

Strategies for Survival (1986)

08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

Strategies for Survival (1986) is an archives project produced by UNIT/PITT Society for Art and Critical Awareness in 2023, funded by the BC History Digitization Program at the University of British Columbia.

Strategies for Survival: State of the Arts / The Art of Alternatives: An International Conference for Artists was organized by the Vancouver Artists' League, as a component part of *Vancouver: The Place, Vancouver: The People*, a City of Vancouver centennial project for 1986.

Find the rest of the project linked at unitpitt.ca



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QUOTE

No, I agree. But I'm astounded at a lot of the assumptions that we make, in terms of what it is that people remember within our own community. In that sense, it's right that a lot of younger artists do not know what CAR/FAC has done...



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00:00:00

Clive Robertson, Canada:

No, I agree, but I'm astounded at a lot of assumptions that we make as to— in terms of what it is that people remember within our own community.

Um, and— and in that sense, it's right that a lot of younger artists, um, do not know what CAR/FAC has done...

[\[Tone.\]](#)



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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

INTRODUCTION (2023)

Strategies for Survival (1986), is an archives project produced by UNIT/PITT Society for Art and Critical Awareness, re-presenting the partial proceedings of *Strategies for Survival: State of the Arts / The Art of Alternatives: An International Conference for Artists*, organized by the Vancouver Artists' League at the Commodore Ballroom in Vancouver, June 9, 10, and 11, 1986.



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00:00:21

Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

Welcome to *Strategies for Survival (1986)*, an archives project produced by UNIT/PITT Society for Art and Critical Awareness, re-presenting the partial proceedings of *Strategies for Survival: State of the Arts / The Art of Alternatives: An International Conference for Artists*, organized by the Vancouver Artists' League at the Commodore Ballroom in Vancouver, June 9, 10, and 11, 1986.

[Tone.]



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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

DOCUMENTS AND ACCESS

For expanded access, this document presents textural and lightly edited transcripts of the presentation.

On the right is the timestamped textural transcript, with all the ums, ahs, pauses, and grammatical idiosyncrasies of the spoken word, meant to be read with the audio, linked [here](#).

This column on the left provides the lightly edited, easy-to-read transcript. This can be read with or without the audio, and subject headings from the original conference papers, or added for this project, are linked in the [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#) above; matching the timestamps at right.



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00:00:49

Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

If you've already listened to the 2023 introduction (track 00, linked [here](#)), you may wish to skip ahead in this text [to [00:02:00](#)] and then skip ahead in the audio to match the timestamp.

[All the timestamps are linked in the [TABLE OF TIMESTAMPS](#) above.]

If you haven't listened to the introduction, or any of the other recordings, you'll want to know that this is a multi-part project, presenting archival audio recordings alongside textural and lightly edited transcripts, for expanded access.

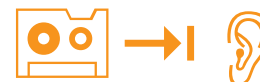
On the left of each transcript document is a lightly edited, easy-to-read transcript that, in some cases, directly excerpts the original conference papers; this can be read with or without the audio.

(By the way, if you're listening to the audio recording, and wondering, "where are the transcripts?" you can find links to those documents in the audio description!)

This column on the right presents the textural

transcript, with all the ums, ahs, pauses, and grammatical idiosyncrasies of the spoken word, to match the archival audio as close as possible—it may be difficult to read this side of the page without the relevant audio recording, [linked [here](#)].

[Tone.]



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edited transcript

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

DAY 2, SPEAKER 2

Clive Robertson, an artist, musician, and curator from Canada, and a member of the Independent Artists Union Toronto, was the second speaker on the second day of the conference. The recent surprise discovery of another cassette tape documenting his presentation means that we'll have more to share from the archives soon; this draft transcript presents only the introduction and part of Clive's paper, titled "Animating the Living Wage," and then part of his Q&A.

Clive Robertson also distributed a draft copy of "The Economic Status of the Artist in English Canada: A Working Paper by the Independent Artists' Union," prepared by the Strategy Committee of the Toronto Local of the IAU, for the *CCA Conference on the Status of the Artist*, April 1986, and *Strategies for Survival*, June 1986. Dated April 1, 1986, the title page states "we invite your comments and concerns," and a version of the paper would be published in the summer 1986 issue of *FUSE* magazine; in that same issue, an editorial by Gary Kibbins on the Department of Communications task force, and a report by Chris

00:02:00

Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

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Creighton-Kelly on the *Strategies for Survival* conference. Another version of the working paper can be found in the supplement of Clive Robertson's *Policy Matters: Administrations of Art and Culture*, published by YYZBooks in 2006.

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issue of *FUSE* magazine; in that same issue, an editorial by Gary Kibbins on the Department of Communications task force, and a report by Chris Creighton-Kelly on the *Strategies for Survival* conference. Another version of the working paper can be found in the supplement of Clive Robertson's *Policy Matters: Administrations of Art and Culture*, published by YYZBooks in 2006.

After the tone, I'll read Clive Robertson's biography from the original conference papers, and then we'll join the conference.

[\[Tone.\]](#)

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

BIOGRAPHY (1986)

CLIVE ROBERTSON Canada

Clive Robertson is the Canadian representative to this conference and is a well known performance and video artist throughout this country.

From 1978 until 1983, he worked as managing editor of FUSE magazine, and is presently Contributing Editor. He has written numerous articles for FUSE, Art and Artists, Artscanada, Parachute, FILE and other magazines.

He is also an active audio artist and musician and has worked as a producer for other artists (sic) records. For the last 2 years he has worked as director/producer of VOICESPONDENCE RECORD AND TAPES in Toronto. Since 1970, he has created more than 20 performances and almost as many videos.

Robertson is a member of the Toronto Artists Union and has a broad experience with artist run centres throughout Canada.

00:03:53

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Robertson is a member of the Toronto Artists Union and has a broad experience with artist run centres throughout Canada.

He has worked as a curator on a number of exhibitions including *LESS MEDIUM, MORE MESSAGE* (with Lisa Steele and John Greyson) which was a survey of documentary video from



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Robertson has sat on juries for the Canada Council and is in a good position to speak on the state of artists in Canada.



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[Tone.]

textural transcript



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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)



INTRODUCTIONS (1986)

Marion Barling, conference coordinator:

—indicate this? Just keep your hands raised.

Clive— can you organize papers for these people that don't have them?

Speaker, off-mic [Sara Diamond?]:

May I make a brief announcement? I just have news from the CBC, on the new obscurity decision.

[Marion, off-mic: "Can you make it very fast? Because we are running out of time. Just stand by the mic, and I'll catch you."]

Marion Barling:

Okay, while they're distributing those papers just keep your hands raised.

There's one announcement Sara would like to make.

So go ahead, Sara.

00:05:17

Marion Barling, conference coordinator:

—indicate this? Just keep your hands raised.

Clive— can you organize papers for these people that don't have them?

Speaker, off-mic [Sara Diamond?]:

May I make a brief announcement? I just have news of the CBC, the new obscurity decision.

[Marion, off-mic: "Can you make it very fast? Because we are running out of time. Just stand by the mic, and I'll catch you."]

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So go ahead, Sara.

edited transcript

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

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Speaker [Sara Diamond?]:

As people know, there's been quite a battle in the artists' community in Ontario and now British Columbia around censorship legislation. And I just received a phone call from a researcher from the journal and she said that the federal government has just tabled its new obscenity provisions from the Criminal Code, and they are incredibly sweeping.

They've defined as obscene—that is as *pornographic*—any image that depicts or suggests masturbation or intercourse. And then there's a provision that includes *any form of sexual contact*, which is *not defined at all*, and could include homosexuality, could include kissing, whatever, and then all of that is lumped together with bestiality, incest, and so on.

What this means—as people from Ontario just said—is that instead of having the commissioners from the censorship board knocking at our doors as artists, we're now going to have the police as well.

The CBC is going to drop off copies of the legislation in about an hour or so, so we'll have a

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textural transcript

08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

chance to look at it. But it's really serious, and it's very serious for not only the artists' community, but the gay community as well.

Just to let you know—a little update on the news.

Marion Barling:

Thank you.

We will now start the second half of the morning, and we will be breaking for lunch around 12:20 pm.

No lunch will be here, you will have to go outside and get it for yourselves.

That's all.

So, we will continue on with Clive Robertson.

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MUSIC

[Music plays.]



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00:07:59

[Music plays.]



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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

INTRODUCTION, CONTINUED

Unidentified speaker:

That was good, wasn't it?

[Audience applauds.]



Unidentified speaker:

Well, as you all probably know, our next speaker comes from Toronto. He has significantly contributed to and influenced the Canadian art scene through his extensive list of publications. Between 1972 and '85, he has had over 100 articles published, in prominent magazines such as *Artscanada*, *Views*, *Art and Artists*, *Parachute*, *La Mammelle*, *Queen Street magazine*, *Propos des arts*, and *FILE*. He has traveled right across Canada as a guest lecturer, and is noted for his performances, videos and of course, music.

Our guest is a member of the Toronto Artists Union, and his presentation will be based on their association and research. He will give an overview

00:13:45

Unidentified speaker:

That was good, wasn't it?

[Audience applauds.]



Unidentified speaker:

Well, as you all probably know, our next speaker comes from ah, Toronto. And he's significantly contributed and influenced the Canadian art scene through his extensive list of publications. Between 1972 and '85, he has had over one hundred articles published, in prominent magazines such as *Artscanada*, *Views*, *Art and Artists*, *Parachute*, *La Mammelle*, *Queen Street magazine*, *Propos des arts*, and *FILE*. He has traveled right across Canada as a guest lecturer, and is noted for his performances, videos and of course, music.

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of the present economic status of the Canadian artist, discuss private and public funding, and offer vital solutions and resources to improve our living conditions.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to introduce again Clive Robertson.

[Audience applauds.]



Clive Robertson:

Before I start, in the break, there was this paper distributed, which is not the paper that I'm going to read. It is a paper that I have taken information from, by the Independent Artists Union in Toronto. It's called "The Social and Economic Status of the Artist in English Canada," and it's a document which deserves your attention, and requires your input and criticism. It's a working paper, and, in fact, it has been written a number of times for a number of different occasions.

The difference between a performer and a performance artist, is that the cardinal rule of

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Artists Union. So, basically, he will be giving an overview of the present economic status of the Canadian artist, and discuss private and public funding, and then offer vital solutions and resources to improve our living conditions.

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[Audience applauds.]



Clive Robertson:

Hi. Um, before I start I want to um— in the break, there was this paper which has been distributed, which is not the paper that I'm going to read. It is a paper that I have taken information from, by the Independent Artists Union in Toronto. It's called "The Social and Economic Status of the Artist in English Canada." It's a document which deserves your attention, and requires your input and criticism. It's a working paper. And, in fact, this paper has been written a number of times for a number of different occasions.

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

being a performer is that you don't apologize. Performance artists are allowed to—and in fact, frequently do—apologize. So luckily, I only have one apology to make, which is that the slides that you're about to see are—in a great sense—incomplete. It was supposed to be a sampling of work to somehow contribute to the context of this conference, which is not only in terms of strategies for survival but also in terms of work within our spaces.

The only other thing I want to say is that what I am going to say is very much particular to Canada. The notions and definitions of the private sector and the public sector, are very much notions which have developed out of living, working, and analyzing the Canadian state. So, whatever useful information we've heard in this conference, I want you to keep that in mind.

The last thing I want to say is that if you want a souvenir from the conference, there are these gorgeous and almost-readable buttons, which are available at the front for a dollar. It says in small type, "A living culture, a living wage."

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textural transcript



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ANIMATING THE LIVING WAGE

This paper is entitled “Animating the Living Wage.” This conference organized by the Vancouver Artists’ League, with the support of ANNPAC’s BC region, is occurring at a revealing historical juncture in the lives of politically-active artists. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the artist organization association ANNPAC[/RACA, or the Association of National Non-Profit Artist-Run Centres/Regroupement d’artistes des centres alternatif]. And what better focus could there be for such an occasion, than a meeting on artist survival strategies?

The topic “the status of the artist” has been much favoured this year. Two weeks ago it was discussed in the Quebec legislature. It was also the theme for the annual Canadian Conference of the Arts, and appears as the topic for the current federal Task Force on the Status of the Artist.

Artists may have lousy incomes, but we’re sure getting a lot of *status*.

This year also has seen the public emergence of Ontario’s Independent Artists Union, which now

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This paper is entitled “Animating the Living Wage.” This conference organized by the Vancouver Artists’ League, with the support of ANNPAC’s BC region, is occurring at a revealing historical juncture in the lives of politically-active artists. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the artist organization association ANNPAC. And what better focus could there be for such an occasion, than a meeting on artist survival strategies?

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has one local in Toronto, and one in Hamilton. It is the first artist union to be formed in Canada, for at least 45 years. The IAU has presented the federal commission of inquiry on unemployment insurance to the CCA [Canadian Conference of the Arts] conference, and most recently to the Task Force on the Status of the Artist.

This year, we have also witnessed directional changes within the federal Department of Communications, with its uncharacteristic interest in the fortunes and misfortunes of individual artists' lives. The federal shift can be understood by looking at the following chronology.

Late in 1984, the current government, as part of its budget, announced cutbacks to the arts. There were many organizing sessions followed by a militant conference in Halifax organized by the Nova Scotia Coalition on Federal Cultural Policy. The new communications minister Marcel Masse seemed willing to promote the public cultural sector, as he was then promoting an image of supporting the Canadian Private Sector Cultural Industries. Other teething problems the same government had included a fight over the "arm's length" status of federal cultural agencies like

least forty-five years. The IAU has presented the federal commission of inquiry on unemployment insurance to the CCA conference, and most recently to the Task Force on the Status of the Artist.

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the Canada Council [for the Arts], and aggressive moves on old age pensions. The government was forced to abandon both issues and according to gossip, the current government does not ever want to have to reopen the arm's length issue.

During the fight over the arts cutbacks Minister Masse made clear his position on the economic needs of artists. In one TV news report he was quoted as saying:

“What do these artists want? It's not my job to fight for them at the cabinet level.”

Now in 1986, bubbling under our very deliberations, is the current hot potato of Canada's Fast Track freer trade negotiations with the US. Wherein cultural sovereignty, or what is left of it, is—despite constant denials—very much on the bargaining table. The overwhelming speculation among political pundits and cultural bureaucrats is that the government is momentarily very much behind individual artists. The reason for this is that when the trade talks reach their

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inevitable “High Noon” finale, it will be the cultural industries that will be abandoned. And the individual artist producers who will be championed as the inheritors and protectors of the domestic cultural Earth.

The proof of this prognosis—providing of course, the trade talks don’t suddenly implode—is that the Department of Communications has been very active in preparing for such a scenario. The DOC’s Policy Analyst Keith Kelly circulated a surprisingly progressive working paper on the Status of the Artist shortly before the CCA conference. The document thoroughly and intelligently compiled the long-term demands of many arts and artists’ associations and unions. It ended with a list of 23 proposals, covering: artists’ rights; an advisory artists’ Committee on the Status of the Artist, with a five-year mandate; employment support programs for artists; and improvement for the education and training of the artist. The DOC paper that was finally presented to the CCA omitted all of the 23 proposals, reducing it more or less to an advanced digest of philosophical principles. The reason for this omission apparently was that the DOC did not want to appear to be

individual artist producers who will be championed as the inheritors and protectors of the domestic cultural Earth.

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What did emerge was the announcement of a fast track, six-week federal task force on the status of the artist led by two performing arts unionists. Paul Siren, General Secretary emeritus of ACTRA, and Gratien Gélinas, former vice president of the Union des artistes. What is expected to come out of this task force—largely due to those asked to lead it—will be some overdue legislation including the legal affirmation of collective bargaining rights for artists unions. The relevant point for this conference is: what long term opportunities can we as artists make of this undeniably temporary window of advantage?

One answer I can offer is that region by region we must become organized, through representative associations or unions, so that we can create a federation which will maintain both pressure and visible presence.

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STATISTICS

Close to the top of any presentation to an international forum of the state of artists' survival within Canada should be some statistical straightening of subjective perceptions. This is to balance any views you may have formed by watching the well-dressed ANNPAC delegates coming into town looking for as many non-political parties as they can find. Expo land is hangover heaven.

I should just pause here and say that what I'm going to do is to give some analysis similar to the presentations made from artists from other countries, but it ends up with a proposal to change the situation.

Canada is a relatively small industrial nation where public subsidy to the private sector is very much a given. Recent DOC ads in glossy magazines loudly proclaim:

“ Culture is a \$16 million business. ”

00:23:13

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textural transcript

08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

Each year the federal government forgives corporate taxes in the forms of credits and write-offs amounting to some 17 to 19 billion dollars. That is—to use free enterprise jargon—19 billion dollars worth of handouts to the private sector. In fact, depending on how and who is calculating such data I am told that it could be as high as 45 billion dollars. And yet it is one of the reasons more credible than the overstated humanitarian qualities of Canadian capitalists why we are not governed by Thatcherism. Too many of our industrialists have their fingers in the public cookie jar.

However, when it comes to corporate philanthropy, even when it's to their own tax advantage, we can see in Canada that the private sector funding for the arts is, if not an apparition, at best an empty dream. Under Canada's tax law, corporations are allowed to write off 20% of their taxable income in donations to registered charities, which would include arts organizations. In 1979, only 8% of the corporations used this tax advantage. Of the 20% allowable, only one half of 1% of total income declared for tax purposes was given to charitable status organizations. And only 1/40 of 1% trickled

unquote. Each year the federal government forgives corporate taxes in the forms of credits and write-offs amounting to some seventeen to nineteen billion dollars. That is—to use free enterprise jargon—nineteen billion dollars worth of handouts to the private sector. In fact, depending on how and who is calculating such data I am told that it could be as high as forty-five billion dollars. And yet it is one of the reasons more credible than the overstated humanitarian qualities of Canadian capitalists why we are not governed by Thatcherism. Too many of our industrialists have their fingers in the public cookie jar.

However, when it comes to corporate philanthropy, even when it's to their own tax advantage, we can see in Canada that the private sector funding for the arts is, if not an apparition, at best an empty dream. Under Canada's tax laws, corporations are allowed to write off twenty percent of their taxable income in donations to registered charities, which would include arts organizations. In 1979, only eight percent of the corporations used this tax advantage. Of the twenty percent allowable, only one half of one percent of total income declared for tax purposes was given to charitable

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

down as donations to the arts. Some trickle, it definitely doesn't qualify as a treat.

If we look at examples of direct subsidies to both the public and private sectors, we can perceive two classes. As an example on the one side, we have an auto parts manufacturer, who has received 100 million dollars in grants and loans over a 14-year period. The owner-operator of this corporation is considered by both Tories and Liberals as some kind of entrepreneurial role model. Under him is a 10,000 person non-unionized workforce. The 100 million dollars has been used to create fewer than 1,000 jobs. On the other side, which is where we come in, we can look at the government subsidy to the arts. I shouldn't have to tell you, that artists in Europe and the US, look at Canadian artists "Oh, what generous subsidies you have" eyes.

In fact, a study published this year headed by David Cwi for the cultural policy—

[Tape cuts off abruptly.]

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[Tone.]

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

SURPRISE!

The recent surprise discovery of three more cassette tapes in the UNIT/PITT archives turned up the missing tape from Clive Robertson's presentation—we'll keep you updated by newsletter and on social media.

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00:27:07

Francesca Bennett:

The recent surprise discovery of three more cassette tapes in the UNIT/PITT archives turned up the missing tape from Clive Robertson's presentation—we'll keep you updated by newsletter and on social media.

For now, we'll return to the Q&A, in progress.

[Tone.]

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

Q&A

Clive Robertson:

—just to strengthen it—

[Loud sound in the background.]

—looking at the living portion aspect of grants, we do suggest that that would be replaced by a living wage, and that artists would also be able to apply for material or production grants, on top of that.

Question [01], from the audience [Sara Diamond?]:

Clive, I wondered if you could elaborate some of the concerns about the DOC position paper, specifically in the context of free trade. And what discussion has the Artists Union had on the kind of national response artists should make towards that?

Because it seems to me that what you're saying is, if artists perceive ourselves as workers who are union members, then we need to make some kind of alliance with workers who are also organized in the cultural industries, to defend the right to

???:???:?1

Clive Robertson:

—just to strengthen it—

[Loud sound in the background.]

—looking at the living portion aspect of grants. Um, and we do suggest that ah— that that would be replaced by a living wage, and that artists would also be able to— on top of that, apply for material or production grants.

Question [01], from the audience [Sara Diamond?]:

Clive, I wondered if you could um— elaborate some of the concerns about um, the DOC position paper, specifically in the context of free trade. And what discussion has the Artists Union had on, the kind of, I suppose national response artists should make towards that?

Because it seems to me that what you're saying is, if artists perceive ourselves as workers who are union members, then we need to make some kind of alliance with workers who are also organized

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Clive Robertson (Canada)

Clive Robertson (Canada)

continue to exist. Is that what you're saying? What should we do?

Clive Robertson:

I mean, it's no surprise that this switch around is really an act of—

I must say here—because Keith is going to appear at this conference—these criticisms are not levelled at him as an individual, he works for a department.

But it's simply an act of political opportunism on behalf of the current government. There's a very good article written by Susan Crean, I believe, in the last issue of *This Magazine*—she drew attention to this.

To answer your question, [Sara], what I am saying is, is that it's sort of a situation of political opportunism that can be played from both sides. I think that we have to be opportunistic at this particular time because of the framework that we have, that is established. If you talk to the DOC about this issue, they swear blind that they're forever going to be interested in the rights of individual artists. It has to be something that all artist associations in the country should make use

in the cultural industries, to defend the right to continue to exist. Is that what you're saying? What— what should we do?

Clive Robertson:

Well, I'm saying that— that, I mean, it's no surprise that this— this switch around is really an act of— not— I must say here because Keith is going to appear at this conference, these— these criticisms are not levelled at him as an individual, he works for a department.

But the— it's simply an act of political opportunism on behalf of the current government. There's a very good article that was written by Susan Crean, in, I believe, the last issue of *This Magazine*. Uh, who was one of the persons who drew attention to this.

Um, what I— to answer your question, [Sara], what I am saying is, is that it's— it's sort of a— a situation of political opportunism that can be played from both sides. That— I think that we have to be opportunistic at this particular time because of the framework that we have, or that is, you know, established. Where if you uh— if you talk to the DOC about this issue, they swear blind that

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

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of.

[Long pause.]

Question [02], from the audience:

I wonder if you could speak about the situation in Ireland and Holland? Discuss their experiences there, their present structure of funding—

Clive Robertson:

In Holland?

Question [02], from the audience:

And Ireland.

Clive Robertson:

In Ireland?

Question [02], from the audience:

You mentioned in your paper that—

Clive Robertson:

We mentioned it. I don't have enough information on either Ireland or Holland to really adequately

they're forever going to be interested in the rights of individual artists. Um, so it has to be— it's— it's something that all artist associations in the country should make use of.

[Long pause.]

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Clive Robertson:

In Holland?

Question [02], from the audience:

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Clive Robertson:

In Ireland?

Question [02], from the audience:

You mentioned in your paper that—

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Clive Robertson (Canada)

describe it. If there are other people here who know it, perhaps they could—

[Long pause.]

Question [03], from the audience:

Do you find that artists are reluctant to join the union because they're fearful that this might affect their grants and exhibiting prospects with the Canada Council? Is that an issue at all?

Clive Robertson:

No, I think that there is a social aspect to every union and association. And I don't think that being a member of the Artists Union any more than being—

[Clive pauses.]

—a representative of an artist organization for ANNPAC[/RACA] is really—

I mean, at various times, individuals get up and make what are perceived to be strong statements, but more often than not, those statements are respected.

Clive Robertson:

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[Long pause.]

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

In fact, to give you some idea, the three or four occasions that the Artists Union has appeared before these various commissions and task forces, the positions that have been suggested have been taken very seriously very quickly, and often turn up in the report. The Canada Council in the past has said the same thing. There is always a need for an intellectual vitality, to discuss these issues. It obviously depends on how responsible the hardest union or any other association is perceived to be.

I should perhaps give you some information about this brief that you have. It was written by the Strategy Committee, which numbers about 15 people. The Artists Union does its work through working committees. It has a women's caucus, a student caucus, an education committee, a legal strategy committee, and a membership committee. The membership of the Artists Union is amazingly diverse.

It sort of came about because there were lots of things happening, there were young artists coming in from Halifax, there were artists coming from other parts of the country. It's followed on from the development of women's cultural spaces in Toronto, and there is a very definite feminist

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process that is working through the Union and often giving it its direction and strategies. There are artists as young as 20 years old, and artists as old as 60 years old. The membership is made up of people who are painters, photographers, sculptors, and all of that list of extended visual artists that we know.

Question [04], from the audience [Lisa Steele]:

Clive, could you maybe talk a little bit about how the Artists Union in Ontario is very much in support of affirmative action programs, and particularly as those affect women. What other kinds of mechanisms would the Artists Union be suggesting for women's issues and for women artists, given the tremendous lack of representation that we have in this country?

Around 12–14% of the one-person shows in major institutions right now are by women. And this has actually gone down, I think, from the survey that was done a few years ago, so we're not feeling terribly optimistic about things as women. And yet, I'm a member of the Artists Union, and I feel that there are things that are talked about.

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Question [04], from the audience [Lisa Steele]:

Clive, could you maybe talk a little bit about the Artists Union in Ontario is very much, um, in support of affirmative action programs, and particularly as those affect women. Um, the— what other kinds of mechanisms would the Artists Union be suggesting for women's issues and for women artists, given the— the tremendous, um, lack of representation that we have in this

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

Clive Robertson:

Lisa's question is important, because we have already had reaction about the call for affirmative action, particularly in terms of women. The provincial funding agency in Ontario, we had a meeting with them, there was an open forum in one of the offices.

As often happens, [they] attempted to refute [this, saying] that we didn't need affirmative action, because statistically if you look at it, 50% of the jury is made up of women, 50% of the grants are awarded to women. The same person had an alarming lack of understanding about racism and multi-culturalism, too.

As far as the affirmative action principles are concerned, as you may or may not know, the number of women's artist spaces or cultural centres in the country is dropping, rapidly. In 1978, the Canada Council refused to give funding to a space in Montreal, on the grounds that it didn't give fair access if it only showed women's work.

And at the time, there was a reasonable amount of protest, and they reversed that decision.

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Clive Robertson:

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

I think the problem, Lisa, is that the Council attempts sometimes to deal with these things in a very, you know, self-controlled, statistical way. I think in terms of the affirmative action, that it's obviously necessary for the thing to be carried all the way through to the Board of Directors of the Canada Council or to the funding agencies, to the jurors, to every level, to the staff.

Question [04], [Lisa Steele]:

So could you see a point at which an organization like the Artists Union would at least try to work out some kind of a reform process, that could include, for example, where major institutions are not showing the work of women artists, that their funds would be in jeopardy? Or at least under question?

Clive Robertson:

Yeah, yeah. I think that the pressure for those principles has to be, obviously, fought consistently on every level. Not just the funding agencies, but ANNPAC[/RACA] for one, has to really strengthen the position that it took a few years ago. It has to look much more carefully at that situation.

As far as the affirmative action principles are concerned, it's— um, as you may or may know, there— the amount of women's artist spaces or cultural centres in the country is dropping, rapidly. In 1978, um, the Canada Council refused to give funding to ah— the space in Montreal, on the grounds that it didn't give fair access if it only showed women's work.

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Question [05], from the audience:

I just have a comment, and maybe you can comment on that. I was interested in your text, that you referred all encompassingly to CAR[/FAC, or Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens] and to ANNPAC[/RACA], and I rather liked what you said, and how you stated it. I think you didn't want us to say *amen*, but I rather liked what you said.

This is a shift, I think, and I want to ask you to comment on that shift from the position of the Artists Union as I understood it—certainly as I experienced it—on a day that I was gonna go on the Artists Union picnic, but it rained. Two other members, one of whom had never heard of CAR[/FAC], and the other one dismissed CAR[/FAC] as, "Oh, they were just interested in setting fee schedules."

And that, together with Sara's comment about unions having been in existence for some time, suggests some discontinuities in the thinking of [the] people that are forming—or have formed—the Artists Union. And a lack of generosity, and a lack of awareness of what has gone before.

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Clive Robertson:

I wasn't there [?]. It wasn't me that you talked to at the picnic.

Question [05], from the audience:

No, it wasn't you that I talked to at the picnic. But I was astounded that people could be so concerned to build a union, and not know what their fellow artists had done, along similar lines.

[Some applause from the crowd.]

**

Clive Robertson:

I agree, but I—

Question [05], from the audience:

[Loudly—]

With what?

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[Some applause from the crowd.]

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

Clive Robertson:

No, I agree. But I'm astounded at a lot of the assumptions that we make, in terms of what it is that people remember within our own community.

In that sense, it's right that a lot of younger artists do not know what CAR/FAC has done, or what ANNPAC[/RACA] has done for them [?].

Question [05], from the audience:

I think what would be a much more useful recruitment tool in general, is some very straightforward statement of the history of artists' collective action in Canada in the past, and for the Artists Union to situate itself in that context.

I personally would find that very useful.

Clive Robertson:

I mean, are you sort of asking the question as to why the Artists Union felt that it needed to be formed?

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No.

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

Clive Robertson:

Great.



Question [06], from the audience:

Do you feel it's an achievable goal to establish a guaranteed income for artists without also doing it for all sectors of Canadian society?

Marion Barling:

Could I just intercede for one moment?

Several people have asked me to request the people that are making questions, could they identify themselves so that the rest of the group knows who you are?

Thank you.

Clive Robertson:

Good question.

I'm sure you heard the question.

I think this thing with the guaranteed annual

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No.

Clive Robertson:

Great.



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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)



income and the living wage is, of course, that the Artists Union—and it says it in the paper—basically supports the same for everyone else in society. I think one set of arguments that is coming against our proposal is the fact that people who—how can I put it?—who have a more secure income, are suggesting to us that, in fact, if anybody should get a guaranteed annual income it should be single, unemployed mothers.

And of course, you know, we agree with that. But on the other hand, the difficulty with this subject, and the difficulty with this whole response to our economic situation, is that we have to come up with proposals that will turn the situation around.

Which is what I was trying to demonstrate in the paper. We live in a society in Canada that has a tradition of public subsidy. As almost everybody in this room—who has had any dealing with funding agencies—knows, at this current time to request increased subsidies is a very hard thing to do. It may be possible to ask for new types of subsidies, and in some ways, this is what the proposal is.

As I also tried to point out, the other part of that, in terms of the private sector—again, most of the artists work or show work in artists' spaces—the

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Clive Robertson:

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Um— I think this thing with the guaranteed annual income and the living wage is, of course, the Artists Union—and it says it in the paper—basically supports the same for everyone else in society. I think the argument— one set of arguments that is coming against our proposal is the fact that people who are— um, how can I put it?—aren't—who have a more secure income, are suggesting to us that, in fact, if anybody should get a guaranteed annual income it should be single, unemployed mothers.

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private sector is so negligible in its support that it obviously is not the way to go. So it's a question of attempting to find an alternative to the current situation.

But I take your point well, about the difficulty of proposing a living wage for one group of people.

Question [06], from the audience:

Clive, I think that inherent in the assumption—I mean, it's a problem with artists' unions, it's a problem with unions in general—that there's a premise that a union will represent the interests of all artists concerned. But one only has to go to one federal reception for artists to know that artists don't all have the same interest.

I'm just concerned, as in the past, when to take a position advocating a union means to take a position essentially against the status quo of arts funding and arts cultural elite in this country. What comment would you have with respect to that division among people in the arts community, which will undoubtedly occur as a result of this kind of work?

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As I also tried to point out, you know, the other part of that, in terms of the private sector, is something that, again, most of the artists who work or show work in artists' spaces, the private sector is— is so negligible on its support that it obviously is not the way to go. So it's a question of— of attempting to find an alternative to the current situation.

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Clive Robertson:

All I can point to is the fact that a lot of the people that are involved in the Artists Union—as a lot of people who are outside of the Artists Union, that are in the—

[Sudden sound of an organ playing.]

Sorry, the David Letterman Show.

[Clive laughs.]

Can you ask the question again?

Question [06], from the audience:

Such a position of advocacy causes disruption to the cultural elite, the bureaucracy, those artists that you referred to earlier. And I think it's naive to assume that they see their interests as the same as perhaps other artists in this room do.

Clive Robertson:

Yeah, I think what I was getting at was the fact that, you know, the people that are in the Artists Union right now—as is the case with a lot of people in this room—have proven over a period of time that they are not just interested in their own

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that— I mean, it's a problem with artists' unions, it's a problem with unions in general, that there's a premise that u— um, a union will represent the interests of all artists concerned. But one only has to go to one federal reception for artists to know that artists don't all have the same interest.

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[Sudden sound of an organ playing.]

Sorry, the David Letterman Show.

Um...

textural transcript

08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

careers, their own projection, their own whatever.

We have built up, in the last 15 years, a type of social responsibility, and it's something that within the union, we're attempting—

In fact, writing the constitution for this union was a very time consuming, and interesting process. It's true what you say about any union or association that starts off wonderfully by wanting to represent people's opinions and ideas. That is one of the reasons that I think that this representational process has to take place region by region. The reason why we have to represent ourselves is because basically, we cannot, at this point in time, allow people within the funding agencies to represent us because that has changed also. The boards of directors of those agencies have become much more conservative. The officers in those agencies—within which I, as an individual, identify—have within their organizations a structure where there is no ability for artists, organized or unorganized, to exert political pressure before those boards of directors. It's a completely incomplete process. Which is why, whether it's a union or an association or something else, we have to represent ourselves.

[Clive laughs.]

—I forgot what it was now...

Um, can you ask the question again?

Sorry—

Question [06], from the audience:

Such a position of advo— advocacy causes disruption to the cultural elite, the bureaucracy, those artists that ah— that you referred to earlier. And I think it's naive to assume that they see their interests as the same as— as perhaps other artists in this room do.

Clive Robertson:

And I think, yeah, I think what I was getting at was the fact that, you know, the people that are in the Artists Union right now—as is the case with a lot of people in this room—have proven over a period of time that they are not just interested in their own careers, their own projection, their own whatever.

That we have built up, in the last fifteen years, a— a type of— um, of social responsibility, and it's something that within the union, we're attempting

Question [06], from the audience:

Well, I agree with that assessment. And I wasn't so much addressing my point to those persons involved in these organizations, but at the split that this would cause, in terms of those organizations they are lobbying against, and whose political aims—let's face it—are 180 degrees around from the cultural bureaucracy. I mean, you have to address that at a certain point.

Clive Robertson:

I don't think that they are 180 degrees around from the cultural bureaucracy, because all we're doing is taking the notion of a grant which includes a living portion, and we're saying that that is not enough, nor is it frequent enough. We looked at this situation quite closely with a lawyer, in terms of whether or not we could create legal cases proving that the government has already to some extent been our employer.

It's been done in other countries, it's been done in Ontario, where, in fact, the grant is a form of interim contract. I know what you're saying in terms of the normalized view of this situation, but I don't think it's a drastic step.

to— to inch—

In fact, writing the constitution for this union was a very time consuming, and interesting process, in that— it's true what you say about any union or association that starts off wonderfully by wanting to represent people's opinions and ideas. That is one of the reasons that I think that this representational process has to take place, um, region by region. The reason why we have to represent ourselves is because basically, we cannot, at this point in time, allow people within the funding agencies to represent us because that shift has changed also. The boards of directors of those agencies have become much more conservative. The officers in those agencies within— within which I as an individual identify— have within their organizations a structure where there is no ability for artists, organized or unorganized, to exert political pressure before those boards of directors. It's a completely um— incomplete process. Which is why, whether it's a union or an association or something else, we have to represent ourselves.

08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

But also, you must remember that, you know, in these commissions and reports that have been held—constantly, it seems—the funding agencies themselves have come very close to supporting the notion. I meant, they have to be embarrassed by the situation, in terms of the people that they deal with.

The support is there for this proposal, among unions, among people within government, among the cultural establishment at large that understands that, in fact, even though they have property they have an income that we don't.

[Sound of chairs scraping, perhaps several audience members are getting up to the microphones.]

Question [07], from the audience:

On comprend très bien que ce document est très important, et indispensable à discuter, à trouver des solutions.

Maintenant, on marque ici que le titre est, "Social and Economic Status of the Artist in English Canada," j'espère que le statut économique des francophones au Canada est la même.

Question [06], from the audience:

Well, I agree with that assessment. And I wasn't so much addressing my point to those persons involved in these organizations, but that the split that this would cause, in terms of those organizations then lobbying against, and whose political aims let's face it are one hundred and eighty degrees around from the cultural bureaucracy— I mean, you have to address that at a certain point.

Clive Robertson:

I don't think that they are one hundred and eighty degrees around from the cultural bureaucracy, because all we're doing is that we're taking the notion of a grant which includes a living portion, and we're saying that that is enough— that that is not enough, nor is it frequent enough. It was originally— we looked at this situation quite closely with a lawyer, in terms of whether or not— um, we could— um, create legal cases proving that the government has already in some— to some extent been our employer.

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C'est une remarque.

[Speaker laughs.]

Clive Robertson:

Sorry.

[It's not clear whether Clive does not understand, or does not have a receiver for French translation.]

Question [07], from the audience:

Je recommence.

[Speaker laughs.]

Alors, c'est un document très important, et sur lequel il faut se [pencher] bien sûr. Mais on remarque—ceci c'est une remarque ou un commentaire—que le titre du document est:

“Social and Economic Status of the Artist in English Canada.”

J'imagine que le statut économique francophone est la même, et que la défense sera la même. Le document fait tant des groupes ethniques et des minorités—qui sommes-nous, à ce moment-là?

[Speaker pauses.]

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edited transcript
textural transcript
Clive Robertson (Canada)

C'est une remarque.

Clive Robertson:

As you can probably imagine, there was no way that us, as a group of artists living particularly in Ontario—even though there is an overlap in terms of some of the analysis—that we were going to speak on behalf of artists in Quebec.

[Unintelligible remarks from the crowd.]

Clive Robertson:

It's true, but there has been, and there still is, to some degree, a different provincial government in Quebec, that has constructed quite different programs, and has had different policies, that are more different than, in fact, the differences between the regions of other parts of the country.

Question [08], from the audience:

I think it's similar to some of the questions that we've been hearing, and from your statements, it seems that there's a lot of question on the part of artists as to representation and being generalized, and that there has to be a much broader spectrum.

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It's not simply a matter of becoming *represented*, as would a specific trade.

Similar to your analogy when talking about artists as if they were to be working for West Edmonton Mall. It's a much broader spectrum, and I think that the representation that Canadian artists have is good, but it has to be broadened. And that there is a very viable support structure to artists today. Granted, we have to watch that that the rug isn't pulled out from under us. And I think that it's the representation that we have that will prevent that from happening. But as far as setting a specific mandate for artists, it has to be given far more thought than what I've seen here today.

Clive Robertson:

Can you perhaps suggest any ways that that spectrum that you define could be broadened? Or what that spectrum is that you have in mind?

Question [08], from the audience:

I couldn't. I really don't have the resources just right here. It needs I think, as you've said, regional considerations.

But, I think that the solutions need a lot more

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[Unintelligible remarks from the crowd.]

Clive Robertson:

The ah— um.

It's true, but there is also, you know, there are— um— there has been, and there still is, to some degree, a different provincial government in

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thought and I mean, just off the top of my head I can't—

Clive Robertson:

I agree.

When I said at the very beginning that this paper requires your input and criticism, I didn't mean it, referring specifically to what the Artists Union wants.

It does want feedback, but it's not, again, to place the Artist Union in that central role. It's just that as a proposal, you know, this notion requires a lot of thought. Not only as a critique of the paper itself, but in fact what it raises in terms of whether changes, you know, the way that artists think that they have an opportunity to change their own conditions.

Question [08], from the audience:

I'd just like to add to that, I think we should watch that some of the things that I thought that were being said—the support to artists, and an end to the the problem of the social economic situation of artists—I don't think that the paper had a clear solution to that at all.

edited transcript

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Uh, it's— it's not ah— simply a matter of becoming ah— ah— *represented*, as would a specific trade.

Ah, was your— similar to your analogy when talking about artists as if they were to be working for West Edmonton Mall. Ah, there— it's a much broader spectrum, and I think that the ah— representation that Canadian artists have is— is good and that— but it has to be broadened. And that um— there— there is a very viable support structure to artists today. Um, granted, we have to watch that the— that the rug isn't pulled out from under us. Uh, and

textural transcript

08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

I think we need incentives for artists. But, as was pointed out, there's an awful lot of needy social economic groups, and to set a fair wage would, of course, be almost—well, it would be impossible.

The government as it is now, of course, is the most overdrawn at the bank of any of us, and so I mean, they need to—

Clive Robertson:

I—

I agree with you, but at the same time, the thing is that where we are—as an occupational category—we are at the bottom of the economic scale.

And if artists wish to stay there, you know, if a lot of artists wish to stay there—

It's not a question of wanting to stay there, it's a question of, is that what they think is their rightful place? I mean— *I don't*, because of having worked in this situation for so long.

Question [08], from the audience:

I think also it's been pointed out that the wage scale for artists is probably the most diverse of any. I can't be certain about that, but I mean,

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And um, but ah— I think that the solutions need a lot more thought and I mean I— just off the top of my head I can't—

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

there are artists that make in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and there—

Clive Robertson:

Visual artists in Canada?

Question [08], from the audience:

Perhaps not per year, but there are many artists that—

Clive Robertson:

Who?

Question [08], from the audience:

There are some notable artists.

[Speaker laughs, seemingly embarrassed.]

But, the point I'm making is that it has a very broad spectrum, and that perhaps we could look at somehow lessening the hierarchy and giving artists equal representation amongst themselves, as much as within the social structure of...

Clive Robertson:

Okay.

It does want feedback, but it's not, again, to place the Artist Union in that central role. It's just that as a proposal, you know, this notion is, I think, willing, is I think— requires a lot of um— thought. Not only as a critique of the paper itself, but in fact what it raises in terms of if it changes, you know, the way that artists think that they have an opportunity to change their own conditions.

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Ah, I'd also— I guess, I'd just like to— to add to that, that um— I think we should watch that ah— that some of the things that I thought that were being said— um, the support to artists, um, in an— in an end to it— to— to the the problem of the ah— the social economic situation of artists, I don't think that the paper would— was a um— had a clear solution to that at all.

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)

Thanks.

Question [09], from the audience:

I'd just like to make a personal observation on the Artists Union.

It says here in the literature that you passed out that the Artists Union believes that the government is already the true employer of artists, and I have a hard time agreeing with that. It's certainly not true in my case, it's very difficult to get grants. The space that I'm here representing doesn't receive gallery funding, and any sort of sales are usually to non-governmental organizations.

I just wanted to make that point. I don't agree that the government is a major employer of artists.

Clive Robertson:

Yeah.

If you read the paper, the category is very broad in terms of the sector in which we work. It's almost impossible actually not to have employment, in terms of culture, that is not subsidized, including commercial galleries, including all sorts of places—even the musical hit *Cats* received

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08: Clive Robertson (Canada)



government subsidy to renovate the theatre.

The reality in Canada is that subsidization is sort of universal, and that's what we meant—it was a broader notion of how, in one form or another, when you string all of those things together, the government, you know, can be said to take on the position.

Question [10], from the audience:

Oh, okay, geez, I'm a member of CAR, and I remember about 15 years ago—or maybe longer, way back in the late sixties—when we were talking about how “galleries should be paying fees,” and “public galleries pay fee to artists,” and there was a big argument there, eh?

“Hey, we're lucky just to show our stuff at these galleries, we might generate a few sales,” and stuff like that.

That was the argument against, and we sort of slugged it out saying, “look, we're performing a service to these galleries so they can give us fees back.” So, that's sort of established as a given now, but that was something that was fought for the same way that Clive's bringing up the idea of a base stipend—or whatever—for artists.

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In answer to the question from the gentleman over here about differentiations of salary, ACTRA—that's the association that represents television actors and stuff like that—negotiates with the CBC a base wage, and then artists—depending upon their skills and their desirability—negotiate above that base rate. So, there's no reason to say you can't make money above the stipend you'd be getting.

Question [11], from the audience (Wilma Needham):

Hi, my name is Wilma Needham. I'm from the Eye Level Gallery board of directors and I'm also a member of the faculty union at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

I'm assuming that all the people here are working artists, which makes us all workers, but we're also—a few of us—employers, by virtue of being on boards of directors and choosing our workers.

One of the things that I'm quite concerned about is that many of our workers who are also here, don't have contracts, work overtime with no compensating time, have no clear terms and conditions of employment.

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[Audience applauds.]



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[Audience applauds.]



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CLOSING REMARKS (1986)

Clive Robertson:

Okay, if there are no more questions, maybe we can break. Thank you very much.

Marion Barling:

Thank you very much, Clive Robertson. We will break now for lunch for one hour. And first up is Oraf, local Vancouver performance artist. And then we have José Ventura from El Salvador. Thank you.



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CLOSING REMARKS (2023)

Thanks for reading. This was just one part of a multi-part project documenting *Strategies for Survival: State of the Arts / The Art of Alternatives: An International Conference for Artists*, organized by the Vancouver Artists' League in 1986—if you're following along, all of the transcripts and audio recordings are linked directly [here](#), or can be found at unitpitt.ca

You may have noticed that, like most archives projects, this one is in progress. If you have any recollections or information that you'd like to share about the 1986 conference, or new thoughts in 2023, send us a message at info@unitpitt.ca



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Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

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[Tone.]



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