

RESEARCH RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

The Rozsa Foundation regularly conducts research to stay well informed to remain responsive to the arts sector. Specifically, we were looking for ways to refresh and renew the granting guidelines and expand the support offered to the visual arts community by addressing current gaps or opportunities. The research objectives were threefold:

1. Meet leaders in the visual arts community and increase general familiarity with organizational mandates.
2. Identify opportunities to increase profile and sustainability of non-profit visual arts organizations that could be addressed through an expanded granting program.
3. Identify areas for collaboration amongst the three subsets of the visual arts community.

JUSTIFICATION OF SAMPLE

The sample chosen to participate in this research was selected to provide a set of data from approximately the same number of respondents per category. Curators of corporate art collections, directors of public art galleries, and owners of private art galleries were invited to participate. Private collectors and individual artists were not included due to difficulty of access. Of the thirty-five companies contacted, thirty-one (89%) responded.

SAMPLE	35	PARTICIPANTS	31
Corporate Collectors	11	Corporate Collectors (5 on-site)	9
Private (commercial) Galleries	10	Private (commercial) Galleries (9 on-site)	10
Public (non-profit) Galleries	12	Public (non-profit) Galleries	11
Galleries	6	Galleries	6
Artist run centres	3	Artist run centres	3
Festivals	1	Festivals	0
Post-Secondary Schools	2	Post-Secondary Schools	2
City Programs	2	City Programs	0

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The reader is reminded that the research sample is only a subset of the entire visual arts population in Calgary: there are other corporate collections and retail dealers, but the non-profit organizations are well-represented. However, certain generalizations are possible.

The works of contemporary Canadian artists are well-represented in Calgary. The larger the collection or gallery, the more likely that established artists will be presented, while ACAD and the artist run centres represent emerging artists and boast more abstract contemporary art. There is an appetite for historical, representational work, exhibited by those with collections and promoted by both private and public galleries. Exposure to international work is possible by viewing various collections or touring exhibitions.

Overall, the private galleries do more to promote individual artists than any other group as they typically host weekly shows which feature a different artist (a schedule far too costly for the public galleries) and for this reason, they play a leading role in the visual art community.

Issues

The tone of all the interviews leads to the conclusion that while each entity may point to issues or gaps in the visual art community which they would like to see those addressed, they do not feel they are able to take a leadership role as a change agent, but focus on their own efforts to secure more time, money, and wall space to devote to their exhibitions.

Leadership

Leadership, or lack of it, stands out as the number one issue in the sector followed closely by concern about facilities of all types. While some individuals are well-known amongst all areas of the visual arts community, they are viewed as key stakeholders but not an authoritative voice for the collective. No one organization is seen to be the community catalyst although many wish the Glenbow would occupy that role.

Media

Recently, there have been a number of negative stories which have questioned the way in which public funds have been spent. The positive press regarding the opening of new galleries and the installation of impressive public art do not have the same impact as the other coverage. However, the real concern is a lack of media coverage of the visual arts community, and the high cost of self-promotion.

Touring Exhibitions

Many national and international exhibitions by-pass Calgary, and as a result, both the historical continuity of artist work and the infusion of fresh ideas are curtailed. New curators with high quality environmental exhibition space may start to address this issue.

Space

Quality exhibition space in Calgary does not meet the demand. The absence of a large art gallery in Calgary (whether contemporary or more inclusive), the lack of wall space in corporate offices, the poor repair of artist run centres or the dearth of studios for artists and residencies, are all concerns. Over the past two decades, a handful of corporate leaders have come together with the desire to spearhead a campaign to build a free-standing, world-class public art gallery known as IMCA (Institute of Modern and Contemporary Art), but they have had no success. Currently a group known as Transformation Calgary is trying to convince local residents and the federal government that a 1% tax should be levied on all sales and the proceeds of this tax used to fund construction of the new art gallery as well as other cultural infrastructure. In the meantime, many interviewed make do with insufficient space and long for the new gallery. At least two corporations are no longer actively collecting because they have no more space and do not de-acquisition works of art. Two of the artist run centres have facilities that badly need repair.

Funding and Human Resources

Not surprisingly, the public galleries and, in particular, the smallest ones- artist run centres- raise the most concerns in this area. The artist run centres spoke at length about their need for a part-time employee who could assist with programming, the essential part of their artistic mandate for which there is never enough time once administrative duties have been completed. They noted that there are

few administrative positions and therefore little career movement or mentoring within the arts community. Lack of succession planning is common across the visual art community.

Public Art, Aboriginal Art

Comments pertaining to Aboriginal art cited the minimal encouragement of First Nation artists and exhibition of their work. No one referred to The Stampede western art display that often features First Nations talent.

Those who spoke about public art are generally pleased with City initiatives, and do not understand why there is any debate about investing tax dollars in this way. On the contrary, they would like to see more.

Education

Although Calgary is fortunate to have one of three art and design schools in Canada that soon will have the capacity to grant a MFA, and the U of C has both a visual art program of studies and an excellent art gallery, the educational benefit does not seem to spill over to the public. Visual art education in public schools was never mentioned and there was scant reference by others to either the Glenbow or The Art Gallery of Calgary's K – 12 art education programs. The impression conveyed was that education was a non-issue rather than an area that is thriving.

Interaction

The collaboration or interaction portion of the findings reveals a number of silos.

Corporate Collections

The strongest interaction occurs between corporations and private galleries from whom art and services are purchased. Corporate interaction with public galleries is typically confined to loaning one or two pieces of art, but otherwise there is little intentional contact. They have no relationship with either post-secondary institutions or artist run centres. As a group, corporate curators or facility managers who are responsible for the art collection do not consider they are colleagues and do not meet with each other to discuss art issues.

Private Galleries

As stated, the private galleries advise some of the corporate collectors, and also have a modest relationship with the public galleries, but do not interact with each other. Their relationship with post-secondary institutions or artist run centres is weak.

Public Galleries

The public galleries collaborate with every group but only their connection with ACAD (not the U of C) is strong. Festivals tend to promote interaction amongst the non-profit organizations, although there is widespread disenchantment with Art Walk. The Nuit Blanche was viewed as a promising public celebration but there are no funds in place to grow it in a second year. As mentioned above, their interaction with corporations (other than as funders) is quite limited.

Artist Run Centres

Artist run centres communicate with each other formally in monthly meetings and informally through the artists they promote. They also have a strong connection to ACAD.

Post- Secondary Institutions

Historically there is little interaction between ACAD and U of C. However, both institutions are exploring new directions.

Recommendation

It is clear that the visual arts community would be far stronger if there was increased interaction amongst all groups and strategic collaboration between the non-profit organizations.