
How do we speak for the arts

in Canada today?

Edmonton, AB

April 24, 2013

DAY ONE SUMMARY NOTES

Panel One

What roles have the arts and artists played in Canada and what roles should they play? (What's next?)

- ✓ What we make should speak for itself
- ✓ Our audiences and the public should speak for the arts. After all, they are all artists at heart, and they know the intrinsic value of the arts and can speak that truth alongside us. They know that what we make matters.
- ✓ We have to find the balance between lobbying up and down – influencing decision makers and inviting the public to participate with us in the conversation about the arts.
- ✓ We must be unified and find a way to have common messaging. We must demonstrate the artist's presence and importance at the intersection of political, economic and cultural life.
- ✓ The arts "in service to humanity" is a central concept that should be further explored and exploited.
- ✓ If "we are each other" as Aaron suggests, then we can let go of us (artists)/ them (public) language and begin to think of ourselves as a community trying to build a better life for us all in Canada.
- ✓ Perhaps the concept of "excellence" is no longer as important as it has been in the past. Perhaps the concept of "value" to the community is more pressing now.
- ✓ We have to find our way back to the fundamental relationship between arts and education.

- ✓ Art cannot be institutionally focused. It has to find its place on an “expanded sidewalk”.
- ✓ What does arts advocacy look like going forward? It has to look different. It may look like “giving” rather than “asking”. It might be more generous than competitive. It might be about public good, rather than what’s good for the public . . . and it just might be about the heart.
- ✓ We have to find the best possible intersection of five key ingredients: Passion/ Process/ Data/ Unity of Purpose and Messaging/ Non-partisan behaviour – because any government can support the arts.
- ✓ We have to look at our engagement tools in a fresh way. What can we do with social media that will make the biggest difference and was not even possible until fairly recently.
- ✓ We need to be willing to get to the intimacy of art – the possibility of “feeling” something different.
- ✓ Dean of Medicine, defending budget: “for goodness sakes, we’re saving lives here.” Dean of Arts: “and we are making them worth living!”
- ✓ What should our engagement tools be going forward? Are there lessons to be learned from those groups that have been successful in making themselves heard in the face of societal rejection or indifference?
- ✓ There needs to be a greater role for artists in political life – as shapers of public discourse, not merely as respondents to it.
- ✓ If it is true that “we become what we say about ourselves” – then if we say that we are essential, important and central to Canadian life – perhaps the current balance of power will shift – making it possible for artists to stop advocating solely for the arts – and be able to tackle other, large scale quality of life issues that the arts are naturally a part of.
- ✓ You described a continuum on which artists – activists – influencers – politicians sit – and said that it is particularly important at this point in the evolution of the arts discussions to be able to place the artist on the right spot on this continuum.

Panel Two

Who has a relevant voice for the arts and why? (What's next?)

- ✓ We are stronger together.
- ✓ We may need a convening national home of some description.
- ✓ We need to reach beyond arts patrons to the general public – and to those whose voice has never been heard, or has been, consistently and systematically ignored. These voices must be heard.
- ✓ There will need to be different voices and strategies deployed depending on the result we want to achieve.
- ✓ We need to use the power of this “talking circle” -- and others like it – to make something *new* happen.
- ✓ We want to have an inclusive conversation about our *vision* for Canadian culture – and then have those who are having that conversation to become natural advocates for the arts as an instrument of building positive culture.
- ✓ We need to find a way to bring everyone “into the tent”: Thom’s mom, his son, and Aaron’s dad. Even though they may experience art in very different ways, they do have the potential for shared “joy”.
- ✓ We need to agree on:
 - The most important things to say
 - The best ways to say them so that there is maximum impact
 - A simple way to express our views
- ✓ We need to believe and trust that others will carry the script for us – that there are “believers” who will support our messaging.
- ✓ If, in fact, the arts help to build the Canada we want, then our collective “song sheet” needs to articulate a new, nation-building story.
- ✓ So, even though Margaret Atwood does a great job of speaking for the arts – we need her to be *one* instrument in a glorious and democratic “orchestra” – made up of professional and amateur musicians and music lovers who are expertly and excitingly conducted by . . . (*perhaps tomorrow, we might fill in this blank*)

- ✓ What we know is that we want to speak for the arts with humour, pleasure, charm and intimacy.
- ✓ We want the “shimmering group of irregulars” to become everyone’s favourite (albeit kooky) family members – beloved and supported.
- ✓ So tomorrow: *“What must we preserve and what must change in order to give voice to the arts going forward?”* and *“What’s next?”*
- ✓ I encourage you all to think about:
 - What needs to be done?
 - What will make the most sense and the biggest difference?
 - What will support artists in the most effective way?
 - What decisions will make us proud to have been in Edmonton in April 2013?

DAY TWO SUMMARY NOTES

Panel Three

What must we preserve and what must change in order to give voice to the arts going forward?

- ✓ We know what we want: a Canada in which the arts are valued and in which everyone is free to experience, participate in, and make art that matters to them.
- ✓ We know that such a country will likely be made up of an intricate mix of institutions, individual artists, educators and audiences who care deeply about the arts in Canada. Art, you said, cannot exist without community.
- ✓ In order to demonstrate commitment to community and to larger quality of life issues, the arts must not just support themselves, but also other community causes.
- ✓ The arts have a unique ability to bring people together on issues that matter – and they must.
- ✓ You said: we have to move beyond talking to ourselves and reach out even further to a broad range of publics, in the following ways:

- By being organized, not by being an organization in the traditional sense
 - By being public facing
 - By being agile
 - By being inclusive
 - By caring about Canada, and the world – not just ourselves.
- ✓ As co-creators of Canada, artists must work together with community.
 - ✓ You talked about many examples of “networks of networks” that could be emulated. Many of these are driven by on-line activity.
 - ✓ Whatever the organizing principle is that this group chooses as a way forward, it must have a strong social media presence.
 - ✓ And you talked about funding, saying:
 - Funding models have to be looked at
 - The need to fund new artistic expression has to be considered alongside the importance of support for traditional and institutional arts
 - “Elders and youth” need to co-exist in the funding mix
 - We need an arts “story” that we can all get behind and support – not one that is exclusive and defined by separate “factions.”
 - Relevance, pertinence, dynamism – these are all intricately tied to questions of funding.
 - ✓ You were discussing a system “re-design” that must run along a parallel track with the refreshed narrative for the arts in Canada.
 - ✓ You are willing to have the conversation about system re-design; even though it may be disruptive and uncomfortable – you agreed it’s necessary.
 - ✓ Your vision, going forward is of a network (a constellation?) that is people-heavy and artist-heavy but *light* in many other ways:
 - light of spirit and intent
 - infused with joy and generosity
 - full of grass-roots authenticity
 - ✓ The grass-roots support for the arts is there, you said. It just needs to be corralled, galvanized and delivered to decision-makers.
 - ✓ You were describing a *movement*. Not a place, or a group, or a committee – but a feeling, a wave – something essential, insistent, natural, joyful.

- ✓ You want to be a part of building a movement that takes the current “crisis” and changes the discourse. Something that will allow for the important re-structuring conversation to take place at the same time as the focus on arts, culture and community becomes an even more pervasive and powerful force in Canada.

- ✓ You described a decentralize, centralized entity that is:
 - Strong but not fixed
 - Agile but not impulsive
 - Courageous without being partisan
 - United but not homogenous

- ✓ *So, what's next?*

Panel Four

What's next?

You decided to do the following:

1. Develop a national arts advocacy network.
2. Develop a national arts research strategy.
3. Create a working committee to start the process of developing the Edmonton “manifesto” and to take a first cut at: goals, strategies, messaging to which the rest of the group can respond.
4. To keep the conversation going in a way that celebrates the spirit of Edmonton 2013 – fun, inclusive, generous. This will mean meeting again – on-line or in person.