

For immediate release

IMAA deplores provincial arts funding cutbacks, raises concern for long-term development of British Columbia's arts sector

Montreal, March 12, 2010 – The Independent Media Arts Alliance is a national association of non-profit arts groups that help Canadian artists create, distribute and exhibit contemporary media art works in film, video, audio and digital formats. The 30-year-old organization's 80 members include film festivals, production facilities, distributors and galleries. These groups represent over 12,000 independent artists across the county.

The IMAA expressed concern Friday about the effects of the British Columbia government's 2010-11 budget on the province's creative sector. The uncertain funding picture for non-profit arts organizations threatens the province's future as a centre for artistic innovation, says IMAA Interim National Director Timothy Dallett:

"British Columbia and Vancouver have established a worldwide reputation for innovative contemporary and media art. This scene didn't appear out of nowhere but was built carefully over the years by an enlightened mix of public investment and community collaboration. That the BC government plans to liquidate this investment now by cutting arts organizations off at the knees is really baffling."

The March 8 announcement eliminating BC Gaming grants to what the provincial government calls "adult arts and culture" will destabilize hundreds of non-profit organizations that depend on the revenue for their operations and programs, forcing them to lay off staff, cancel events or even shut down completely. This puts British Columbia's arts and culture sector at a disadvantage compared with other jurisdictions where stable provincial arts funding allows non-profit organizations to plan effectively, leveraging federal programs and local fundraising to develop arts and culture in their communities. A cycle of diminishing resources and fewer venues to realize projects will create barriers and disincentives for artists to practice in the province.

The IMAA's 10 member organizations in British Columbia, located in Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna and Penticton, anticipate significant funding shortfalls as a result of the cuts. Bryan Skinner, Executive Director of Victoria-based Cinevic Society of Independent Filmmakers, an IMAA member, commented:

"The gaming fund cuts are really devastating. This takes away over 20% of our core budget, money that was used to pay our rent. Victoria can look forward to yet another empty storefront. Not only are BC film festivals getting a 50% cut, they can expect even fewer films from the local filmmakers whose productions we support."

"I think BC's politicians really need to think carefully about the long-term effects of their policies," says Dallett. Some already have: the BC Legislature's all-party Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services Committee recommended in November 2009 that the government restore arts funding to 2008-09 levels, but the Campbell government chose not to act on the Committee's report.

While the overall effect of the cutbacks to the BC Arts Council isn't quite as drastic as first proposed last summer, the reduction in overall public investment in the arts is still substantial. An analysis by the BC Alliance for Arts and Culture finds the provincial government's public culture spending projections for 2010-11 to be 32.4 percent lower than in its 2008-09 budget, with the BC Arts Council cut 53 percent from 2008-09 levels, and BC Gaming Commission contributions to the arts lowered by 58 percent.

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