

advertising unpaid internships

Hello,

We notice that you have recently advertised an unpaid internship. We understand the pressures that publicly funded non-profit arts organizations such as yours are under. We salute you for taking the time and effort to mentor and train people wanting to work in the arts sector.

However, we are concerned that by not paying people, only those who can afford to work for free will be able to benefit from your internship scheme. As internships are becoming more prevalent than entry-level jobs, those who are unable to take up these unpaid opportunities are less likely to enter the sector. These positions negatively impact the value of all labour in the arts, and make it harder to fight for adequate working conditions in the cultural sector.

This is far from an equitable labour practice. Demonstrating such unfair employment practices also seems to contradict your gallery/centre/organization's role in the arts milieu. Artist-run centres in Quebec/Canada have a long-standing history of fighting for artists' rights, including the payment of artist fees and advocacy around the value of cultural work. It is only logical that the recognition of artistic labour and support for fair working conditions should apply to all cultural workers, including the staff of arts organizations.

In Quebec/Canada we have been avoiding important conversations around artistic labour and precarity. Perhaps the situation feels less urgent in light of our particular funding structures, or we are censoring ourselves because the community is small and we are worried about upsetting people or endangering our own jobs and future opportunities. Nonetheless, we encourage you to think about how an organization like yours might act as a model for equitable labour practices, rather than contributing to economic conditions that encourage exploitation.

We wanted to flag this and ask you to consider the ethics of offering unpaid internships in your organization. There is a lot of information out there that might help you develop a new and more equitable approach to working with interns. FUSE Magazine has a number of links on their website (fusemagazine.org/2013/12/interns) with information and guidelines on this topic, and we encourage you to consult those.

We thank you for your attention to this matter, and hope that we can count on your collaboration.

Sincerely,

Nicole Burisch is a Canadian curator, artist, critic and cultural worker. Her research (with Anthea Black) into curatorial strategies for politically engaged craft practices is included in *The Craft Reader* (Berg) and *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press). Burisch worked as the director of Calgary's

Mountain Standard Time Performative Art Festival from 2007 to 2009, and is currently based in Montreal, where she works as administrative coordinator at Centre Skol. She occasionally makes collaborative performance work as one-third of the Ladies' Invitational Deadbeat Society and one-fourth of The Brick Factory.

Thanks to Anne Bertrand and Stéphanie Chabot for their encouragement and support.

Translation to the French by Sophie Le-Phat Ho; French copyediting by Edith Brunette

Bonjour,

Nous avons remarqué que vous avez récemment affiché un stage non rémunéré. Nous sommes conscients des pressions que ressentent les organismes artistiques sans but lucratif soutenus par un financement public comme le vôtre. Nous saluons vos efforts et le temps que vous dédiez à former les personnes intéressées à intégrer le secteur artistique.

Cependant, nous sommes préoccupés-e-s du fait que, en n'offrant pas de rémunération, seules les personnes qui peuvent se le permettre pourront bénéficier de votre système de stages. Alors que le nombre de stages a dépassé celui des emplois de premier échelon, ceux et celles qui sont incapables de postuler pour ces opportunités bénéfiques seront moins nombreux à pénétrer le secteur. Ces postes ont un effet pervers sur la valeur de l'ensemble du travail effectué dans le milieu des arts et rendent la lutte pour de meilleures conditions de travail dans le secteur culturel plus difficile.

Ceci ne constitue pas une pratique de travail équitable. Recourir à ces pratiques injustes semble également contredire le rôle de votre galerie/centre/organisation dans le milieu des arts. Les centres d'artistes auto-gérés au Québec/Canada ont une longue histoire de lutte pour les droits des artistes, incluant le paiement de cachets d'artistes et la défense de la valeur du travail culturel. Logiquement, la reconnaissance du travail artistique et le soutien pour des conditions de travail équitables devraient s'appliquer à l'ensemble des travailleurs-euse-s culturels-le-s, incluant le personnel des organismes artistiques.

Au Québec/Canada, nous avons ignoré ces discussions importantes autour du travail artistique et de la précarité. Il se peut que nos structures de financement nous aient amenés à sous-estimer l'urgence de la situation. Peut-être nous censurons-nous en raison de la petite taille de notre communauté, par crainte de déranger ou de mettre en péril notre carrière. Ceci étant dit, nous vous recommandons de réfléchir aux manières dont une organisation comme la vôtre pourrait devenir un modèle de pratiques de travail équitables, au lieu de contribuer à perpétuer des conditions économiques qui encouragent l'exploitation.

Nous espérons que vous saurez prêter attention à cette situation, et vous demandons d'examiner l'aspect éthique du fait d'offrir des stages non rémunérés au sein de votre organisation. De nombreuses sources d'informations s'offrent à vous afin de vous aider à développer une nouvelle approche plus équitable auprès de vos stagiaires. Le magazine FUSE offre sur son site (fusemagazine.org/2013/12/interns) plusieurs liens à ce sujet, que nous vous invitons à consulter.

En vous remerciant de votre attention et en espérant pouvoir compter sur votre collaboration, cordialement,

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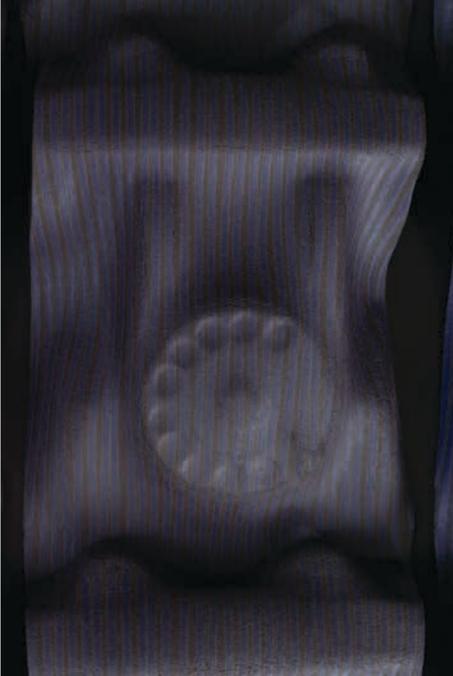
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 A Space Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of our members and project partners as well as the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council.

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ART, AUSTERITY AND THE PRODUCTION OF FEAR

In early November, FUSE put out a call to our close collaborators for a short feature essay on the impacts of austerity within our sector. Faced with an overwhelming response, we decided to take on an experimental, collective writing format. On the evening of 2 November 2013, a group of Toronto-based executive directors, curators and dropouts of prominent artist-run organizations met in the FUSE office to engage in frank discussion about the conditions affecting our organizations. The text that follows was built out of a selective edit of that conversation. As compensation for their participation, each contributor has been paid the minimum wage (currently \$10.25 in Ontario) for each hour spent in conversation and editing. This ad hoc collective has elected to remain anonymous.

On 30 October 2013, the *Toronto Sun* published an article criticizing a project organized by Allyson Mitchell and presented by the Art Gallery of York University. *Kill Joy's Kastle: A Lesbian Feminist Haunted House* (2013) was a large-scale installation in Toronto's west end that used Halloween tropes to lay out a haunted history of feminism. Situated as a response to "hell houses" created by radical evangelical groups to promote socially conservative values, *Kill Joy's Kastle* provided a playful response to homophobia and misogyny (while also stirring up a maelstrom of intra-community discussion and controversy). The *Sun's* attack of Mitchell's work, penned by veteran

columnist Joe Warmington [1], relied on that most faithful of right-wing ammo – the public funding that the project received. In this case, dedicated funding amounted to a \$500 Exhibition Assistance Grant from the Ontario Arts Council, a modest sum that the *Sun* exaggerated by publishing it alongside the five-digit number corresponding to the annual funding received by the Art Gallery of York University. To further criticize this supposed misuse of public funds, the *Sun's* reporter drew a comparison to a haunted house set up by Toronto mayor Rob Ford at his office, which was paid for privately. While an obvious rebuff might begin with reminding Warmington and his ilk that artists and other residents will always create projects from their own funds, leaning on this type of argument misses the point of public arts funding altogether: art adds value to society through the expression of diverse viewpoints and critiques, and is not merely an aesthetic object, a form of spectacular entertainment or an economic generator.

This type of alarmist shaming is certainly not limited to the *Sun*; in September 2012, CTV News published a similar story critiquing funding for Toronto production centre Trinity Square Video's workshop "Grow Yer Own Porn... 2012 Style," which discussed "ethical and political issues around explicit sexual representation, prioritizing problem-solving and practical production activity." [2] While neither story gained traction outside of right-wing outlets, the trouble is that negative media attention

leverages public opinion and loops back to venues and granting bodies, in turn threatening their support and funding. This threat alone can impact the arts community through the preemptive self-censorship of both practising artists and artist-run centres. This backhanded push towards censorship is just one element of a driving attack on the fundamental principles of arts funding in Canada—designed as arm's-length granting processes for artists, organizations and projects, juried by their peers. Media critiques directly produce the fear that by supporting potentially controversial projects, artists and their institutions run the risk of feeding a neoliberal assault on public-sector arts funding.

In this current age of austerity those fears are real. As governments worldwide are pressured to cut spending and simultaneously reduce revenues through tax cuts, we find ourselves in a downward spiral of austerity. It is not only funding for the arts that is suffering under austerity – social housing, education, health care, income support and virtually all other programs are impacted. This is all part of a vast transfer of wealth to the richest in society, which is creating the highest level of income inequality seen since the 1930s in what was formerly the developed world. As people are reduced to taxpayers, a fundamental break with notions of civil society and collective well-being is cemented – a permanent state of emergency sets in.

This state of emergency does not impact everyone evenly, even within the arts. Identity-based organizations serving disability, racialized and Indigenous communities are still struggling compared to "mainstream" (read: white, hetero, male dominated) organizations despite years of targeted programs. This is not to mention the fact that all precarious "immaterial" labour in the arts is dependent on the brutal, decidedly material working conditions for the labourers who produce our electronics, clothing, supplies and so on. [3]

Life and Death in Artist-Run Culture

Artist-run culture and its institutions are key elements of contemporary art in Canada. Since the late 1960s Canadian artists have built a national network of organizations and collectives to support artists outside the constraints of the market. The utopian impulse of artists to control the means of production, publication and dissemination has succeeded in building an infrastructure that can be inclusive of diverse voices and mediums, across all regions of the country. While the initial impetus of artist-run culture has remained in some centres and emerging projects, institutionalization has too often ossified the sector. The creation of new hierarchies on top of the old boys' clubs continues to restrict the possibilities for artists to create parallel institutions that reflect the diversity of contemporary practice.

Austerity and freezes to arts council budgets across most of the country have created an impossible condition for maintaining the status quo in artist-run culture. Due to inflations alone, every year of stagnancy actually results in significant cuts to arts organizations and other publicly funded sectors of civil

society. This is particularly striking in areas such as the price of renting commercial space, which has increased exponentially without an increase in funding to offset the cost. With public funding for the arts playing a significant role in the development and structure of the sector, the condition of stagnation means that for the most part, no currently funded organization can receive an increase and no new organization can enter the funding stream – regardless of their programming excellence – without cuts to existing organizations. As part of the complex requirements to enter the operating streams of funding, new organizations must build significant capacity through project and other temporary funding programs, only to receive what is often /less than what they operated with on a project basis.

Arts organizations are increasingly under pressure to pursue private sector sponsorship. While many organizations have shifted their models to attract corporate sponsorship and to increase self-generated revenues, other projects have resisted change because it threatens their core mandate and values. Again, key to this discussion is how to ensure the independence of the sector from censorship, because work that is truly messy, radical or controversial (environmentalist, anticapitalist, abolitionist &c) is often unpalatable to corporate agendas. While spectacles like Luminato, Nuit Blanche and TIFF attract massive corporate sponsorship, opportunities are far more limited for small and midsized organizations. Private sector funds can be important to some groups, but the value of art cannot be determined by its utility for corporate branding, and financial concerns must not be allowed to dilute the independence of arts institutions.

These are decisions we must, and do, make on our own terms. Could the recent symposium on decolonial aesthetics organized by e-fagia and *FUSE*, for instance, have proudly sported the moniker "L'Oréal" or "Scotiabank Symposium on Decolonial Aesthetics?"

We might say that everything has a lifespan and artist-run centres are no different. Some end before their time, others transform and renew themselves through successive generations, and some remain on life support far longer than is dignified, beholden to the palliative care [4] of a burnt out "new generation" of cultural workers tasked with working out their present and future while struggling to honour their past. Sometimes it's better to go gracefully than to struggle on, as seen with the Toronto Free Gallery's decision earlier this year to close due in part to costly new reporting requirements mandated by the Ontario Arts Council.

When speaking of the demise of centres, it may be helpful to see some as having lived out their life spans due to sectorial, technological or political shifts that have dramatically changed the landscape since the centres were founded, often decades ago. In media arts, there are three main types of organizations: production centres, distributors and exhibitors (with some organizations performing all three roles). At present, the greatest challenge for the sector is how to work with a fixed amount of funding to sufficiently support successful organizations

[1] Joe Warmington, "Taxpayers funding 'lesbian haunted house' in Toronto," *Toronto Sun*, 30 October 2013. Warmington, not coincidentally, is one of the few journalists who gets a pass from Toronto's current mayor-by-name-only, Rob Ford, whose primary self-assigned mandate is to watch every dime spent by council.

[2] See Andrew James Paterson's review of the CTV coverage in *FUSE* 36-1 (Winter 2012–13).

[3] For more on this last point, see Jacob Wren in Lee, Kraus and Wren, *In Different Situations Different Behaviour Will Produce Different Results!* (Toronto: Paper Pusher, 2013), 23-24.

[4] Amy Fung, "Evolve or Perish," *Post Pacific Post* tumblr (22 November 2013).

and to create space for new ones. The clearest strategy for the sector is to address the redundancy created by successive waves of technical shifts.

Media arts production and distribution have historically been divided between film, video, new media and sound art organizations. Many cities have multiple production and distribution organizations that are specialized, with some working out of the same building. For instance, Toronto is home to Vtape (video distribution, research and exhibition) and CFMDC (Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre), Trinity Square Video (production and exhibition), Charles Street Video (production) and LIFT (the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto, media non-specific production and exhibition). At a time of financial constraint, what is preventing organizations like these from merging, aside from distinct legacies? The merger of organizations performing similar roles could be an effective mechanism to reduce costs for physical space and to consolidate staffing, while freeing up increased funds for improved services. By creating "super-centres" for production and distribution, the media arts sector could have the opportunity to address historical inequities across regions and mediums, and to provide space for new projects. Part of what's standing in the way of such succession is that no one's done the math. With a dearth of precedent, no one is sure how the councils will respond, and people fear losing jobs and programs.

New projects and possibilities are everywhere, but it is imperative that current administrators envision new models and configurations and work closely with the councils to make them possible. This is how artist-run culture was born and it's what is required to keep it alive through this awkward midlife crisis. The death and merger of centres are not suggestions; they are inevitable as the sectors evolve with changing climates. The only question is where and how the decisions will be made – collectively by institutions and the artists they represent, or top-down through the funding process? All sectors face difficult decisions around which institutions are crucial and how they can be improved. It is imperative that cultural institutions put aside their self-interests and closely examine the needs of the broader community. There is not only death and merger here, there is also space for increased collaboration and for sharing resources. Breaking away from competition and opening new models of mutual aid is possible. When so many contemporary artists work in an extra-disciplinary manner, does it even make sense to maintain disciplinary distinctions that silo artist-run initiatives into media arts, visual art, performing art and publishing?

As new organizations come into being, it's essential that they are not exclusively located in the downtown cores of major cities – a priority that's already been recognized at the council level with their emphasis on priority neighbourhoods and regional projects. Suburbs, small towns and rural areas can all benefit from new initiatives that provide access to the production and exhibition of art. Likewise, existing institutions need to amp up their equity-focused programs to ensure they are truly serving disability, racialized and Indigenous communities, in alliance with

identity-based organizations (as opposed to routine tokenization). Without this support for diverse artists, it will be impossible to build a robust national voice to resist austerity in arts funding.

The Return of the Cultural Worker or How Not to Lose Faith

The political situation is dark. The public discourse is bleak. Austerity is spreading across much of the world. Too many people now define themselves as taxpayers, and not as residents engaged with broader communities. Most arts funding is static, to say nothing of welfare rates, social housing budgets, intelligent transit investment and income inequality, all while the state security apparatus endlessly expands. It feels like a dark time as we see some organizations become corporate shells and watch others collapse under the weight of increased costs.

Against this backdrop, this year Toronto has seen a major success in arts funding. In January 2013 Toronto City Council passed a motion to tax billboards and dedicate the income to arts and culture funding. Estimated at \$17.5 million annually, this increase in arts funding is the only recent break from the regime of austerity. This didn't come from a vacuum; working with partners in urban planning, citizens' groups worked for years to make it a reality. Under the umbrella of the Beautiful City Coalition, over sixty arts organizations shared common cause to make an ambitious goal a reality. With this new funding, Toronto organizations are just starting to catch up to the cuts to provincial support under the Harris government, and to peers in other cities (prior to this, Toronto had the lowest per-capita municipal arts funding of comparable Canadian cities).

Models for success emerge when cultural workers organize. Artists and cultural workers organizing and working with allies is what created arts funding in Canada. While we must work to increase the levels of arts funding to create a more sustainable sector, we must also be self-reflexive and willing to pull terminal organizations off life support in order to better use the funds we have.

Perhaps we can begin by selecting fewer centres to fund, so support is prioritized and reserved for ones more effectively creating space for new ideas and new projects. There are also times we need to stop doing more with less, where the only solution to diminishing returns is a strike – the withdrawal of labour from conditions that are no longer tolerable. In the coming months we may see both of these spreading across the arts community. With luck, the action will spread far beyond artists and cultural workers, allying all communities under attack by austerity. [5]

LIDS
DO LESS WITH LESS /
DO MORE WITH MORE

The Ladies' Invitational Deadbeat Society (LIDS) was founded in 2006 as a closely knit affiliation of then-unemployed cultural workers, not working but still bustin' ass within Alberta artist-run culture. Their activities make visible and politicize women's roles in the (arts) economy through tactical laziness, crafty collaboration, over-performance and wild hilarity. Members Arthea Black, Nicole Bursch and Wednesday Lupyciw have held positions as maids, waitresses, professors, homeopathic practitioners and board

and staff of several Canadian artist-run organizations. They've exhibited their solo works, published, conferred and lectured throughout Canada and the world, and they now reside in London/Toronto, Ontario; Montreal, Quebec; and Calgary, Alberta respectively.

The Ladies' Invitational Deadbeat Society's limited edition *DO LESS WITH LESS / DO MORE WITH MORE* cross-stitch-pattern poster was printed at the Alberta Printmakers' Society in June 2012. The slogan on the posters was inspired by a discussion that took place as part of Artivistic's Promiscuous Infrastructures project at Centre des arts

actuels Skol in Montreal, about how artists and non-profit arts organizations negotiate the constant pressure to do more with less. With this poster reissue for *FUSE*, LIDS proposes that we resist the capitalist logic of constant acceleration, productivity and austerity budgets by reasserting a realistic level of production within our means. Use LIDS's handy pullout pattern to stitch a banner for your own office and hang in the orientation of your choice!

[5] For more on this, see curator Cheyanne Turions's blog post, 17 November 2013, adapted from her presentation at the Evolve or Perish conference presented by MANO/RAMO (Media Arts Network of Ontario), held in Ottawa.

