

“It is necessary to raise the ugly spectre of fund-raising.”

Artist-run culture emerged, in part, as a reaction to the tunnel vision of the commercial art world, but in Halifax, artists were also organizing to draw attention to the financial needs of individual working artists. In Nova Scotia, municipal and provincial funding for the arts was far below other regions of the country and the need for additional sources of funding was a regular agenda item during board meetings at Eye Level Gallery and the Centre for Art Tapes.

In 1980, the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee was established to undertake public consultations and report to the House of Commons on the state of federal cultural policy. The committee released its landmark report in 1982. The authors of the report, Louis Applebaum and Jacques Hébert, were critical of the federal funding for the arts and wrote that “it is clear to us that the largest subsidy to the cultural life of Canada comes not from governments, corporations or other patrons, but from the artists themselves, through their unpaid or underpaid labour.”

Prospects were dim and it was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain full programming schedules with limited and sporadic funding. One report given to the Eye Level Gallery board from director David Craig bluntly states that “It is necessary to raise the ugly spectre of fund-raising.”

The Applebaum-Hébert report did not improve the funding situation and, in 1984, massive cuts to arts funding were announced. By this time David Craig was national spokesperson for the Association of National Non-Profit Artist Centres (ANNPAC). In this capacity, he wrote to federal Communications Minister Marcel Masse on November 21, 1984 regarding the cuts and asked “if artists are already contributing the largest subsidy to culture in this country; and if cultural enterprise is contributing to the well-being of the country, then how can Canada afford to diminish its investment in the arts?” Masse responded on December 31, 1984 and wrote that “the budget cuts in no way diminish the importance which this government attaches to the development of cultural expression in Canada” and that the impact of the cuts “can be greatly minimized through reductions in administrative expenditures, the elimination of non-essential services and enhanced coordination of effort among government programs and agencies and the private sector.”

Ironically, at the same time, Eye Level Gallery was working with a federal grant that funded the creation of three administrative positions at the gallery, including the gallery’s first archivist, Bruce Campbell. Campbell and a team of artists prepared the gallery’s archival collection to be deposited at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia.

The cuts prompted a national outcry, which culminated in Halifax with the Arts and Culture Assembly held on January 27, 1985. The Assembly featured readings, presentations, and a performance on arms-length funding by Cathy Quinn. The Arts and Culture Assembly is well-documented in the Eyelevel Gallery and Centre for Art Tapes fonds, as well as other archival fonds held at the Dalhousie University Archives. (The proceedings were published under the title “*You’ve got 10 minutes to get that flag down . . .*”) The Assembly was a critical moment in the development of artist-run culture in Halifax.

This cluster features a variety of grant applications, administrative documents, photographs, and ephemera that collectively demonstrate the divergent perspectives on arts funding, cultural labour, and cultural policy held by artists and cultural policy makers.