



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

**Arts Day on the Hill 2014**

**Video Interview conducted by the Independent Media Arts Alliance**

October 21, 2014

The IMAA interviewed Members of Parliament as part of Arts Day on the Hill 2014. Arts supporters from across Canada gathered in Ottawa on Tuesday October 21st to meet with Members of Parliament for the Arts Day on the Hill, organized by The Canadian Arts Coalition: <http://www.canadianartscoalition.com>. The key discussions focused on the role that federal arts investment plays in the economic and social health of Canada. Arts Day on the Hill 2014 saw more than 100 art supporters take part in scheduled meetings with Members of Parliament, senators and senior officials from all parties.

**Elizabeth May**

MP for Saanich - Gulf Islands (Green Party)

**Transcript**

***Can you talk about a memorable art experience that's affected your life?***

It's hard to pick one memorable art experience. I grew up in a family of artists. My mother was a sculptor and a pianist, my uncle was an actor, so I grew up in a very arts-aware, engaged family.

My dad was an accountant so it balanced things out. And personally I'm a writer, I know it doesn't look like it because I'm in Parliament, I've written eight books, and being part of the arts and culture community. Most of my closest friends are painters and poets and what I consider "real writers" who are producing.

My best friend was Farley Mowat. So I've been surrounded by the arts in many forms all my life and it's part of who I am.

***4% of Canada's workforce is employed in the cultural sector. This sector is growing all the time, and every dollar invested generates large returns into the Canadian economy. Yet levels of public investment have remained stagnant for over a decade. Do you support an increase to the Canada Council's operating budget to the level of \$300 million annually?***

We have to stop, and I think it's far too common to regard the arts as something that's a frill. I think in defending the arts we fall into the trap in commodifying everything again and just counting the economic value of having an arts and culture community, talking about competitiveness and so on. That's all true.

and it's a huge sector and filmmaking in my home province of British Columbia for example creates more jobs than fishing and mining and forestry combined right now. So you can make the economic case.

But I think it's really important that we not lose the argument for our soul, that we not lose track about how important it is to ensure that artists can survive.

I wince a little when the Harper administrations creates walls of fame to celebrate the arts, and we celebrate people who've done well in the US.

I really don't want to make it about celebrity, I want to make it about—as it is—part of our culture, it's integral to every part of every community.

So we need to support artists with better tax breaks and tax relief, the models out of Ireland and Berlin are really good examples of how we attract—to Canada—talent.

How we, as Richard Florida talks about, the creative class, attracts investment, and it enriches the life of a community.

Yes, there is a bottom line and there is a bank account and it all makes sense to average out the tax earnings of artists over time,

so that it's fair when you have a year when suddenly five years' worth of work is recognized monetarily that you can average out what may look like in some ways a windfall.

But it's five years of work and you've had four years of poverty for one year of income, that should be averaged out. We need to do much more to protect our institutions, the Green Party policy actually calls for the leadership of our cultural institutions, whether Telefilm Canada, CBC, National Film Board, all of them to have the selection of who leads those agencies not be by a political party.

But by a jury of people who actually know what's needed to make those institutions thrive.

And of course steady, predictable, and sustainable funding to our arts and cultural entities. And for the health of democracy, the key one is we've got to protect the CBC and the Radio-Canada so they are independent and less intimidated, shall we say, by those in power. With the possibility of actually being the kind of independent public broadcaster that we need.

**As a Member of Parliament, what actions do you intend to take in support of Canadian artists and arts institutions?**

We've always had the caricature of the starving artist, it shouldn't be like that.

We know that's what it's like for most artists, so one of the thing that the Green Party believes is we have to end poverty rather than to deal with it segment of society by segment of society. End poverty, create a guaranteed livable income, and then when people make income above that level that allows for no one to live... In a country as wealthy as Canada we should not allow anyone to be living below the poverty line. We can do it relatively easily.

So that's integral to our policies to end poverty that will have the effect of also ending poverty for artists and all the other programs to ensure that we have the local art events are properly funded.

That people have an opportunity to sell their work by ensuring Canadian content rules, throughout various aspects of what might be called an entertainment industry in Canada.

There's no reason for the kids of artists not to be able to eat well, but there's no reason for the kids of anyone, kids whose parents are both holding down jobs at fast food restaurants.

All children in Canada deserve to have a good start in life and the only way to end childhood poverty is to end poverty.

## **END WORD**

Just to say thank you all artists across Canada for making this a country that is distinctive, and to celebrate who we are, we must protect our artists, otherwise we won't have a distinctive Canadian culture

And it's distinct by regions as well.

**We've got to protect our arts.**

.....

**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 90 independent film, video, audio, and new media production, distribution, and exhibition organizations in all parts of the country, the IMAA serves over 16,000 independent media artists and cultural workers.

Media art is understood to apply to all forms of time-related art works which are created by recording sound or visual images. Time-related art works include works in the fields of sound, video and computer art, both installations and internet projects, and single channel works.