

COMMUNIQUÉ — August 14, 2008

CANADIAN CULTURE AT RISK

The future of Canada's international reputation is at stake.

Since taking power in 2006, the Conservative Government has chosen to eliminate over \$34 Million from Cultural and Heritage Granting Programs. The programs affected were designed to assist artists, arts institutions and not for profit charitable organizations in the creation, development, promotion and dissemination of Canadian art both nationally and internationally.

The most recent cuts, including a cancellation of the \$4.7 Million PromArt program and the \$9 Million Trade Routes program, have seriously crippled the ability of Canadian art and artists to travel outside our borders. Both of these programs assisted with the export of Canadian culture by enabling travel and support for artists, authors, performers, designers and the creators of films, television and new media. Canceling these programs only degrades Canada's reputation in the international cultural economy.

The comments made by political representatives of the government at the time of the announcement undermine the enormous value of Canada's cultural economy, ignore the significance of the many successes achieved abroad, and underestimate the intelligence of the general public by insinuating that the grants issued were used for leisure purposes by recipients of an immoral or untalented nature. In reality, well over 300 grants from the Department of Foreign Affairs alone were issued to recognized artists and arts organizations with the purpose of advancing interest in, understanding of and business with our cultural community; a community that defines the multifaceted Canadian identity, with a freedom of expression we claim to promote across the world.

Projects funded through these grants instill pride in Canadians, representing the many views, tastes, styles and media of Canadian art. The funds assisted artists, organizations and institutions in bringing Canadian art to the world, and bringing the world to Canadian art. The Department of Foreign Affairs' International Cultural Relations Division alone connected Canada to over sixty countries in only one year. Many of these and other countries across the world support and understand the

relevance of cultural diplomacy as big business, which offers exceptional return on investment.

The export of Canadian culture has a direct, positive effect on our economy, one which is not limited to our cultural sector. It allows international audiences the opportunity to relate with Canada on a more intimate basis by showcasing a taste of what we have to offer. Promotion of our multicultural, cosmopolitan, talented and vibrant culture results in increased tourism. Equally important, cultural export expands the marketplace for our cultural community, leading to increased support and new opportunities for our artists, performers, filmmakers, authors and more.

Canada's cultural economy, a \$40 billion annual business, is fuelled by vibrant, passionate, hardworking and dedicated taxpaying individuals. Their contribution to the economy of our country is worth no less than the contributions of workers in other fields of business. Their efforts to bring attention to Canada through international touring and presentation should be applauded, as they are dedicated to building a multifaceted, multicultural, engaging and enlightening international reputation for Canada through Canadian art.

Canadian sovereignty is not only a matter of defending our borders. It is about affirming who we are and what we stand for as a people. By undermining the work of artists and institutions, the decades-old respected cultural reputation for Canada abroad is damaged. The government should be aware of the impression these cuts give: that we have no identity worth affirming, that we have no values worth defending, and that we have no place on the international stage. Is this what we want to show the world?

Aussi disponible en français.

THE CULTURAL COMMUNITY RESPONDS / LES RÉACTIONS DU MILIEU CULTUREL

"Abolishing this program is the equivalent of killing the entire culture market abroad"
– Alain Dancyger, head of the Les Grand Ballets Canadiens in reference to PromArt

"Canceling the cultural diplomacy budgets for ideological and moral reasons is probably the littlest, meanest, most ridiculous and most representative decision Canada's New Government has made." – Todd Babiak, The Edmonton Journal

"The wholesale elimination of PromArt and Trade Routes is neither selective nor judicious. And while it constitutes the federal government's latest offensive in its apparent war on culture, it also displays breathtaking ignorance of a subject the Tories, above all others, should know by heart: Commerce."
– Alec Bruce, The Times & Transcript

« Pour Nassib El-Husseini, des 7 doigts de la main, "annuler le programme de promotion des arts est une erreur pour trois raisons : on ne pourra plus tourner autant, le Canada perd une faramineuse occasion d'établir des relations publiques et les ambassades perdent un outil" » – Hélène Buzzetti, Le Devoir

"...if we want our voice to have influence in the rest of the world, to be the moral beacon we believe it is, that requires marketing Brand Canada. Sending artists and writers abroad is an integral part of that marketing that happens to be extremely cost-effective."
– Simon Houpt, The Globe & Mail

"VoCA finds it depressing - no, it's deplorable - to think, that at a time when virtually EVERYONE not living under a rock recognizes the importance and value of the arts, ...that our Prime Minister still doesn't get it."
– Andrea Carson, www.viewoncanadianart.com

« La réalité, c'est tout simplement que les conservateurs n'aiment pas les artistes. Ils ne s'intéressent pas à la culture, point à ligne. [...] La plupart des grands pays pratiquent une diplomatie culturelle dont les fers de lance sont leurs artistes et leurs intellectuels.[...] Le programme de Routes commerciales était un peu l'équivalent pour les milieux culturels de ce qu'est pour les entreprises manufacturières Exportation et développement Canada. Dans l'esprit des conservateurs, si les artistes ont un vrai talent, ils n'auront pas de difficulté à se faire reconnaître à l'étranger. Quid donc l'aide apportée à Bombardier pour son nouvel appareil appelé CSeries. »

– Bernard Descôteaux, éditorialiste, Le Devoir

"I can't believe they would be so stupid. It's just provocative."

– Alain Pineau, National Director of the Canadian Conference of the Arts in reference to the cuts to PromArt and Trade Routes

“What is equally problematic here is that the recipients of these grants, be they Inuit carvers or Toronto rockers are being demonized for applying to, and receiving support, from a program developed, sanctioned and administered by the Government of Canada.”

– Duncan McKie, President and CEO, Canadian Independent Record Production Association

"This is going to really erode the ability of artists to get their work on the international stage." – Claire Hopkinson, Executive Director, Toronto Arts Council

« Nos artistes sont nos meilleurs ambassadeurs. On n'a pas à juger du contenu de leur création, il y a une démarche artistique qu'on se doit de respecter. On ne peut évoquer des arguments [comme ceux avancés par Ottawa]. Les demandes de subventions sont évaluées par des gens compétents. Qu'un groupe ou l'autre ne fasse pas l'affaire ne change rien au portrait. »

– Christine Saint-Pierre, ministre de la Culture du Québec, citée par Guillaume Bourgault-Côté, Le Devoir