders, professionals and entrepreneurs by offering them a healthy and stimulating environment in which to raise their families. Supporting culture enables the Indigenous communities all across Canada to truly move forward by activating their century-old cultural heritage and turning it into sustainable socio-economic development tools.

This new understanding of the full value and potential of culture in contemporary societies comes at a time when the rise of the creative economy is identified as a key strategic element by governments all around the globe. The creative economy encompasses both the contributions of core culture workers (those directly involved in producing creative

¹ http://www.pch.gc.ca/pc-ch/org/mission/index_e.cfm (Consulted on August 8, 2008)

² *From Restless Communities to Resilient Places: Building A Stronger Future For All Canadians*, Final Report of the External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities, June 2006, p. xvi

works) and culture-based industry workers. Their role in the Canadian economy is of the utmost importance:

Occupations based on arts and culture skills have been recognized as among the fastest growing occupations in Canada since the occupations began to be studied by Statistics Canada in the 1970s. They have added tens of thousands of jobs to the Canadian labour force each of the last three decades, growing at twice the rate of the labour force as a whole during the 1990s. Culture-based occupations outnumber jobs in fishing or forestry or mining, or, for that matter, teaching. According to the 2001 Census these occupations are the career of half a million Canadians.³

The media arts cultural workers are especially sought after in our new digital global economy. This is true for straight forward content production but also in the context of several other peripheral sectors. As an example, the Montreal-based architectural firm Scéno Plus, responsible for the design of numerous award-winning high tech theaters from Las Vegas to Dubai is employing freshly graduated new media artists in order to conceptualize fully interactive environments in multi-billion dollar projects. This highlights the shift that needs to occur in the perception of the government officials with relation to the federal support of the arts and culture. The federal investment in culture has an exponential effect on the quality of life of Canadians from all cultural backgrounds, regional locations and gender identities. It is also a direct injection of funds into what is a nothing less than pure research and development for one of the fastest growing segments of our economy. It would be ill advised from the part of our elected representatives to neglect such a vital sector that has, when compared to other areas of our economy, a higher ratio of return on investments.

THE PRIORITY

Over the year, the IMAA has been advocating relentlessly for the creation of a federal cultural policy guiding the government in its support of the arts in Canada. Despite this unfortunate oversight in our public policy, the artists and arts organizations have managed to survive thanks to constant sacrifices, incredible ingenuity and the support of specific government institutions and programs. The Department of Canadian Heritage has been a privileged partner in this process. One key issue for the arts and culture being sustainability, it was with great pleasure that the sector acknowledged the extension in 2005 of the multi-year investment initiative **Tomorrow Starts Today**. This initiative, in combination with other programs of the Department of Canadian Heritage, provided much needed support for numerous struggling arts organizations trying to break the cycle of financial instability crippling the development of their capacity. As our sector is just starting to see these initiatives bear fruits, there is a growing concern over the future of several programs that are crucial to the survival of most arts organizations across the land.

That is why the IMAA recommends to the Standing Committee on Finance that the funds allocated to the Department of Canadian Heritage for the support of the arts and culture that are up for review over the next two years (evaluated at \$343 million) be renewed, at a minimum, at the same level.

³ *Building on Success: A Human Resources Development Strategy for the Cultural Sector – 2004*, prepared for the Cultural Human Resources Council by T.J. Cheney Research Inc., p. 1

THE STRATEGY

The IMAA recommendation is based on the fact that the stated objectives of the programs up for renewal are well aligned with and responsive to the expressed needs of the sector and that most of them have been successful in reaching their targets, as noted in several reports and benchmark evaluations. What follows is a road map of some of the strategic areas where the renewed funds should be directed, from the media arts perspective. An umbrella investment initiative like **Tomorrow Starts Today** is an interesting and useful model but the main priority is that the specific needs of the sector be addressed, no matter what the method is, and that the funds reach the communities themselves and not only the larger public institutions.

The objectives for media arts at the Department of Canadian Heritage are the following:

- **Reaching audiences by ensuring a healthy supply chain continuum from creator to citizen, so that Canadian content is available and accessible to Canadians;**
- **Reflecting ourselves by reflecting Canada's rich linguistic, ethno-cultural, Aboriginal, and regional diversity as our shared citizenship and common values;**
- **Investing in excellence by focusing on cultural excellence and rewarding success;**
- **Harnessing the opportunities of new technologies by taking a proactive approach to technological change in order to take full advantage of its benefits;**
- **Reaching the world by developing international markets so that we can share Canadian talent and culture with the world.**⁴

The first step towards achieving all of this is **production** and in that regard, capacity building has always been a fundamental challenge for film, video, audio and new media organizations. More than in any other artistic areas, the media arts are operating in a rapidly evolving environment where skills, knowledge, equipment and facilities are in a constant need of reassessment and stabilization. The **Canadian Arts and Heritage Sustainability Program** has been successfully addressing this question by helping to strengthen organizational effectiveness and build capacity of media arts organizations. In parallel, the question of equipment and especially of space keeps coming back as a main challenge for organizations having to struggle with the shifting movements of urban gentrification and real estate speculation. The **Cultural Spaces Canada** program, by supporting the improvement, renovation and construction of facilities, and the acquisition of specialized equipment as well as conducting feasibility studies, has allowed organizations to start envisioning dynamic and stable hubs where the artists can create and where the public can have access to a wide array of media artworks. In the case of both programs, such initiatives are long-term processes that warrant a sustained financial commitment in order to reach completion.

Once produced, the works need to reach the largest public possible. **Dissemination** is at the heart of numerous independent media arts organizations' mission statements. Whether they are concerned with the presentation of a rich diversity of quality artistic experiences or the expression of the distinct character of unique Canadian communities, there are examples of established programs that are already in place to support these objectives (**Arts Presentation Canada** and **Building Communities Through Arts and Heritage**). As we also saw earlier, reaching out of our frontiers is now a strategic exercise that serves a diversity of Canadian artists, that attracts new talents to our country and that positions our creative assets in a competitive new global economy. **PromArt** and **Trade**

⁴ http://www.pch.gc.ca/pc-ch/sujets-subjects/arts-culture/film-video/index_e.cfm (Consulted on August 8, 2008)

Routes, or similar initiatives, are essential tools for media arts organizations to promote the cultural vision and products of Canadians. Moreover, and in the spirit of investing in the creative innovations that are going to be the daily experiences of tomorrow, it is crucial to support the development of new media platforms via **New Media Networking and R&D** funds that are free of the constraints of the commercial-based industrial sector.

Increasingly, and particularly in the case of media arts, the issue of **preservation** is a major concern as film, video, audio and new media works are stored on supports that are fragile, volatile and by nature temporary. Recurring problems with the funding of media arts centres have seen entire collections slowly disappear, while even recent works are rapidly deteriorating due to inadequate storage conditions. This without even starting to address the complex archiving conundrums raised by the current and future playback problems linked to intricate format-based works. All these works, in their multiple forms, are the precious records of our nation's history, the key to our understanding of who we are today and our gift to the generations to come. In the case of Indigenous media artworks, the fine line between memory and oblivion is even thinner. As it is now, the resources available to institutions such as the **Audio-Visual Preservation Trust** and the **National Gallery of Canada** are wholly inadequate to address the challenges they are facing with regards to the preservation of our heritage. Reducing their funding level would be catastrophic and completely incoherent as a majority of these works have been financed by public money.

At the end of the day, excellence should be the main goal driving arts and culture in our country and the **Canada Council for the Arts** has been providing support and guidance to artists and organizations alike for more than half a century. A recent Special Examination Report by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada stated "*with reasonable assurance that [the Council's] assets are safeguarded and controlled, that its resources are managed economically and efficiently, and that its operations are carried out effectively*"⁵. The Department of Canadian Heritage has to confirm and secure its contribution to the Canada Council for the Arts while opening up more communication lines with this natural ally. The shared goals and objectives of each institution have to be discussed in order to find out where collaboration and support can be improved.

CONCLUSION

The importance of the arts and culture in Canada goes beyond its fundamental role as an agent of personal and national identity building. Culture, by enhancing our quality of life, acts as an instrument of social cohesion while also playing an essential structuring function in today's creative economy. The Department of Canadian Heritage has already implemented several programs that are just starting to address the pressing needs of Canadian artists and arts organizations working in film, video, audio and new media.

That is why the IMAA recommends to the Standing Committee on Finance that the funds allocated to the Department of Canadian Heritage for the support of the arts and culture that are up for review over the next two years (evaluated at \$343 million) be renewed, at a minimum, at the same level.

⁵ Canada Council for the Arts - Special Examination Report, Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 26 June 2008, p. 21