

December 16, 2009

Youssef El Jaï
Head, Media Arts Section
Canada Council for the Arts
350 Albert Street
PO Box 1047
Ottawa ON K1P 5V8

Dear Mr. El Jaï,

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the member organizations of the Independent Media Arts Alliance, I would like to express our community's support for the approach, method and substance of the program architecture consultation process undertaken in recent months by the Media Arts Section.

The consultation meetings that you and your colleagues organized across the country provided our members with a structured opportunity to give feedback on both the 2009 *Program Architecture Examination of the Media Arts Section* report and on other points presented for discussion. The constructive nature of these meetings, and the Media Arts Section's openness to dialogue and consultative interaction with its client organizations is very much appreciated by our constituency.

While understanding that no specific formal proposal has yet been made for adjustments to either the general architecture or the specific features of Canada Council programs supporting media arts organizations, we have formed an impression of some general goals and directions articulated by the Media Arts Section during the consultation process. I would like to take this opportunity to offer the Alliance's perspective on these themes. These observations are based on our members' aggregate feedback, and thus summarize, rather than replace, any specific points that have been made at particular regional consultation meetings.

The notion of adjusting support programs in order to maximize opportunities for arts organizations to respond to and fulfill their own mandates is to be commended as an example of sophisticated and progressive thinking about the relationship between the Media Arts Section and its organizational clients. Insofar as the Council's investment in the media arts milieu involves an administratively constructed relationship with groups receiving its support, we endorse the idea that this relationship might be developed with respect to the milieu's particular characteristics and its potential for self-generated innovation.

Any reduction in the administrative workload of grant application preparation that is consistent with a thorough, fair and equitable peer adjudication process is strongly supported by our membership, which awaits your more specific proposals in this regard with interest. To the extent that adjustments to the current multiplicity of Media Arts Section program offerings could lighten organizations' grant application workloads, such initiatives would be seen as making a

very positive contribution to our members' ability to concentrate their energies on the development and delivery of programs as such, and would find widespread and enthusiastic support in our community. It is worth underlining that multi-year operational funding is understood by our membership as a most effective and desirable program model because it promotes organizational stability. Nevertheless, the short-term flexibility—traditionally provided by project grants—to respond to new developments with specific, time-limited activities also plays a central role in the operational approach of many of our members.

Over the past three decades, the Canada Council has made a substantial investment in the independent media arts milieu through its support of the organizations that are members of the Alliance. The notion of mobilizing this investment through networking, mentorship, inter-organizational training and professional development is certainly one that our membership supports in principle. Development of any of these directions might suggest potential roles for the Alliance itself in facilitating interactions between our member organizations. As an arts service organization, the IMAA would be most interested in exploring such potentials with you.

By comparison with other artistic disciplines, the media arts are characterized by an unusual degree of integration with the dynamics of industrial development and by their implication in complex social ecologies of commercial, professional and vernacular media. The intersection of these factors has created challenges for the growth of the sector and we are most encouraged to learn of your interest in implementing a renewal of the milieu's technological base. We encourage you to take account of the conceptual and material specificity of technologies and resources associated with different forms and modes of media arts practice, and of the diversity of regional perspectives that have been expressed on the topic, particularly concerning differences in regional conditions for equipment acquisition.

In connection with the theme of proactive approaches to the development of the media arts sector, we would like to re-assert the need for building capacity in indigenous media arts organizations which historically have had much less access to the kind of long-term investment referred to above. This disparity is one that the IMAA feels it is important for the Council to address.

The Independent Media Arts Alliance acknowledges and appreciates the spirit of consultation, dialogue and adaptation that has characterized the Canada Council Media Arts Section's approach to this important consultation process. While there are inevitable nuances, qualifications, distinctions and details awaiting discussion in connection with specific program revision proposals, we as a community wish to express our fundamental alignment with your project of renewing the architecture of Canada Council programs for media arts organizations and await the opportunity for further interaction with you and your colleagues.

Sincerely,

Timothy Dallett
Interim National Director

(CC: IMAA Board of Directors and IMAA web site communications archive)