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In 1971, Canadian Artists’ Representation/le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC) was formed to lobby the federal government for recognition of artists’ copyright. After a sustained advocacy campaign, Canada Council made the payment of fees to living artists an eligibility requirement for Program Assistance Grants to Public Art Galleries. In 1976, Eye Level Gallery became the first gallery in Atlantic Canada to pay CARFAC fees.

By this time, artist-run centres were organized nationally under the Association of National Non-Profit Artist Centres (ANNPAC), a network of artist-run centres established to foster communication between centres, and lobby for stronger support for the arts in Canada. To help plan for the next decade of artist-run culture, Canada Council sponsored the “Living Museum Colloquium” in 1979. Participants were chosen based on their regional and disciplinary representation and by their willingness to help prepare a working document to guide the development of artist-run centres into the 1980s.

One of the organizers of the colloquium was Al Mattes, co-founder of the artist-run Music Gallery in Toronto. Michael Fernandes attended the colloquium as a representative from Eye Level Gallery. He apparently wrote a letter to Mattes, expressing his interest in attending the colloquium but the letter was misplaced by Marina Stewart and never sent. Stewart then wrote to Mattes to paraphrase Fernandes’ enthusiasm for the colloquium:

I regret to say I’ve just misplaced the letter Michael gave me to send you. He expressed himself poetically, and I think it went something like this: “We don’t know what it is but we are hopeful of (interested in) what it could become.”

The colloquium resulted in a major report prepared by Victor Coleman and presented at the 1979 annual general meeting of ANNPAC. The report included a four-point plan to strengthen and extend the artist-run network despite a freeze in government funding for arts and culture. Under the plan, the Living Museum would include an agency to help ensure artists receive fair remuneration for their work, a distribution hub to promote and sell art, and physical spaces in urban centres to support the activities of contemporary artists. The Living Museum was also intended to include a national data network that would improve communication and provide a central archive of information about the activities of artist-run centres across the country.

While lobbying and organizing efforts were underway on a national level, in Halifax, Eye Level Gallery and the Centre for Art Tapes were maturing as artist-run centres and presenting an increasingly diverse set of programming. Both centres provided exhibition and performance opportunities for local artists and arranged for touring artists to present their work in Halifax.

This cluster features a chronological inventory of exhibitions, performances, and other events organized by Eye Level Gallery and the Centre for Art Tapes between 1977 and 1981. Read together, the inventory reveals the close relationships between both centres and their impact on the art scene in Halifax. The inventory is presented alongside documents from the 1979 Living Museum Colloquium to illustrate the concurrent efforts to strengthen the national artist-run network and improve the overall livelihood of Canadian artists.