



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

September 28, 2010

Youssef El Jaï
Head, Media Arts Section
Canada Council for the Arts
350 Albert Street, P.O. Box 1047
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5V8

Dear Mr. El Jaï,

I am writing to you with three requests from the Independent Media Arts Alliance. As a representative body and national arts service organization one of our functions is to synthesize and present the insights, concerns and aspirations of the community of media arts organizations across the country.

In this spirit, we present three formal requests from our membership to you as Head of the Media Arts Section. These three requests are detailed in attached pages.

- The first request is for data on the regional distribution of media arts creation grants to individual artists.
- The second request is for improvements in the procedures for translation of applications submitted in French by media arts organizations.
- The third request is for the initiation of a dialogue between the Media Arts Section and the media arts community concerning the issue of preservation of media artworks.

The IMAA believes that our collegial relationship with the Media Arts Section is of inestimable value to the community of our members and to the media arts milieu as a whole. We feel that the IMAA has an important national role to play as an interlocutor with the Section on the community's behalf and we are privileged to be able to work with you on the shared project of advancing the discipline and the mechanisms that sustain its development.

The Media Arts Section has made a monumental effort over the past year to bring about the Program Revision of operating grants to organizations. We understand that Section staff have been significantly occupied with this process, and wish to convey our understanding of the importance of this activity.

Given this focus of the Section, we realize there is no perfect time to present these requests. We appreciate the continuing development of our dialogue with you and your team on issues and questions affecting the media arts community, and the above questions in particular, as opportunities emerge for these conversations.

I would also note that the IMAA's National Director Jennifer Dornier returns to her position on November 1, 2010. She will attend the meeting of National Arts Service Organizations convened that day in Ottawa by the Canada Council, and looks forward to seeing you and the members of your team who may be attending that meeting.

imaa-aami

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If it would be possible for you and I to meet prior to November 1 to discuss any of the matters outlined above, I would be most appreciative of the opportunity. If your schedule would not permit a meeting before November 1, Ms. Dorner will be pleased to follow up with you on our requests after that date.

Sincerely,

Timothy Dallett
Interim National Director

Attachment:

-Details of requests made by the IMAA to the Media Arts Section (total 3 pages)

Request from the Independent Media Arts Alliance to the Media Arts Section of the Canada Council, October 2010

1. Re: Regional data on individual artists' grant awards

On behalf of its Atlantic Region, comprised of media arts organizations in the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, the Independent Media Arts Alliance requests that the Canada Council Media Arts Section make available the following information:

a detailed comparative breakdown of artists' applications and success rates, by region, for all individual media artist grant competitions since the year 2000.

We are not interested in the identities of the artists themselves, but rather in a detailed comparison of:

- the numbers of applications from,
- the success rates of,
- and the amounts awarded to

artists from different regions of the country over the past 10 years.

In requesting this information we are motivated by a profound concern for the issue of regional equity in the distribution of resources that support media arts creation across Canada. Our request is intended to help our community determine if the record of regional distribution of grants to individual media artists validates our concern.

Media arts organizations are embedded in local and regional ecologies of artistic production. Grants to individual artists for the production of media art play a crucial role in sustaining these ecologies. In reflecting on this context, the Atlantic region has reason to believe that its media arts milieu is structurally disadvantaged.

The above request for data reflects our hypothesis that the ecology of media arts creation – including Council grants to individual media artists – is not reaching its potential in the Atlantic region. We suspect that a cycle exists whereby an ongoing pattern of low application success rates acts as a deterrent to applicants, which in turn leads to even fewer awards regionally. Is the combination of resources reaching media artists, and the organizations that serve and facilitate their work, truly in the synergistic relationship that would allow this regional media arts community to reach its full potential?

Imbalances in regionally available funding profoundly affect organizations' capacity and sustainability and contribute to structural disparities that are self-reinforcing. These disparities ultimately affect the equity and competitiveness of national adjudications.

We are well aware that the Canada Council has a defined mandate as a national institution in which considerations of locally available resources do not play a part. We nevertheless wish to underline the question of regional disparity for your attention and consideration, while noting that the Council has already undertaken targeted initiatives in collaboration with provincial partners. Within the parameters that the Council has articulated, if you would be open to an exploratory dialogue on this topic, we would sincerely wish to contribute to it.

Request from the Independent Media Arts Alliance to the Media Arts Section of the Canada Council, October 2010

2. Re: Translation of operating grant applications submitted in the French language

On behalf of the Quebec Region of the IMAA, comprised of 19 member organizations in the province, the IMAA requests that the Media Arts Section continue to address the question of translation of grant applications made in the French language by organizations seeking operating assistance from the Media Arts Section.

We would like to build upon collaborative dialogue between past IMAA Quebec Regional Directors and yourself to reduce to an absolute minimum any disparity in workload and in presentation that might be entailed by a need to translate Francophone organizations' grant applications into the English language for peer assessment. It is our understanding that this conversation has been ongoing and that recently you have proposed a number of new accommodations and enhancements, including the possibility of simultaneous interpretation at the meetings of peer assessment committees adjudicating such applications.

These accommodations and your willingness to explore them are profoundly appreciated. We also understand that with the impending release of the new combined program of operating assistance for organizations that the format and length of applications could well be different than in the past.

Nevertheless the IMAA wishes to underline that the amount of funds that has been allocated to organizations electing to perform their own translations has been insufficient to cover the actual cost of professional translation services. Not only have Francophone organizations been obliged to assume the additional administrative burden of coordinating, revising and re-submitting translated applications (if they wish to retain authorial control over their presentation to the jury), they have to date been allocated inadequate resources to achieve the professional re-presentation of their application in the alternate official language. This has represented an inequity in the administration of the program.

Based on the application format of the Operating Assistance programs previously in place, we respectfully request that the amount allocated for organizations' application translation expenses be doubled, from \$750 to \$1500, and that organizations be allowed 4 weeks from the original application due date to submit their translated version.

Given the impending changes to project and time-limited initiative programs, this request does not specifically address the translation of project applications. We would note, however that smaller and less well-resourced organizations applying to project programs could be at a disadvantage in regard to the translation context for their applications. We encourage you to give due consideration to their needs and circumstances as well.

Request from the Independent Media Arts Alliance to the Media Arts Section of the Canada Council, October 2010

3. Re: Dialogue on the issue of media arts preservation in independent media arts organizations

The Independent Media Arts Alliance requests that a dialogue be initiated with the Media Arts Section concerning issues related to the preservation of media artworks.

We acknowledge our previous discussions with you to the effect that the preservation or conservation of works of art has not – outside of some precisely defined areas – been considered part of the mandate of the Canada Council for the Arts.

In the field of media arts, however, the technological apparatus of particular media systems – including storage, retrieval and display – cannot be separated from the work of art itself. Specific media technologies determine the possibility of particular works' existence. If a work cannot be experienced it cannot be considered to exist.

The finite life-cycle of the industrial systems that instantiate media formats and standards is implicated in every aspect of production, dissemination, distribution and critical discourse concerning media art.

We propose that questions of preservation, migration, and emulation in the milieu are not only urgent, but are relevant for and appropriate to all modes of media arts activity. This relevance extends far beyond a narrowly defined notion of 'conservation' *per se*. The development of perspectives on, and approaches to, the historicity of media systems is fundamental to the ongoing evolution of the discipline.

In so far as the Media Arts Section's programs and activities play an integral role in the Canadian media arts sector we suggest that dialogue between the Section and the community on these question is timely and important. The IMAA wishes to bring the experiences and insights of our community to your attention. We would sincerely value a conversation with the Section about ideas, strategies and approaches to assist the milieu in responding strategically to the challenge that technological evolution poses for continued access to the evolving legacy of Canadian media artists' work.