

Pre-budget brief for the fiscal year 2015-2016

Good morning, my name is Robin McGrath and I am a board member of Visual Artists Newfoundland and Labrador. Thank you for taking the time to hear our presentation this morning.

VANL-CARFAC is an incorporated, not-for-profit cultural organization. As a provincial sectoral organization, VANL-CARFAC represents the interests of professional visual artists of Newfoundland and Labrador both at home and nationally through our affiliation with CARFAC National in Ottawa.

Visual Art is an artistic discipline covering many media including painting, sculpture, video, digital, installation and performance. The production of art plays an important role in the market economy of Newfoundland and Labrador by generating income for individual, self-employed artists and for private sector businesses such as commercial art galleries, advertising agencies, manufacturing, and tourism operations, to name but a few. The production and exhibition of art also provides the tourism industry with what amounts to the cultural experience of the province; this experience being one key "product" of the tourism trade¹.

Art also plays an important and complex role in the social economy of Newfoundland and Labrador. Most simply, the production of art provides content for not-for-profit and public sector organizations, The Rooms being the most high-profile of these in the province. The production and exhibition of art also adds to a better quality of life for the people of the province, in turn having an effect on the market economy, encouraging private investment from corporations, businesses and individuals, and a draw for skilled labour and tourists alike, thus positively affecting the growth of multiple economic sectors. Art provides us with the symbols of our cultural identity and the very notion of who we are as people.

While cultural workers contribute greatly to our economy, they are themselves among the lowest-paid and most impoverished of our citizens. The average income of a visual artist in the Atlantic provinces is \$19,471, which is just below the low-income cut-off point for a single person living in a community with 100,000 to 500,000 residents (\$19,500) and which is 53% lower than the income of the overall labour force.

We are confident that the Finance Minister will see these four recommendations as positive economic decisions which will impact not only the lives of visual artists and other cultural workers, but the social and financial well-being of the province itself.

Budget Recommendations

¹ Fiona McLean, *Marketing the Museum*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Any direct dollar investment the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador makes in the Visual Arts or in the cultural sector as a whole supports the growth of the provincial economy.

Arts and culture is one of the fastest growing sectors in the Canadian economy, and Newfoundland and Labrador has shown some of the most significant growth. In Canada, between 1997 and 2008, consumer spending on art works and events grew by 59%, more than any other category of cultural spending, including sports. In particular, the purchase of physical works of art showed an increase of 107%, which was second only to the purchase of TVs and DVD players at 124%.

Most significant, in that same period, consumer spending on arts and culture in Newfoundland and Labrador had the largest growth for the whole country, with an increase of 124%, more than double the national average of 59%. ²

The development and growth of the necessary cultural infrastructure is the first step to fostering a creative and economically healthy environment in which artists can work, live and contribute to the economy. In order to achieve this, we need the commitment of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to enable the sector to grow and, more importantly, to help develop the ability to sustain itself. Visual artists have time and again proven to be innovative and resourceful self-employed business people, and unlike oil and minerals, the arts are a renewable resource!

Recommendation 1

Create a policy to allocate 1% (one percent) of budgets for any provincial capital works projects to commission public artworks

Public Art is considered to be a key component to the attractiveness and identity of a province and its municipalities. It demonstrates the character of communities, and we know that investment in the arts strengthens local economies and stimulates the growth of arts-related business. It encourages the use of public areas and it stimulates public art in private developments through example. The dedication of 1% of the budget of all capital works projects towards public art commissions is a show of commitment to enrich the daily lives of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and could do so without requiring the allocation of new monies.

Applicable projects could include new building construction, major additions to existing buildings, park development projects, and new engineering structures. The policies for 1% for public art which have been adopted in several provinces and many cities across Canada could provide a useful blueprint for the implementation of this important public program.

² Hill Strategies, *Consumer Spending on Culture in Canada, the Provinces and 12 Metropolitan Areas in 2008*: 2010

Recommendation 2

Reinstate the Market Access and Export component of the Cultural Economic Development Program, and restore the ability of individual artists to apply for funding under this program.

Beyond the creation of artworks, a necessary element of a visual artist's career is the ability to adequately access a wider art market. Much of a visual artist's income comes from outside of Newfoundland and Labrador: through exhibition fees from publicly-funded galleries; copyright and reproduction fees; grants; commissions; and through selling their work. Therefore many of the province's artists earn a significant portion of their income from elsewhere, and then spend it here. True economic development means new money coming into the province and this is one of the primary ways that artists contribute to the local economy.

The Market Access and Export Program was a granting component of the Cultural Economic Development meant to address this need. These were not grants to assist with the creative side of producing artistic works, but to help to "expand the marketing, promotion and distribution of cultural products and activities." Artists were eligible for up to \$5,000 to cover the costs of activities such as: the shipping and insurance of their work; travel and accommodation; the production and distribution of promotional materials; and attendance at trade shows and showcases. As a result of a 10% cut to the CEDP program in 2013, the Market and Access component for individual artists was eliminated.

The rationale may be given that individual artists can apply to the Newfoundland & Labrador Arts Council for some of these costs under Professional Project grants; however, there are two major impediments to this: the Arts Council's budget has not been increased—a fund which is already strained beyond capacity; and, second, while individual artists can apply to the NLAC to support "creation, production, operating and travel costs," the NLAC *Best Practices Project Assessment* guidelines explicitly state that marketing and publicity expenses are to be given a low priority by the jury.

Recommendation 3

Increase funding to the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council, in order to increase the number of professional project and sustaining grants available to this province's artists and arts organizations.

In 2014 there was \$575,000 of funding awarded through the Professional Project Grants program, but the request for funds was \$1,548,818. 303 Project Grant applications were submitted, and 47% of those were approved, but at dramatically lower grant amounts than those requested, with only 37% of funds requested being awarded.

The province's artists, as self employed business people, need this support. Investment in their work by the NLAC is used to leverage other funds, such as private monies and matching grants, which are then spent within the province. We strongly suggest that the provincial government increase the NLAC's budget from \$2.1 million to \$4 million in order to increase the funds available for grant support to professional artists and arts organizations. It would enable more artists to continue to produce the work that enriches our community life, and our tourist industry.

Recommendation 4

Provide adequate funding to the gallery of The Rooms.

The Rooms' art gallery is key to the success of this province's artists and their work's legacy, while improving the well-being of her citizens. According to the most recent statistics available, 30.5%, or almost one third of Newfoundland and Labrador residents visited a public art gallery in 2010, which is double the 15.2% who visited a one in 1992.³

Following the budget cuts in 2013, and subsequent hiring freezes, the art gallery has been forced to shoulder a disproportionate amount of those cuts. The gallery now has a staff of five, with only one of those positions being considered permanent. This is in marked contrast with the 14 employees dedicated to the archives and 12 to the museum. As it stands, the Rooms Provincial Art Gallery does not have enough curators and staff to adequately develop exhibitions by the province's contemporary artists. In addition VANL-CARFAC has been made aware that the gallery's dedicated Documentation Centre, purpose-built infrastructure to care for the province's collections, was recently moved on extremely short notice and little consultation adding more strain to those charged with the professional care of collections.

As well, there is a need for an increased budget for the Art Acquisitions program. Maintaining and growing collections is a vital activity of any public art gallery. Galleries do this as part of their mandate to act as cultural stewards for past, current and future citizens. We cannot rely on the Art Bank of Newfoundland and Labrador alone, but also expand the Rooms Provincial Art Gallery Collection, crossing historic and contemporary periods, as well as national and international artists whose work is in conversation with our own. This activity places our cultural stories in a global context.

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This is considerable concern within the visual arts sector that the shrinking resources of the Provincial Art Gallery will continue to interfere with the professional growth of our industry and the maintenance and stewardship of the province's history and visual culture.

Thank you for your time this morning.

³ Newfoundland and Labrador Residents' Arts, Culture and Heritage Activities in 2010: 2012