

CAMDO Spring meeting 2012 Réunion du printemps de l'ODMAC

MEETING NOTES

DAY 1 – Thursday, May 3rd

Vancouver Art Gallery, Courtroom 302

Special Topic 2: The role of the public gallery in the ecology of the visual arts

Moderated by Josephine Mills and Gabrielle Peacock

Attending: Kent Archer, Jane Brooke, Carol Podedworny, Anthony Kiendl, Greg Bellerby, Barbara Fischer, Paul Crawford, Diana Nemiroff, Peter Thompson, Louise Déry, Scott Watson, Suzanne Greening, Robert Labossiere

This topic was one of three identified as priorities for the visual arts at the Kingston Colloquium last September.

The idea is to involve everyone involved in the visual arts and to look at the bigger picture.

The exhibition fee schedule agreement is coming up for renewal end of 2012 and it is not desirable to enter into "negotiations" because it doesn't get to the bigger issues.

Generally, in conversations with individuals, the response to the idea of maintaining the status quo on exhibition fees has been positive.

A broader conversation is needed if the livelihood of artists is to increase or if we want to ensure that art is collected and loved by all Canadians.

There was a initial "art economy" meeting in March in Toronto, a good combination of different perspectives.

Among the things we are looking at is wording, we use the word economy and market; the focus should be on how to create a healthy market. So some of the questions we are asking are:

What would the indicators of health be?

What can museums do?

What can the Visual Arts Alliance do?

From conversations so far, we know lack of transparency is a problem.

If we want to be treated like an economy, then we have to act that way.

We need to look at things in terms like supply and demand, consumer confidence (boyancy), robustness.

Another thing we need is better information: access to data.

The Bellavance report showed that there's no real data, no consistency, no idea what questions to ask even.

We have stats like that the average household expenditures on art is \$43, including vases, which is not at all helpful.

So, the VAA could be used as the place for gathering info
e.g. annual philanthropic giving
annual sales through dealers
publish two year exhibit schedule (see where value is being created)
grants given
sales at biennials and art fairs
commissions
secondary market sales

DISCUSSION

Diana: who attended the March meeting?

Robert: idea was to keep it informal, organic, it is impossible to have a truly representative group given the size and diversity of the community these days.

Greg: Are we talking about the idea of artists' livelihood and market but not the whole ecology?

Diana: if we had the data what would we do with it?

Gaby: We have to assume that it's useful. If we had the numbers, it could give us ways to change things. Nobody knows e.g. acquisitions annually by public galleries or the impact of exhibitions, e.g. after a David Milne show, values went up phenomenally.

Robert: Information plays two roles - knowing helps you do things better, but it also debunks myths.

Diana: Who's job is it to gather this type of information? Often this is the kind of thing that academics and social scientists do for other sectors.

Barabara: I was thinking of a broader idea of ecology, how art functions as a pedagogical tool, in the school system and in the larger public arena, how art appears in the media; the whole idea of presence, who produces it and in what ways. There are a number of pillars: economy is interesting, link between exhibits and market but, if we get into market discussion, where does that go for us as curators and directors? Will we start talking about bottom lines; what are the economic benefits of this or that exhibition? It's good to have more facts, but what will it lead us to consider?

Gaby: it doesn't have to be only about the market, but that is what the VAA tasked us with - other matters are considered otherwise, e.g. education and national campaign.

Peter: I love numbers but I share Barbara's concerns that this distorts how our value as museums is perceived, e.g. how we shape consciousness. As Josie said, we need to start somewhere, and this is a good place because there is an obvious paucity of information

plus a good part of our job is to affect policy. There is a temptation with a group like the VAA to look at measurables, e.g. salaries.

Gaby: The question is how it all fits together.

Peter: The players actually want it to be secretive.

Paul: I'm being squeezed e.g. Daphne Odjig is living in extended care; her paintings are selling for 25,000 and she has no work to sell, but I can't afford to pay artists' fees for her or reproduction fees. There's always been a relationship between commercial and public galleries. There's an art sales index. We need to make our resources available to the public - getting it out is most important.

Josie: The trick is to get academics funded.

Barabara: What can we do to strategically increase the profile and strength of the visual arts in Canada? To what extent can numbers help us is still an open question.

Josie: The measures of success we are asked for are things that come from performing arts, e.g. bums in seats, or that have nothing to do with what we actually do or want to do. Can we create our own measures? Can we have indicators across the different parts of the sector?

Barbara: The numbers of audiences is something asked for; do we have these for comparative purposes? Are they being used? Strategically is that really how we want to measure our successes?

Anthony: Measuring sales of art work would be a small part of what's actually going on; education would be more important, bigger impact, social capital. We suspect that there is a 1% doing very well and the rest do not do well. Resolving the artist fees issue would be very important. It should not be an employee - employer relationship.

Diana: It wasn't like that; there were some more radical voices who want to couch the debate that way; but only the National Gallery as a federal producer has to do it. The only way it got resolved was through a mediator; I'm not really for having that kind of thing again, can get hijacked; but if the position is to let the status quo be; then it's worth reaching out and saying to them, things are working fine, would like to keep it that way, what do you think?

Paul: CARFAC and exhibition fees are very difficult; people reduce staff to part time to keep up their fees for fear of losing council funding.

Janet: We don't know how attendance numbers figure because have nothing to compare them with.

Gaby: We need to acknowledge the impact we have, the contribution we make. The other day the board asked me to compare how we operate in relation to the size of our community, household income, etc.

Diana: These statistics might not be helpful because our contribution might not be that big. We can't lose sight of qualitative values, anecdotal information can be as powerful. It's not about direct economic return.

Peter: Statistics Canada sends me a quarterly survey every few months; perhaps we can have some input into the questions. I have filled it out 4 times a year for 7 years, 28 surveys; where is the data? And I can't remember even one of the questions. Numbers can be useful for advocacy; e.g. creativity is most important cognitive capacity among CEO's - an important argument that has absolutely helped with fundraising. There is a use for credible soft data.

Barbara: What about CADAC? How do you pull the data out?

Anthony: You can look at your own stats relative to the overall averages. A lot of the financial materials are useful but not the statistical reports.

Barbara - we should talk about what numbers are useful; what are the criteria; let's not be too romantic relying on the qualitative, needs to be founded on facts

Francine: We are caught in a world where we are always asked to measure everything; the question is how; the Ontario Arts Council has looked at what measurables should be, e.g. "curatorial something" but today everybody is a curator. We have to stop arguing that there is an economy. We need to break the myths, e.g. that everyone is a curator. We need to identify what we really value; how we fulfill our mandate; audience relationships, relevance to community. It is so useless to report the number of people, 24 people may be very very successful. We need to challenge the measures.

Greg: If we project ahead, imagine we have strategies for gathering data, what's the purpose, who does it go to; government? or is it the public? If enough people are on your side, then it will affect policy. So info needs to be digestible. To change the ecology you have to change the public, who is involved, and who is not. How do we fit with mass media, tv, etc. It's not just the hard facts.

Suzanne: We need a multi-pronged approach. I asked CAMDO members for input. We need to look at specific needs of each institution; all at different levels of maturity of their communities; in Abbotsford, the mayor looks at recreation participation or library use vs. the gallery, which then looks like a big hole.

Louise: I agree there is a need to get the info out. But a granting body recently changed the rules about magazines so they need to have distribution over 5000 to qualify for funding; just providing the numbers is not enough, they may not be used in the right way. We are always explaining qualitatively but there is always a gap when it comes to the numbers. For example, if we show young artist and then their work is collected, the collector will claim they "made" the artist, not the gallery. Producing catalogues is important as is how they are distributed but we are not in the market. At the same time, for the Venice Biennial, we brought a Quebec artist into the international scene. We need to show the link through studies etc.

Gaby: In Toronto, the focus was outward; how can we show what we do and celebrate what we do; some part of that has to be about the numbers; it's about making it easier for people to understand what we do; e.g. philanthropy is not well understood.

Scott: Some are looking at cost per visitor... an Americans for the Arts report; but it's too simple to measure the door. It's not useful. It's better and easier to collect stories; e.g. at one of our University alumni reunions I met a guy who said a work he saw at UBC changed the course of his life.

Diana: There is what is known as metrics: Max Anderson as a Getty fellow looked at how to integrate qualitative info into numbers. For example, for publications, we could be evaluating the seriousness of them by establishing benchmarks, e.g. 100 pages and over = more serious. There is also the UCAGAC survey. It might be good for CAMDO to commission a survey. It could be useful. They did an executive summary and sent it out to lots of people, and made the more detailed report available.

Janet: It is true that there is a supply chain, and we need to understand that, but the idea is that we create the market and sell to it, e.g. books, and that's new knowledge creation. The language of supply chain is good, but what is being affected, what are the knowledge impacts?

Paul: A lot of the data isn't useful but I agree with Scott that stories are important. We have kids using a skateboard ramp by the gallery. We had an Agnes Martin show and people came out weeping. It could be a powerful campaign: how art has impacted us. For me it was finding a Karsh photo at a thrift shop, writing to him and him writing back. That set me on a life course.

Josie: Where do we go from here?

- doing an art economy meeting in Nanton
- the nature of these is that it is a broad group, the different spokes
- the VAA is coordinating
- like activist theatre
- don't predetermine actions or outcomes
- more small meetings - how and where?
- BC in Oct during "institutions by artists"?
- TO during the art fair end of October

Barbara: Cells would feed into VAA . It's all good because goal is improvement, but smaller groups need a more focused question e.g. what is the link between qualitative and quantitative measures? Can we take control over these? What is our agency? How do we collect stories?

Josie: From March, there were notes and conclusions. In Nanton we'll be looking at the 16 points developed in Toronto, possibly using a world cafe model, and we'll look at the five things that came out previously and have at those in more detail.