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Comments by Carmen Lamanna on Canadian Visual Art

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I believe that the best image a gallery can have, if it needs one at all, is one of diversity that is created out of a series of separate and distinct choices made by an individual personality. Only when a gallery is characterized by an individual personality rather than a body of preconceptions, such as those defining regionalism, multiculturalism and nationalism, is constant evolution possible.

The aesthetic behind the Carmen Lamanna Gallery's goals which determines its exhibition program is intended to be personal, rather than institutional or academic. We are primarily concerned with the innovational quality of art and its existence in the presents It is our aim to search out, foster and promote new forms of art as they are being created and give the public the opportunity to deal with art as a genuinely contemporary activity by providing a daily showcase for innovative contemporary artists to display their work, making it meaningful in the context of society.

The Carmen Lamanna Gallery's policy has been deliberately directed towards the fulfillment of its aesthetic aims rather than towards financial rewards, although unfortunately our financial difficulties always interfere with our efforts and limit our fullest potential. Taking into account the lack of recognition and financial support we have received from our government cultural agencies, we have nonetheless inspired the interest of the most discriminating individuals in the international artistic community in our most innovative contemporary Canadian artists. As a result, we have represented Canada in the foremost exhibitions and art galleries in the world. Canada was represented for the first time in history at the Third International Pioneers Exhibition in Lausanne, Switzerland, 1970 by the Carmen Lamanna Gallery. We have also represented Canada in many other invitational international exhibitions including: the Venice Biennale, Documenta (West Germany), the Paris Biennale, the Tokyo Biennale, Expo '70 (Japan), the Sydney Biennale (Australia), Festival Des Deux, Mondes (Italy), the Ljubljana Biennale (Yugoslavia), International Exhibition (Vienna), American Biennale (Chile) and the Cracow Biennale (Poland) to name but a few. We have also represented Canada in exhibitions in the world's major art galleries, including: the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Washington Gallery of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the San Francisco Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago), the Kunsthalle (Cologne, West Germany), Musee D'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, and Kunsthalle Basel (Switzerland). The effect of these international exhibitions of work by Canadian artists has been staggering in the European context. The work by

Canadian artists has generated respect and interest in our country. European curators are increasingly requesting that Canadian artists be included in future exhibitions. Abroad, Canada's cultural image is but a shadow of its fullest potential. Through our yearly exhibition program, we educate and introduce the public to new forms of contemporary Canadian art and enable them to witness the ongoing development of artistic careers. We maintain an up to date historical record and documentation of the artists we represent and their work, and provide complete professional collaboration and service to national and international institutes in the organization and mounting of exhibitions of work by Canadian artists. Please refer to the attached national and international exhibition program for the Carmen Lamanna Gallery, fall 1981 to spring 1982. It should be noted that this exhibition program lists only major events. During the same period represented the Carmen Lamanna Gallery collaborated with numerous other regional and national institutes in providing group exhibitions of contemporary Canadian art. We are one of the few private galleries in Canada that offers such extensive service to institutes, artists and the general public. Unfortunately, apart from the exhibitions undertaken, we were unable to consider many other important opportunities for promoting our contemporary Canadian artists through other national and international exhibitions, simply due to lack of funds.

The approximate operating cost to the Carmen Lamanna Gallery in carrying out such a yearly exhibition program such as the attached is \$300,000.00. The average yearly sales of art works supply only about 20% of the general operating costs required. Since the Carmen Lamanna Gallery is 100% privately funded, the remaining 80% of the general operating costs must be raised through a variety of methods, such as working after gallery hours on framing, restoration, or any other odd jobs that are available. This means we usually work 18 hour days, seven days a week. As well, the Carmen Lamanna Gallery is accumulating a debit which increases yearly.

Such operation is extremely frustrating. Not only are we forced to spend long hours raising money to meet operating costs, but such operation also limits the vital professional service that we can provide to artists and the general public.

We provide an essential service to artists and the public, yet the Canada Council is determined to ignore our contributions. Indeed, the importance of our exhibition program becomes more apparent when one realizes that the current exhibition programmes of major public galleries in Canada demonstrate minimal interest in mounting exhibitions of work by contemporary Canadian artists. The importance of private galleries in developing contemporary Canadian art must not be overlooked.

We believe that the Government of Canada must provide the economic base for our activities. It is apparent to us that the current momentum of thought behind determining a practical cultural policy inclines towards cultural activity that pays its own way, and we realize that the Carmen Lamanna Gallery because of its policy of exhibiting new forms of contemporary Canadian art, is not in a position, nor will it soon be, to pay its own way. All genuinely innovative creative works become widely appreciated only with time. Even the most simplistic, least cerebral forms of art in man's history have gone years before their value has been recognized. However, it is vital for artists and the development of contemporary Canadian art to have galleries to exhibit their work. The continuing neglect of our culture can only seriously jeopardize the well-being of this nation.

Despite the admiration and praise for our efforts which we have received from the most discriminating gallery directors and curators in the international audience, we are consistently ignored by our own country's cultural institutes and suffer from an ongoing lack of support, both financial and spiritual. Our relationship with Canadian cultural institutes is a series of ongoing battles to safeguard our commitment to and support of the most significant new forms of modern art. Unfortunately, the policies and attitudes of Canadian cultural institutes demonstrate an ongoing conflict of interest which undermines and does not respect the individual efforts and commitments of the Carmen Lamanna Gallery and its artists.

Such attitudes are deeply felt by the Carmen Lamanna Gallery and threaten our survival. During the past 16 years of the existence of the Carmen Lamanna Gallery, we have been constantly reminded that we are confronted with a powerful government organization which ignores our efforts. Throughout our experience with government cultural institutes we have clearly reaffirmed that the threats to our survival are not due to lack of funding available to government cultural agencies, but simply due to the misdirection of funding towards purchase and exhibition programs that support regionalism, nationalism and multiculturalism. This fact can be illustrated by examining the distribution of grants to artists, mounting of exhibitions and acquisitions of works by public galleries and institutes. Thus our government cultural institutes encourage mediocrity, mislead the general public and waste funding at this crucial period of our cultural growth.

In the early 1970s we were discovered for the first time by a Canadian institute the National Gallery of Canada, at that time under the directorship of Jean Bogg. During her directorship, it was most encouraging to realize that for the first time the most demanding new forms of art were genuinely supported by both the purchase and exhibition programs of the National Gallery of Canada. Unfortunately in this instance Jean Bogg's individual efforts were not appreciated and since her resignation the National Gallery's exhibition program has been consistently

directed towards the injurious demands of regionalism and multiculturalism, which are further supported by the National Museums Corporation. Again in this instance, it is not lack of funding but rather misdirection of cultural philosophy which hinders the development of Canadian contemporary art. It would make more sense if individual efforts were supported and could serve as influential models, which would encourage the best expression of other individual efforts.

I wish to further direct attention to the present selfish and opportunistic attitude of our government cultural institutes. The commitment and support of private galleries to their artists enables artists to create works of art which in turn generates a significant amount of employment in our society, I would estimate that 75% of this labor force is employed by government cultural agencies. The government also provides all the necessary funding for general operating costs of public institutes across Canada, but has never set aside a special budget for payment of professional services, loan of works etc. from private galleries. However, it is an established fact that to promote the ongoing health of any industry, all parts of such industry must benefit equally. By aiding one sector at the expense of another, such industry stagnates. Without the collaboration of private galleries and artists, there is no reason for the existence of public art galleries and museums. Our government cultural institutes, however, with a selfish attitude, blindly reward only those who serve its self-interest and overlooks both the obligations it has for the services provided by private galleries and its responsibilities to provide the general public with a meaningful exhibition program. I strongly recommend that our government cultural agencies support the individual efforts of private galleries; in other words, the professional services provided by private galleries should be given the respect other professional services are, and paid accordingly.

It is disheartening to realize that our government cultural agencies, despite their original intentions which have always been represented to us as meaningful and promising, have come nowhere near to fulfilling their original objectives. In fact, the actual results of spending millions of dollars on the arts have been harmful rather than helpful to the state of Canadian culture. The basic difficulty in this regard is the inability of government cultural administrators, directors and curators to distinguish between artists of genius and mere imitators.

I firmly believe that it takes individuals of acute intelligence to appraise and support artists of genius. Therefore, the positions of cultural administrators must be filled by intellectuals who are passionately committed to supporting our most creative artists. I protest against both federal and provincial administrators art institute directors and curators who undermine and disregard our intellectually gifted artists, meanwhile supporting all types of commercial, imitative and mediocre art. Great harm has been done to the development of visual arts in this country because of poor administration and distribution of funding in the visual arts. As a result it is the imitators who benefit from the support of our government cultural institutes, while artists of genius are neglected.

It is most disturbing to realize that mediocre art is well supported, not only by the private sector, but also by the public sector. Under these circumstances, any addition to the minions available to the arts will not benefit artists of genius; rather the present problem will be made worse, since only the imitators will benefit. Thus, under present conditions, the harm to the visual arts grows in direct proportion to increases in funding.

Furthermore, due to the existing support for mediocre, imitative art available from government cultural agencies, other imitators are encouraged to seek support for their efforts. In fact, both the imitators who produce such work and the government administrators, curators and directors who support them function under the same mentality, which undermines and neglects genius, meanwhile ensuring that the mediocre in both the private and public sectors perpetuates itself.

The problems created by poor administration can be illustrated by the following example. In the early 1970's Susanne Rivald-LeMoyne, former head of the Canada Council visual arts department foresaw the vital importance of the role of the private gallery in the development of Canadian art. As a result, the Art Bank program was introduced. At that time, it was clearly stated to the artistic community and the general public that the criteria of the Art Bank purchasing program was to purchase the works of contemporary Canadian artists through private galleries, which would benefit both private galleries and artists. Unfortunately, soon after Ms. Rivald-LeMoyne resigned as head of visual arts, the ArtBank purchasing budget was drastically reduced to \$500,000.00, a loss of half the budget. Furthermore, recently the Art Bank purchases have been suspended for a period of one year, for no obvious reason at this crucial time. It is most disturbing and discouraging to realize that within a short period the original purpose and criteria of the Art Bank program have been completely misinterpreted and transformed by its administration in such a way as to serve no meaningful purpose either to private galleries, artists, or the general public. In fact, the Canada Council's most recent news release blindly stated that the Art Bank's purpose -is to support Canadian artists, and did not acknowledge the support of private galleries, and disregarded the mutual efforts and commitments between artists and private galleries.

The Art Bank continues to present its programs as meaningful, i.e. "The purpose of the bank is to recognize artists of achievement and to stimulate the art, market." In this instance, 98% of the Art Bank's budget is used to purchase popular objects fabricated by imitators, who of course are already supported by the private sector. Such lack of ability on the part of individuals in critical positions is the major cause of the present poor state of Canadian culture. Firstly, our government cultural administrators, directors and curators disregard artists of genius and secondly, through supporting mediocre art, the general public is misled into believing that such work is important.

If indeed the government had a genuine interest in preserving and supporting artists of genius, they must ensure that these critical positions in our cultural institutes are held by intelligent individuals possessing deep commitment and support for these unique forms of art. Ideally, the individuals who hold critical positions in our government cultural institutes should be involved in an ongoing process of learning about demanding new forms of contemporary art. It would be wise to learn from the examples of technology and medicine, in which there is a continual emphasis on the responsibility of educating oneself about recent developments, in order to provide the best possible service. If these criteria were applied to the individuals who hold critical positions in our cultural institutes, then the Canadian artists who are creating new and unique forms of contemporary art would finally receive the support and recognition which is long overdue to them.

Meanwhile, the importance of private galleries to the development of Canadian culture and the work of many truly great artists continues to be ignored. Private galleries, which are firmly committed to the development of genuine contemporary Canadian art suffer from a lack of recognition and respect on even a basic level. As a result, an extreme case of alienation exists between federal cultural agencies and private galleries, when instead private galleries only need the support and funding of federal cultural agencies to completely revitalize the state of contemporary Canadian art.

The Canada Council, through its program of direct funding to artists, seems to be determined to ignore the vital role that private galleries play in the development of important contemporary Canadian art. In the 1950s it made sense (politically and otherwise) for the Canada Council just to give grants to artists. It still makes sense to do so for beginning artists, but that is no longer enough because it does not help established artists or serve the cause of making their work more meaningful in the context of their society. Artists basically require ongoing support from private galleries to exhibit their work. What is the purpose in providing grants to artists, when they have no reason to complete work if they have no place to show it? Instead the Canada Council chooses to disregard and ignore artists' most basic requirement of having a continual showcase with private galleries. "All dressed up (by the Canada Council) and nowhere to go" (except warehouses and studio basements). It would make much more sense if the Canada Council would support private galleries which have demonstrated genuine support exclusively to our greatest Canadian artists. By supporting private galleries, the Canada Council could serve the interests of everyone concerned - the artist, the private galleries and the general public.

There is an obvious need for a coordinated government policy which can recognize and accommodate the need for promoting Canadian art abroad. Canadian artists of genius deserve to become internationally recognized and it is clear that the promotion of Canadian art abroad can be best accomplished by the efforts and representations of private galleries.

Private galleries are in a much better position than any government cultural institution to judge exactly which international opportunities to pursue, and how to best represent their artist's interests as such opportunities arise, since they have a much closer day to day rapport and communication with their respective artists than any government cultural agencies. Private galleries are therefore best equipped to negotiate with other commercial galleries and museums abroad to maintain a professional relationship which can promote the interests of Canadian artists. Canadian artists have exhibited at several important international art events, such as Documenta, the Venice Biennale and numerous major museums etc., but unfortunately, no private galleries were present to capitalize on and maintain the interest which these artist generated among the international art community. Only by a higher Canadian profile, through the continual presence of private galleries at international exhibitions can any meaningful, ongoing benefits develop.

If Canadian artists and their galleries were given the meaningful support necessary to develop the contacts and stimulate the interest of international museums and private galleries, there is no doubt that such support would have greater benefits than any other form of support, not only in stimulating the international art market for Canadian work, but also in terms of making a Canadian cultural presence abroad felt. Unfortunately, there is not only a lack of promotion of Canadian art abroad, but also within Canada itself. Due to the risks and intimidating expenses private galleries face in mounting travelling exhibitions of works by their artist, not only do our best Canadian artists remain largely unknown nationally, but the majority of Canadians never have the chance to experience and enjoy the most exciting new developments in Canadian art.

I urge that the entire system of funding to the visual arts be critically reassessed. Artists are one of the most precious resources in any civilized society, yet in Canada they are seriously disadvantaged and discouraged by the lack of support from federal and provincial cultural agencies, which persist in disregarding the fundamental role of private galleries. Therefore, I recommend that the following methods of support be made available to those individuals in critical positions in the private sector, in order that they can revitalize the state of contemporary Canadian visual arts.

- 1) Funding should be available to cover any year end debits that are incurred in the general operation of private galleries which intelligently and critically foster and promote genuinely original forms of Canadian contemporary art.

2) Private galleries should be eligible to receive funding enabling them to negotiate and mount national and international exhibitions of contemporary Canadian art. All general costs for mounting and promoting such exhibitions should be funded 100% by government cultural agencies.

3) For all national and international group and solo exhibitions composed of contemporary Canadian artists organized by private galleries, a professional service fee shall be payable to private galleries. Unfortunately, up to the present, private galleries have never received a professional fee for services provided to institutes.

4) The Canada Council should provide generous funding to public art galleries and museums specifically for the mounting of yearly, exhibition programs of contemporary Canadian art. Far too few public galleries and museums have an adequate exhibition program of contemporary Canadian artists. Funding should be available to both the artist and the private gallery, in the form of a budget to cover exhibition costs, publication of a professional catalogue, artist's fee, travelling and living costs for the artist to attend the exhibition opening, plus a fee to private galleries for professional services, including travelling and living costs incurred in mounting such exhibitions. Each public gallery that mounts such an exhibition should also guarantee to purchase a percentage of the work from each exhibition for their collection. Thus, each exhibition at a public gallery should generate income for both private galleries
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5) Funding shall be available to private galleries to cover 100% of publication costs for catalogues for exhibitions at private galleries, including a fee for essays written by art critics. Private galleries shall also be eligible for funding to cover 100% of publication costs for posters promoting their exhibitions. Besides funding from government cultural agencies for the publication of such catalogues and posters, we strongly believe that the private sponsorship of such publications, plus publication of lithographs, multiples and portfolios must be encouraged by enabling sponsors to deduct 100% of their sponsorship from their taxable income.

6) Any grants to private galleries for the purposes discussed in point #1 - #6 including funding for professional services, should be income tax exempt.

7) 100% tax exemption should also be applied to purchases of contemporary Canadian art by corporations and individuals through private galleries. This would enable a private gallery to establish with the private sector an ongoing educational dialogue and would help develop support for both private galleries and artists. Such tax exemption would result in growing benefits for government too, since important work appreciates in value and a tax could be levied whenever the work is resold.

8) The initial purchase of contemporary Canadian art. through a private gallery should be provincially sales tax exempt. This would encourage sales of contemporary Canadian art and the government could benefit by collecting tax on the resale of the work. This naturally shall not apply to work of commercial quality, such as regional art, fashion art, sentimental art, imitative art etc., but only to committed contemporary artists who create works of art with their own hands and through their own intellectual capacity.

9) The Canada Council should lobby for the reinstatement of the "1% for art" program formerly administered by the Department of Public Works. This program was a valuable form of support for both private galleries and artists and was an excellent opportunity for the public to have daily access to art.

10) Professional collaboration and support between private galleries, art critics, and all forms of news media such as CBC-TV, CBC Radio and all Canadian magazines must be encouraged and supported by our cultural agencies as a fundamental basis for educating the public towards an understanding and passion for the arts, in order that Canadian contemporary art is supported by the private sector, rather than having to rely on the minimum of support from public institutes.

11) Directors of private galleries must be invited to become members of boards of directors of federal and provincial cultural agencies, and should be actively involved with the jury granting system and purchase programs. They must also be represented on committees which revise and develop the policies of government cultural agencies. The Canada Council board of directors and the head of visual arts must be passionately convinced and convincing about the need of the Canada Council in the 1980s to become part of a coordinated effort between

- the Income Tax Department
- the Department of External Affairs
- the Secretary of State (culture)
- the Department of Public Works
- the National Museums Corporation

to provide a broad base for the development of culture in Canada.

Private galleries such as the Carmen Lamanna Gallery are formed by individuals such as artists and gallery directors who share an equal interest and appreciation of genuinely new forms of contemporary art. In contrast, we have long witnessed that federal and provincial cultural agencies, because of their bureaucratic nature, undermine the efforts of private galleries, as well as disregarding the establishment of artists' careers that are meaningful in the context of their society. Individuality, however, is the most important characteristic of creativity. Federal and provincial cultural institutes must learn to respect and support the efforts of private galleries, since we as individuals represent a wealth of creativity. We fulfill a unique purpose which is irreplaceable by any government agency. Therefore, Canada Council funding must be decentralized and made available to those galleries in the private sector who are deeply committed to the support of intellectually gifted contemporary Canadian artists, in order that Canada's potential for cultural expression can be developed to its fullest.