

**To:** The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture

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## **Reframing the Arts**

**May 7, 2021**

Dear Minister Guilbeault,

We are writing today to thank you and the Government for the significant investments made in Budget 2021 for arts and culture. These investments will have a rippling effect on the sector's recovery and provide a much-needed boost to the funding programs at Canadian Heritage.

We also acknowledge the release of the new strategic plan of the Canada Council for the Arts which outlines their direction over the next five years. Although we acknowledge that their commitment to recovery and sustainability, and their obligation to ensure Equity, Inclusion and Diversity are notable, we believe there is much more potential for the arts to contribute to the social cohesion, community vitality and quality of life for all Canadians.

We are writing to request that you ensure that professional community-engaged arts, a discipline which is at the forefront of art and social engagement, is given the necessary support it deserves to play an important role in the well-being of Canadian society. The practice of community engaged art rarely fits within established funding programs because it moves across disciplines and sectors. Now, more than ever, the professionals who connect arts, community, and social engagement must see equitable access to federal programs.

We, the undersigned, feel compelled to offer an alternative, expanded vision for the arts in our country, one that responds more fully to the multiple challenges we are facing and that validates the central importance of creative expression within all sectors of our society.

With the recent investments in Canadian Heritage, you have an opportunity to create new policies and programs that expand the current criteria embodied by those programs which require arts and heritage organizations to 'improve their business practices and diversify their revenues'. Global crises require us to move beyond a paradigm of constant economic growth to one that puts people first. The inclusion of criteria that focus on social impact in the programs at Canadian Heritage is a good place to start. The social benefits of engaging in arts, culture and creativity are well documented around the globe and in these challenging times, necessary for the recovery and rebuilding of our nation.

We fundamentally believe that artmaking is an essential element for healthy, cohesive and innovative societies and that a just society recognizes the right to cultural expression in all its forms – inviting citizens to engage in all aspects of the whole, interconnected ecology of the arts.

We know that creative expression through artmaking provides us with new ways of experiencing our lives; these processes open up diverse perspectives, clarify and celebrate our relationships with each other and with the world. When we can share our stories, visions and realities through all forms of artistic expression, the full spectrum of the ecology of the arts becomes inclusive and cultural democracy becomes possible. We express our own unique identities and voices and these perspectives become part of conversations about what matters to us in all our diversity. Our authentic voices must be present in an essential dialogue about where we are headed as Canadians. Especially now.

Artistic and creative expression contributes to wellbeing in mental and physical health; social and environmental justice; cultural division, prejudice and racism; and brings absent voices to the forefront as we recover from current crises and act for more sustainable futures. Cross-sector collaboration is necessary to deepen and sustain the impacts of this work – in hospitals, schools, homeless shelters, daycares, seniors' home, prisons, and in the fight with climate change. Creative expression becomes a way for us to create hope and action for change. Audiences/consumers become participants. Worldwide, this leads to empathy and insight, as well as solutions to often-complex problems.

In community-engaged arts (CEA)/art for social change (ASC), groups of people who may not self-identify as artists co-create art (in any of its forms) about what matters to them; this process is facilitated by a specially-trained, professional artist who is in service to those community members. Often working in partnership with non-arts organizations, the work is based on building and sustaining trusting relationships. Extensive international research confirms the many positive impacts of these forms of artmaking. (Examples can be provided if useful!) Canada is considered a pioneer in this work yet practitioners of CEA and ASC struggle to survive due to the lack of recognition of the value of their work and insufficient government funding.

It is important to parse the many different meanings of the words “community engagement”, “partnership” and “inclusion”. These can often mean educational programs for audiences, providing inexpensive access to performances, or artistic learning opportunities for children, youth and life-long learners. The experience begins with the artists and their institutions and flow out to the public. In CEA, the activity starts within community settings and flows out to others in those communities, their partners and the public. This is art made by at-risk youth, isolated elders, people living in poverty, by new Canadians, in intercultural conflict resolution, for environmental education, to address issues of mental and physical health, and to create relevant and effective public policy. These two different approaches are both essential and effective in their service to communities.

The Canadian sector of hundreds of CEA/ASC organizations and independent artists has little representation in current or recent Canada Council language. Previously supported by the Council since 1997, the field, which has its own, unique goals, methods, pedagogy and research, is now subsumed within other art disciplines, a dismissal of its unique presence within cultural policy making and problematic for the vast majority of practitioners.

Lack of training opportunities is also a major issue for CEA/ASC as more and more artists want to learn the many special skills needed to safely and effectively facilitate community-based art while creating and sustaining cross-sectoral partnerships with other change makers.

**We propose that Canadian Heritage become a meaningful national home for the sector, as well as an advocate for the value of everyday creativity by developing policies and programs that respond to this unique art-making we see in communities across the whole country. Diversity, equity and inclusion**

are fundamental values of our sector. In light of the government's focus on EDI, we feel that the time is right to create a new program that integrates these forms of artwork into strategies that address these and other challenges. We suggest that this new program be created, administered (including adjudication processes) and monitored in consultation with artists from the sector.

In the short term, we suggest that the criteria and accessibility to programs (e.g. Citizen Participation Branch, Building Communities Through the Arts) be adjusted to allow access to our sector.

We also suggest that now is the time for dialogue and collaboration between the Department of Canadian Heritage and other siloed federal ministries including those with responsibilities for mental and physical health, strategies to address the environmental crisis, immigrant settlement, poverty reduction, job creation and training and...the list is long!

We offer these provocations to share this vision for Canada's arts and culture and look forward to dialogue with you to explore these many, exciting opportunities.

With respect,



**Brenda Leadlay**, Executive Director  
BC Alliance for Arts + Culture



**Judith Marcuse**, LL.D. (Hon.)  
Artistic Producer, Judith Marcuse Projects &  
Founder/Co-Director, International Centre of  
Art for Social Change (ICASC)

And:

**Mary-Louise Albert**, Artistic Executive Director, *BC Movement Arts Society*

**Holly Arntzen**, President, *Artist Response Team (ART)*

**Laura Barron**, Executive Director, *Instruments of Change*

**Sean Bickerton**, BC Director, *Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne*

**Kathy Bishop, PhD**, Associate Professor, *Royal Roads University*

**Tim Borlase**, Co-Chair, *Labrador Creative Arts Festival*

**Bruce Clayman**, Board Chair, *Judith Marcuse Projects Society*

**Seanna Connell**, Founder and Executive Director, *ArtBridges*

**Nancy Cottingham Powell**, Executive Director, *North Van Arts*

**Vicki Cummings**, President & CEO, *Vision Co-Create*

**Zandi Dandizette**, President, *Pacific Association of Artist Run Centres*

**David Diamond**, Founder, *Theatre for Living*

**Dr. Warwick Dobson**, University Scholar in Applied Theatre, *University of Victoria*

**Kendra Fanconi**, Artistic Director, *The Only Animal*

**Lynn Fels**, Professor, *Simon Fraser University*

**Mohamed Foda**, Arts Advocate

**Marnie Gladwell**, Executive Director, *Saskatchewan Arts Alliance*

**Paul Gravett**, Executive Director, *Heritage BC*

**Dale Colleen Hamilton**, Founder & Artistic Director, *Everybody's Theatre Company*  
**Elliott Hearte**, Director, Programs & Services, *Arts BC*  
**Jock Hildebrand**, President, *Cowichan Public Art Gallery*  
**Ryan Hunt**, Executive Director, *BC Museums Association*  
**Leslie Hurtig**, Artistic Director, *Vancouver Writers Fest*  
**Lauren Jerke, MA**, PhD Candidate, *University of Victoria*  
**Dusty Kelly**, Secretary, *Vancouver Musicians Association, Local 145*  
**Richard Kerton**, Administrative Executive, *Theatre BC*  
**Heather Lamoureux**, Artistic Director, *Vines Art Festival*  
**Andrew Laurensen**, Artistic Producer, *Radix Theatre*  
**Maude Lavoisier**, Director – Arts Engagement, *École nationale de théâtre du Canada*  
**Erick Lichte**, Executive Director, *Chor Leoni*  
**Julie Mamias**, Executive Director, *New Performance Works Society*  
**raine mckay**, Executive Director, *Craft Council of BC*  
**Valerie Methot**, Executive/Artistic Director, *Some Assembly Theatre Company*  
**Patrick E. Meyer**, Executive Director, *Federation of Canadian Artists*  
**Carole S. Miller**, Professor Emeritus, Drama in Education, *University of Victoria*  
**Eric Rhys Miller**, Executive Director, *Community Arts Council of Vancouver*  
**Helen Moore-Parkhouse**, Director, Communications & Engagement, *Calgary Arts Development*  
**Jean-François Packwood**, Executive Director, *Conseil culturel et artistique francophone de la C.-B.*  
**Trudy Pauluth-Penner, PhD**, Adjunct Assistant Professor, *University of Victoria*  
**Stephen O'Shea**, Executive Director, *Arts Council of New Westminster*  
**Juliana Saxton**, Professor Emeritus, *University of Victoria*  
**Sanjay Shahani**, Executive Director, *Edmonton Arts Council*  
**Kaile Shilling**, Executive Director, *Vancouver Writers Fest*  
**Valerie Sing Turner**, Creative Director, *CultureBrew.Art* & Artistic Producer, *Visceral Visions Society*  
**Lindy Sisson**, Arts Consultant  
**Thomas Sparling**, Executive Director, *Creative Manitoba*  
**Jan Streader**, Producer, *Jollygood Productions*  
**Susanna Uchatius**, Artistic Director, *Theatre Terrific Society*  
**Andrew Wade**, Executive Director, *Richmond Arts Coalition*  
**Jessica Wadsworth**, Executive Director, *Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists / West (CADA/West)*  
**Kelsey Waggener**, Membership & Communications Coordinator, *CARFAC BC*  
**Lisa Wayrynen**, Director, *Vancouver Visual Art Foundation*  
**Will Weigler, PhD**, Theatre Artist and Author  
**Mirna Zagar**, Executive Director, *The Dance Centre*



