

**Hong Kong Arts Development Council
International Arts Leadership Roundtable 2016**

Plenary 3: New Thinking for International Exchange

Scaling up our impact through international exchange

Speech by Mr Simon Brault, Director & CEO of Canada Arts Council

I'm delighted to be here with such esteemed panelists. You've already had rich conversations today about the connections between the arts and community, technology and innovation. They are a perfect lead-in to this plenary. Because these are the connections that that are shaping the way we're now thinking about international exchange – and why it is so important for the arts and for society.

Personally, it's an exciting time for me to be here representing the Canada Council for the Arts, and Canada, as an active player at the international level. Over the past decade I've seen a growing momentum around the world to give the arts a stronger role in addressing the major global issues of our times. Issues like sustainability, development, citizen engagement to name a few. I've participated in many international conferences, committees and forums on these movements. And now I feel that Canada is poised to contribute in a meaningful way.

Middle powers like Canada have traditionally exerted cultural influence on the world. Although this influence may have dwindled in recent years, I'm confident that Canada is back. With our last federal election, we've seen a renewed commitment to cultural diplomacy. In other words, there is an understanding that the arts and culture can have a halo effect on commercial and political exchange between countries – and can help to deepen business ties, among others. There's also a renewed recognition that through the arts we can share with the world Canada's values – and our capacity for innovation and creativity. The Canadian government has made several commitments to build its international presence. And the Canada Council is ready to support this through our investments in Canadian arts abroad.

For those of you who may not know, the Canada Council is funded by, and operates at an arms-length from, the federal government. During the election campaign, the government made clear and bold commitments to double our budget. We are waiting to see what is announced in the federal budget in the coming weeks. And we are ready to react quickly whatever funding scenario that announcement brings. That's because over the past 20 months, we have been transforming ourselves to respond to a rapidly changing environment. This transformation

includes a stronger international focus. One based on the idea that for Canada to be in the world, we need to welcome the world to Canada. Reciprocity and exchange are keys to our approach.

Today I'll be speaking mainly about our transformation and our granting programs, but I want to take a moment to mention other international networks at the Council. For example, many of you may now know that the Canadian Commission for UNESCO is housed within the Council. The Commission supports UNESCO's mandate to create a more peaceful and better world through education, science, culture, information and communication. Through its programs and activities, it brings Canadian voices to the international issues like sustainability, cultural heritage and equity.

The Canada Council is also responsible for Canada's Public Lending Right program. The Public Lending Right, as you may know, is an international network that compensates authors for the use of their books in public libraries.

Finally, the Canada Council has an Art Bank that houses the world's largest collection of contemporary Canadian arts. We've been proud to share our experience and expertise in establishing and maintaining the Art Bank with counterparts around the world who are setting up their own art bank models – for example Australia, Korea, South Africa and Taiwan in setting up their art bank models. In fact, this spring, my colleague Tammy Scott will be speaking on this topic in Taipei.

So all this to say that, as arts funders, there are many international networks – and many opportunities – to exchange within and beyond the confines of our granting programs.

And I want to emphasize that I speak to you today with an attitude of optimism – grounded in reality – and with a spirit of collaboration. We represent different countries with unique characteristics, challenges and perspectives. But at the same time, in the world of the 21st century, the boundaries that separate us are blurring, as opportunities for deep exchange come into focus.

None of us remains unaffected by issues of sustainability, global recessions, digitalization, and large-waves of immigration. Technology and globalization have brought us closer together. And at the same time, have made expression and identity as important as ever.

As Director and CEO of a national arts funder, I've seen firsthand the impact of these forces on the arts. I know you've seen it too. As arts funders in the 21st century, our challenge is to continue to buttress existing structures and systems, while finding new ways to support artists and arts organizations in an ever-changing environment. How can we work together to pool our creativity, resources, and influence to have a greater impact for the benefit of the arts – and society.

This is the impetus behind the large-scale transformation underway at the Canada Council. I hope that in sharing our story with you today, it will inspire new thinking about international exchange. It all begins with adopting an attitude of anticipation. Looking to the horizon to see trends as they develop. Nurturing innovation and creativity in our organizations. Recognizing opportunities and remaining flexible enough to seize them. Reaching beyond geographic, professional, and sectoral borders to work with new and unexpected partners. In other words, we have to think like the artists we support and the public who benefit from their work.

For the Council, the challenges of our times aren't just a problem to fix. They present an opportunity for an expanded role for the arts in society. But to truly seize this opportunity and scale up our impact, we need to work together.

Toward a new approach

It might be useful at this point for me to give you some background about the Canada Council's transformation.

We are always in regular and ongoing contact with our clients in the arts community. This includes official consultations with a wide range of stakeholders and more informal discussion with our peer assessors – the hundreds of artists and arts professionals across the country who assess grant applications to the Council. Peer assessment is a core value of the Council. It ensures that our programs are relevant and that the Council is regularly in touch with the arts community.

In recent years, the findings of these consultations showed us that some segments of the arts community were not being well-served by our programs. We took these findings seriously and acted on them. We realized, as the Council approached its 60 anniversary in 2017 that we could not simply continue to do the same thing and remain relevant. To illustrate this, I'll give you a couple of examples:

First, there is the wide-scale impact of digital technology, which I've already alluded to. It has affected every country represented here.

Even just 10 years ago, social media was non-existent and the iPhone was still a rumour. And today, the internet has brought the world to our fingertips in ways that we all experience in our everyday lives. And where is Canada in this trend? Well, Canada is leading the way as a digital country. According to the 2014 comScore Report, 87 per cent of the households in my country are connected to the internet. That ranks second out of the G8 countries. Each month, Canadians

visit on average close to 4,000 web pages and spend 41 hours online. We watch an average of 300 online videos per month -- more than any other G8 country.

As a result, the ways that artists create arts, and the ways that audiences consume it are changing rapidly. Digital technologies have given artists exciting new tools with amazing potential and have sparked an unprecedented appetite in the public for participation in the arts. Traditional business models, in publishing and music, for example, have been shaken by the many digital platforms that have emerged. None of this was reflected in our funding structure. A structure that made possible excellent and important work, but that had become a patchwork of small grants created in an ad hoc way over many years to address very specific needs.

Another catalyst for our transformation was Canada's diverse population. According to the country's most recent census, there are over 200 ethnic origins represented in the Canadian population. Canada has the highest proportion of foreign-born citizens among the G8 countries. Canada strength is its diversity. Our country has been built by successive waves of immigration – and so has our vibrant art scene. Artists from these communities brought new models, new arts practices, new art forms. And although the Council created specific programs in response, the principle of equity wasn't fully integrated into our vision and systems. As a result new Canadian artists often faced barriers to funding – and our client base didn't reflect the diversity of our population – a grave concern for a citizen-funded organization like the Council.

It became obvious to me and my team at the Canada Council that we could not remain relevant in the 21st century by merely continuing to do the same thing, with the same means. Or even with greater means, for that matter. Nothing less than a transformation was in order.

We've approached this transformation as an opportunity to reconfigure our core activities to suit our own priorities and our strategic ambitions to bring the arts to Canadians and to connect with the world. Not as a reaction to budget cuts or policy decrees from the government of the day.

For us, it has become a way to bring the issue of public funding of the arts to the forefront in a way that is positive, visionary and future-oriented. This can only strengthen our case for stable and enhanced funding. This renewal and the impacts we anticipate will give us more credibility to make ourselves – the arts – part of the key conversations on the future of our country.

Our New Funding Model

The first step in our transformation is a New Funding Model. We announced it last spring and have been sharing details as we develop them. It will come into effect in 2017. The major change is a significant reduction in the number of granting programs from 147 to six. These six programs will cover all regions and all fields of professional arts practices. They give us the

flexibility to reach out to the growing sectors of the arts community less well served by our current model – for example, young artists, diverse artists, those working in remote regions. Artists who are disadvantaged from accessing funding – not because of the quality of their work but because they haven't figured out how to navigate our processes and programs. The model also allows us to more easily see what kind of impact our funding is having.

I don't want to go too much into the fine details of this new funding model, but I'll mention two of the programs that are most pertinent to you – and it will give you a sense of the vision that is driving the Council's transformation.

One of the new programs is called Arts Abroad. As its name, suggests it has an international focus. Council has always had international programs – given our sparse population scattered over a huge territory To illustrate this – Canada has 3.34 people per square kilometer. Compare this to India or Japan, with over 300 people per square kilometres. So obviously, access to international markets is critical to the artistic and financial success of our artists and arts organizations. The Council has just completed a three-year initiative in which we doubled our investments internationally. A couple of examples:

One example of the type of investment we made was in a series of international literary festivals. Here you see Madeleine Thien, who was one of several Canadian authors to take part in the first ever Spotlight on Canada at the Bookwork Literary Festival. This festival takes place in Beijing and several other cities across China.

Les 7 doigts de la main had a hugely successful showcase at the Canada Focus at the Shanghai International Performing Arts Festival. This has led to bookings for extensive tours through China. And shown here is a production by Quebec-based theatre company Sursaut. Which recently toured 11 cities in China, including Shanghai and Beijing.

Even if these investments were modest, they give us new insights about what artists and arts organizations need to be successful in the international arena. And now, we are ready to do more.

We're excited to take our international activities to the next level through our Arts Abroad program. The program brings together all our international funding to bring Canadian arts to the world. The result is that we have more flexibility to quickly respond to global trends and markets as they develop – and additional funds should they become available. And at the end of the day we'll be better able to measure and tell the story of the full impact of our funding.

Another manifestation of our potential for international exchange is in our new program called Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples.

This is a pivotal time in history when the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian state has been called the defining issue of our times. It's a time when it's recognized that Indigenous arts hold tremendous potential to change the tide in relations between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples for a common future. Canada is not alone in this critical moment. Around the world Indigenous political, social and cultural movements are challenging colonial power imbalances. Governments and citizens worldwide are grappling with the need to set out on a journey of decolonization and the arts can play a powerful role.

With the Council's Creating, Knowing and Sharing program, we believe we can have a great impact on the community level – especially in Indigenous communities where the healing power of the arts and cultural identity is well documented. But also at the international level. This dedicated program will take a unique, self-determined approach. This means it will be guided by Indigenous artists' values and worldviews, administered by staff of Indigenous heritage, assessed Indigenous arts professionals and its impacts reported on in an Indigenous cultural and artistic context. It also means that it can both inform and be informed by global movements for Indigenous rights.

This program features a component dedicated to international exchange. This opens the door to explore strong cultural and historical links across continents. To nurture the creative process, find new markets and raise understanding of these unique cultures with other countries with Indigenous arts practices such as Australia, New Zealand, the US, Norway, Finland, and the countries of East Asia.

A couple timely examples of this type of exchange:

A couple of days ago (Feb 22-26), for the first time ever, Indigenous artists, producers and presenters gathered together at the Australia Performing Arts market. One of the artists This was made possible through a tri-country partnership between the Canada Council, the Australia Arts Council and Creative New Zealand.

Earlier this month, for the second year, there was a spectacular showcase of Indigenous cinema at the Berlin International Film Festival. This initiative was spearheaded by the Canada Council, and this year we were joined by partners from New Zealand, the United States, South America, Greenland and the Nordic Countries.

Aside from the changes within our funding model, there are other transformative waves running throughout all of the Council's activities. These waves speak to our vision to see the arts take on a bigger role in society – they reinforce our goal to empower artists and citizens.

One of these waves is equity. In recent years, we've made targeted investments in culturally diverse communities and in the Deaf and disability arts communities.

What's more, we've woven these values of equity into the fabric of our organization through internal practices, program delivery and knowledge sharing.

Why is equity integral to our transformation? It's because the arts and culture are essential components of any journey to empower people, and for communities to re-invent themselves.

They open doors to diverse practices. They encourage innovation. They amplify voices that may not otherwise be heard. Voices we need to hear for the arts to truly reflect the range of excellence and to effect societal change. Voices that have ancestral connections throughout global diasporas.

This cultural expression and participation are keys to countering discrimination and alienation. And what could be more important to our societies in this era marked by refugee crises, terrorist attacks and disenfranchisement.

And that's why I feel so strongly about another transformative wave at the Council: public engagement in the arts.

Public engagement in the arts is much more than increasing ticket sales and creating a market for the arts. It's about making the arts part of our everyday lives, regardless of where we live, our ability or level of participation.

For the Council, this is integral to our mandate as a public funder of the arts. We have always funded activities and projects to promote public engagement. But for the Council that's no longer enough. We need to embrace it ourselves as an organization. And at the core, our transformation is about embracing the public considerations and responsibilities that come with our public funding. After all every citizen must have the opportunity to see, hear, experience, participate in the expressions of the culture – or cultures – that define them.

Public engagement is something that takes place in the spaces where we live and work. Our communities. But at the end of the day is a global concern. When our citizens are actively engaged in cultural life, they are likely to be engaged in all of civic life. A deep level of engagement grows our cultural influence on the world stage. Its soft power in a global context.

Beyond the NFM, beyond borders

I've given you the broad strokes of our transformation and its first iteration, our new funding model, but this is just the beginning of our transformation. We're now in the process of developing our strategic plan for the next five years. One of the main themes running through

our plan is Canadian arts and the world. But, in fact, all of the areas hold great potential for international exchange. Themes like:

- Artists and audiences in the economy of the future
- A digital strategy for the arts, and
- Indigenous arts – a new relationship, a shared future

In focusing on these themes, we're looking beyond our grant programs. We're exploring other areas where the Council can be part of international exchanges that will scale up our impact in Canada and in the world.

And so as we continue our conversations here today and in the months ahead... Let's talk about what opportunities are there for us to work together to address global issues affecting the arts and society. How can we join forces to support international movements?

In terms of digital technologies and new economies, how can we pool our knowledge and expertise and strength of our voices? How can we ensure a space for quality cultural content? In her book *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age*, Astra Taylor writes about the abundance of cultural offerings from around the world made available by technology. But she warns that these offerings are only as good as the soil that cultivates them.

She points out that even the most virtual, electronic work is produced by people who create in a social context. And I quote: "Our virtual and physical lives are intertwined, inseparable, equally "real." Whether their work is distributed by paper or pixels, creators never emerge fully formed from the ether. Individuals are buttressed by an array of plinths and braces. These include family and friends, patrons and publics. And institutions that include universities, foundations, community centres, publishers, distributors, libraries, bookstores, rock venues and cinemas as well as the ad hoc networks that comprise scenes and subcultures, digital and analog."

And so, it's vital that we make sure these plinths and braces, these people, institutions and networks are strong. How do we do this? How can we nurture a healthy ecosystem for the arts... and a better world for us all?

How can work together to bring together Indigenous cultures? How can we support efforts to rebuild cultural identity in Indigenous communities. And nurture reconciliation between the world's Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

Can we exchange success stories, best and promising practices? Can we collaborate on research about new markets?

Are there ways we can coordinate our efforts to promote the power of the arts? How can we together advocate to bring the arts to the tables where major discussions about the issues of our times are taking place?

Like the artists we support – the artists that enrich our lives with their tremendous inspiration and imagination – we also need to address the challenges around us in a way that is innovative, creative and collaborative.

I look forward to discussing these ideas with you further!

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