

Strategies for Survival (1986)

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

15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"



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QUOTE

Question from the audience:

—in a realistic way.



[Long pause.]

Keith Kelly:

Anyone else?

[Keith laughs, annoyed.]

Have you any ideas, specific measures to pose, axes to grind?



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00:00:00

Question from the audience:

—in a realistic way.



[Long pause.]

Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Anyone else?

[Keith laughs, annoyed.]

Have you any ideas, specific measures to pose, axes to grind?

[Tone.]



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edited transcript



textural transcript



15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"



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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15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"

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 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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15: Keith Kelly, on the “Status of the Artist”

DAY 3, SPEAKER 3

Keith Kelly, an Arts Policy Analyst from the Department of Communications, was the third speaker on the third day of the conference, presenting on the Task Force on the Status of the Artist. Unfortunately, the cassette tapes found in the UNIT/PITT archives don't provide documentation of his presentation, only part of the Q&A, and his remarks .

The Siren/Gélinas, *Status of the Artist: Report of the Task Force*, was published in August 1986, and has been revisited in further federal and provincial reports, including the *Status of the Artist: Update on the 30th Anniversary of the UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of the Artist*, published by the Canadian Conference of the Arts/Conférence Canadienne des Arts, September 2010. Many further task forces seem to have taken up the topic of "status," and *Strengthening the status of the artist in Canada : report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage* is the most recent, published in March 2023.

On that note, the surprise discovery of further cassette tapes in the UNIT/PITT—or any other

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On that note, the surprise discovery of further cassette tapes in the UNIT/PITT—or any other archives—would be most welcome here!

↑ archives—would be most welcome here!

📺 1986

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→ 15: Keith Kelly, on the “Status of the Artist”

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After the tone, we’ll join the conference in 1986.

[Tone.]

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Q&A

Question [01], from the audience:

—very similar to other Canadian artists, but the major one is that we have very little access to information nationally. Your task force is traveling around Canada, but it didn't go to either the Yukon or the Northwest Territories. And I'm just wondering if you can suggest a way that Yukon artists and art administrators can get more involved in things like this.

Keith Kelly, Arts Policy Analyst, Department of Communications:

You're quite right, of course. We're not going to the Northwest Territories or the Yukon, but we didn't go to Newfoundland or Prince Edward Island either. What we did is arrange to have representatives of those organizations present in Halifax and Moncton. I don't know the schedule—do we have someone from the Yukon Arts Council in Vancouver here? Someone is making a presentation to the Task Force in Vancouver.

00:03:24

Question [01], from the audience:

—very similar to other Canadian artists, but the major one is that we have very little access to information nationally. Your task force is traveling around Canada, but it didn't go to either the Yukon or the Northwest Territories. And I'm just wondering if you can suggest a way— um, that Yukon artists and art administrators can get more involved in— in things like this.

Keith Kelly, Arts Policy Analyst, Department of Communications:

You're quite right, of course. We're not going to the Northwest Territories or the Yukon, but we didn't go to Newfoundland or PEI either. What we did is arrange to have representative of— representatives of those organizations present in Halifax and Moncton. Uh I— I don't know the schedule for the— do we have someone from the Yukon Arts Council in Vancouver here? Yeah, so someone is making a presentation to the Task

This is a very interesting point and one that Ronald Harmelin, who is the Executive Director of the Association of Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts made on exactly this point, that in Canada whenever we have a Task Force or a Royal Commission, we seem to work on this east-west axis. But we forget that Canada also has a north-south axis. In six weeks, it was almost impossible to hit every part of the country, and I really do apologize to the artists in the Yukon and Northwest Territories for not being included. The point has been noted.

Question [02], from the audience:

Hello, I just want to make a slight *mise en point* about use of words again—

Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Yes...

Question [02], from the audience:

And it doesn't pertain to what you said, it pertains

Force in Vancouver.

This is a very interesting point and one that Ronald Harmelin, who is the Executive Director of the Association of Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts made. He— ah— exactly this point, that in Canada whenever we have a Task Force or a Royal Commission, we seem to work on this east-west axis. But we forget that Canada also has a north-south axis. And ah— in six weeks, it was almost impossible to hit every part of the country, and I really do apologize to the artists in the Yukon and Northwest Territories for not being included. But ah— the point has been noted.

Question [02], from the audience:

Hello, ah— um, I don't— I just want to make um— a slight *mise en point* about use of words again—

Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Yes...

to what was said about arm's length. Yesterday, Clive Robertson talked about the auditor's report, in which was said that only 15% of Canada Council grants are given through juries. I think that, to say that only 15% of—

[Question asker laughs briefly.]

—of the Canada Council is arm's length is a misuse of terms.

I think that the Council's programs, all grants to individual artists are juried. There are many other programs that are juried. Where this misconception about juries has come up, is that grants to organizations are not juried. And, I think there's a good reason for that. There is an assessment process, and assessment is made through experts in all the fields, including artists. I think you have to put yourself in the framework of grants to organizations—it would be very difficult to get a jury to meet for a few days to assess the budgets and the programs of the larger organizations—it's a very extensive task to make those kinds of assessments.

So, I just wanted to make that clear.

Question [02], from the audience:

And it doesn't ah— pertain to what you said, it pertains to what was said about arm's length. Yesterday, um— Clive Robertson talked about the auditor's report, in which was said that only fifteen percent of Canada Council grants are given through juries. Um, I think that, to say that that's— that means that only fifteen percent of—

[Question asker laughs briefly.]

—of the Canada Council is arm's length is— is a misuse of terms.

Um, I think that um— the— the Council's programs, the— all grants to individual artists are juried. There are many other programs that are juried. Um, where the— this um, misconception— or this thing about juries has come up, is that um, grants to organizations are not juried. And, I think there's ah— a good reason for that. There— there is an assessment process, and assessment is made through, um— experts in all the fields and— and are— including artists. And ah— it is— I think you have to put yourself int— in the— um, framework of grants to organizations— it would be very difficult to get a jury to meet for a few days

Question [03], from the audience:

I have one comment about, some of the first things we've said, which was that the status of the artist has been sort of— *simmering*, since the calling of this conference. My impression is that the status of the artist has been in question in this country—and a matter of public debate—since at least the time of the Massey Commission. And it has been something which artists have been boiling about at least since—I'd say the time of Expo '67—let alone '86. But the fact that it's only now, getting to the point of a fairly senior level task force for government, and getting that much closer to legislation, is a sign—not of artists' lack of calling for change, but of bureaucratic deafness, and political befuddlement.

You know—none of these things are new! Most of the ideas you'll have heard at this conference, you've heard at previous conferences, you've been hearing for a long time. Maybe now we're getting more and more senior— conferences, task forces, whatever... but, these things are not new. It hasn't been just invented in the last couple of years.

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Some of us have been angry for a long, long time. And we continue to be angry, particularly when government continues to play **[in a mocking voice]** *little word games about whether money exists or not.*



Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

I'm sorry?

Question [03], from the audience:

[Again, in a mocking voice:

...little word games about whether the money is there, or the money is not there, for this category or that category.

]



Some of us are just really tired of that.



edited transcript

You know— none of these things are new! Most of the ideas you'll have heard at this conference, you've heard at previous conferences, you've been hearing for a long time. Maybe now we're getting more and more senior— conferences, task forces, whatever... but, these things are not new. It hasn't been just invented in the last couple of years. Some of us have been angry for a long, long time. And we continue to be angry, particularly when government continues to play **[in a mocking voice]** *little word games about whether money exists or not.*

textural transcript

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15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"

And more than anything— I wish that that kind of little argument could be avoided because it detracts so much from the central issues. Maybe that's strategy, but I really think that if government and their spokesmen were in control, if they were good managers, if they were in control of their language, they could avoid so much hassle—we could get rid of so much of the anger which we come up with again and again and again, and get down to the issues and maybe decide whether things are happening or not! My impression is that after all these years, things still are not happening, in a realistic way.



[Long pause.]

Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Anyone else?

[Laughs, annoyed.]

Have you any ideas, specific measures to pose, axes to grind?

Some of us are just really tired of that.

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[Long pause.]

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Question [04], from the audience:

At this point, have you received suggestions from all the way across the country?

Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

We have.



Question [04], from the audience:

Do you have a list of some of the recommendations that have been made by artists in different parts of the country?

Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

We do.



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Anyone else?

[Laughs, annoyed.]

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textural transcript

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Question [04], from the audience:

Would you be willing to put forward some of those ideas to this group?



Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

I think I could do that, with the caveat that the report has not yet been written, needless to say—we're still in the process of hearings. And not all ideas are going to be able to be included in the final report. I will only repeat observations, I won't tell you any Task Force conclusions, because we don't have any at this moment.



One of the main themes has been professional recognition. That means an inclusion of a specific section in the Income Tax Act that recognizes the artist as a profession like any other, with the specific adjustments made to reflect the realities of the profession. For fishermen and farmers,

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edited transcript



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and taxicab drivers and hairdressers, that exists already. So, I don't think it's asking too much that the artist has their own little section in the Income Tax Act.



Also, the right for collective bargaining—which currently does not exist. We have not one accredited artists' union in this country: ACTRA is not accredited; Equity; Union des artistes; American Federation of Musicians, Canada Branch, is not a union. In fact, as the discussion paper points out, if there were any producer who were truly disgruntled about having to deal with the union in negotiating with artists, they could file a charge under the Combines Act and shut down the entire artists' union network. So, this is something that has to be done: artists must be given collective bargaining rights as every other profession enjoys in this country.



The ah— the main themes have been for professional recognition. And that means an inclusion of a specific section in the Income Tax Act that recognizes the artist as a profession like any other, with the specific adjustments made ah— to reflect the realities of the profession. For fishermen and farmers, and taxicab drivers and hairdressers, that exists already. So, I don't think it's asking too much that the artist has their own little section in the Income Tax Act.



The right for collective bargaining—which currently does not exist. We have not one accredited artists' union in this country: ACTRA is not accredited; Equity; ah, Union des artistes; um— American Federation of Musicians, Canada Branch, is not a union. In fact, ah— as the discussion paper points out, if there were any producer who were truly disgruntled about having to deal with the union in negotiating with artists, they could file a charge under the Combines Act and shut down the entire artists' union network. So, this is something that has to be done: artists

So, those are the two main themes that we've been hearing, and others are: unemployment insurance, the question of retirement and pensions for artists. As it stands now, even the non-recognized unions are not allowed to manage pension funds for their members. Union des artistes, ACTRA, and Equity have RRSP plans, which the artist and the employer contribute to, but it doesn't allow them the flexibility of management that a real pension fund allows. Canada Pension Plan is accessible to everyone. Again, in Toronto, Carol Conde said, after 25 years of being an artist, when she retires—based on her current level of contributions—she'll be able to draw a handsome sum of \$43 a month, as a pension from Canada Pension Plan. This is a real problem!

Pension, unemployment insurance, taxation, copyright— Artists from across the country have said, “shave or get out of the bathroom,” on copyright amendments. This means something to us. It establishes a moral right to the ownership

must be given collective bargaining rights as every other profession enjoys in this country.



So that's— the two main ones that we've been hearing, and the others are: unemployment insurance, the question of retirement and pensions for artists. Ah— as it stands now, even the non-recognized unions, are not allowed to manage pension funds for their members. Union des artistes, ACTRA, and Equity, have RRSP plans, which the ah— artist and the employer contribute to, but it doesn't allow them the flexibility of management that a real pension fund allows. So— Canada Pension Plan is ah— accessible to everyone. Again, in Toronto, Carol Conde said, after twenty-five years of being an artist, when she retires—based on her current level of contributions—she'll be able to draw a handsome sum of forty-three dollars a month, ah— as a pension from Canada Pension Plan. This is a real problem!

and enjoyment of the benefits of our own work and we want to see it, and we don't want to wait much longer. The current Act came into force in 1924. A few things have happened since, that make the old Act a little, anachronistic, shall we say?



The question of health and safety and security is another issue, that artists—performing artists, visual artists, sculptors, craftspeople—often have to work with material that isn't properly labeled, they have to work in situations that aren't properly ventilated, there are no support programs available from any of the funding agencies that allow an artist to equip their studio space with the proper ventilation and health features, so that an artist can work safely. There is no one that will do that.



We've heard problems, also about the difficulty of dealing with the system as an artist. That very few

Ah— Pension, unemployment insurance, um— taxation, copyright— Artists from across the country have said, “shave or get out of the bathroom,” on copyright amendments. This means something to us. It establishes a moral right to the ownership and enjoyment of the benefits of our own work and— and we want to see it, and we don't want to wait much longer. Ah— the current Act, ah— was— was ah— enacted in nineteen— came into force in 1924. A few things have happened since, that— that make ah— the old Act a little, ah— anachronistic, shall we say?



The ah— the question of health and safety and security is another issue, ah— that artists— performing artists, visual artists, sculptors, craftspeople—often have to work with material that isn't properly labeled, they have to work in situations that aren't properly ventilated, ah— there are no support programs available from

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people seem to understand the realities of artistic life. This isn't just at the provincial level, at the federal level, it also goes right through all strata of government.



Those are the main kind of things we've been hearing.

Work— For example, performing artists say, "Well, when we get a contract our fees are quite decent, but we might get one contract a year." There's only so many places that dancers can perform. So, it's great, you have a 20-member dance troupe, who can perform 15 nights a year in a city, and they have to line up for access to the facility.



Very fundamental kinds of things that all point to the inequitable treatment that this group of professionals receives in our society right now.

Media—that's another thing! When a Canadian artist goes abroad they come back with a stack of

any of the funding agencies that allow an artist to equip their studio space with the proper ventilation and ah— health ah, features, so that an artist can work safely. But— there is no one that will do that.



We've heard problems, ah— also about the difficulty of dealing with the system as an artist. That very few people seem to understand the realities of artistic life. This isn't just at the provincial level, at the federal level, it also goes right through all strata of government.



Those are the main kind of things we've been hearing.

Work— Artists, say—for example, performing artists say, "Well, when we get a contract, our— our fees are quite decent, but we might get one contract a year." There's only so many places that dancers can perform. So, it's great, you have

edited transcript

textural transcript

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clippings *this big*, from every newspaper, and they send out reporters and television crews, and my gosh, they've done feature interviews! In Canada, the media seems to be particularly disinterested in the arts, unless it's a particularly famous artists that dies, or something, and then they spare no ink. But for the living artists, there seems to be very little media presence, and also a woeful lack of critical skills in the journalistic community.

er&e !

Education system— The fact that most grade five students think the Group of Seven is a punk rock band from Europe, tells you how aware are children are of their own cultural heritage. There is no consistent arts education program in school. On Friday afternoons a teacher may pull out a stack of newsprint and say, "Okay, splash your hearts out, I'm going out for a cigarette." But, there's no consistent art program. And if the arts are going to revitalize themselves—if they're going to be perceived differently in the general population—that process has to start in the school system, which is actually our acculturation system,

a twenty-member dance troupe, who can perform fifteen nights a year in a city, and they have to— to line up for access to the facility.



Ah— very fundamental kinds of things that all point to the— the— inequitable treatment, ah— that this group of professionals receives in our society right now.

Media—that's another thing! That— for an artist it— when a Canadian artist goes abroad, uh, they come back with a stack of clippings *this big*, from every newspaper, and they send out reporters and television crews, and my gosh, they've done feature interviews! In Canada, ah— the media seems to be particularly disinterested in the arts, unless it's a particularly famous artists that dies, or something, and— and then they waste— they spare no ink. But for the living artists, there seem to be very little— there seems to be very little media presence, and also a woeful lack of critical skills in the journalistic community.

in this society.



Those are the main points and I see people at the mics, I don't want to go on.

Question [04], from the audience [Clive Robertson]:

I would like to thank you publicly for your working paper that you presented prior to the CCA conference, because I think what it helped to show was that you assimilated a lot of the demands, which have come from the various sections of the communities. And I think it was useful—not only for what it said and the very careful way that you wrote it—but I think also, it proved to us that, in fact, this is what we need—a larger federation of these interests, which could in time present all of these various demands and these arguments to these various task forces. Thank you.



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Those are the main points and I— I see people at the mics, I don't want to go on.

[The tape sound cuts briefly, and returns with applause from the audience.]



Question from the audience, [03, again?]:

Clive has mentioned one point I wanted to make, in a sense, that there is, I think, a feeling in a lot of the community that this kind of consultation—between the community and government bureaucracies—should be a regular thing and not simply something that happens under the guise of various conferences. Now, I have mentioned this—I used to work for CAR in Ontario—and I have mentioned this to colleagues and the government at various levels, over and over again. Everyone says, “Oh, wouldn’t that be nice.”



But the idea of getting together with everyone in the visual arts community once a year at that level and saying, “Okay, what are your ideas? What are you thinking about this issue? What are you

Question [04], from the audience [Clive Robertson]:

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[Applause from the audience.]



thinking of that issue?”—does it ever happen?
No! We go through the most inefficient method possible—we wait for crises to happen. It’s crisis management, all the time.



There are a lot of really, really good ideas—
inventive, imaginative ideas in the community—
which you are not going to get. Because we
are constantly scrambling to meet current
crises, rather than taking the time to develop
understandings of issues and find creative
responses to them.

I had the pleasure of meeting—about a year and
a half ago—with the executive directors of most
of the arts service organizations in Ontario, with
the Ministry of [?] and Culture there. As an aside,
I should say, I’m happy to note that the majority
of them were women. These are all top people in
their fields. We sat down and the one thing that
the Ministry had the hardest time accepting from
us, was the common feeling that we never have
enough time to sit down and think through an
issue, get a really good handle on it, and find a

Question from the audience, [03, again?]:

Clive has— has um— has mentioned one— one
point I wanted to make, in a sense, is that
there is— I think, um— a feeling in a lot of the
community that— that this kind of consultation,
between the community and government
bureaucracies... really should be a regular thing
and not simply something that happens under
the guise of various conferences. Now, I have
mentioned this—I used to work for CAR in
Ontario—and I have mentioned this to colleagues
and— and the government at various levels,
various times over and over again. Everyone says,
“Oh, wouldn’t that be nice.”



But the idea of getting together with everyone
in the visual arts community once a year at that
level and saying, “Okay, what are your ideas? What
are you thinking about this issue? What are you
thinking of that issue?”—does it ever happen?
No! We go through the most inefficient method
possible—we wait for crises to happen. It’s crisis

↑ ... solution to it. We're constantly dealing with crises. ↓



↑ ... Now, this may be a feeling that comes out of anger or frustration—I don't know. But my understanding of management is that good management comes from the top down. And if we can ever, ever, ever get the people at the top—in culture in this country—to manage these things a bit more smoothly, try to find a way so we can talk regularly and calmly about things, instead of always having to wait until things explode, we could all be nicer to each other, we could get more things done, and the people who have the ideas— And I have a whole bunch I'm not gonna tell you, because I'm not getting paid to tell you, I got to that point of being that cynical about it... you know? There are things that can be done in this country, and they're not going to happen until the people at the top find the management skills to say, "Okay, let's talk. Let's talk. Let's just roundtable, no pressure, no panic, no big immediate problem to solve." Can we do this? ↓

↑ management, all the time. ↓



↑ There are a lot of really, really good ideas— inventive, imaginative ideas in the community— which you are not going to get. Because we are constantly scrambling to meet current crises, rather than taking the time to develop understandings of issues and find creative responses to them. ↓

↑ I had the pleasure of meeting—about a year and a half ago—with the executive directors of most of the— the arts service organizations in Ontario, with the Ministry of [?] and Culture there. As an aside, I should say, I'm happy to note that the majority of them were women. These are all top people in their fields. We sat down and the one thing that the Ministry had the hardest time accepting from us, was the commonly felt— feeling, that we never have enough time to sit down and think through an issue, get a really good handle on it, and find a solution to it. We're constantly dealing with crises. ↓

So that would be my one real suggestion. Find some program, somewhere in government, to bring people together, once a year, for a couple of days—just to talk!



Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Well, I agree with you. In a sense, we're doing that already, because the Department of Communications has money in this conference, and I believe we also have money in the ANNPAC conference. I would like to think that throughout the year we're in fairly close contact with most organizations in the arts. Sometimes I'll call in or just drop in. I was in another city once, and I dropped in on a gallery, with nothing on my mind, I just wanted to talk. And as soon as I left the gallery, the phone started to buzz, trying to find out what I was up to!

[Keith laughs.]

I just wanted to talk! I wanted to see the operation. I agree that that has to be formalized,



Now, this may be a feeling that comes out of anger or frustration—I don't know. But my understanding of management is that good management comes from the top down. And if we can ever, ever, ever get the people at the top—in culture in this country—to manage these things a bit more smoothly, try to find a way so we can talk regularly, and calmly, about things, instead of always having to wait until things explode, we could all be nicer to each other, we could get more things done, and the people who have the ideas—

And I have a whole bunch I'm not gonna tell you, because I'm not getting paid to tell you, I got to that point of being that cynical about it... you know? That there are things that can be done in this country, and they're not going to happen until the people at the top find the management skills to say, "Okay, let's talk. Let's talk. Let's just— let's just roundtable, no pressure, no panic, nope— no big immediate problem to solve." Can we do this?

And so that is— would be my one real suggestion. Is that— find some program, somewhere in

edited transcript

textural transcript

15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"

we have to do it more consistently, and more evenly, and we're certainly going to take that into account in the Task Force report.



Question [05], from the audience:

I would rather address the audience here. The man who spoke just before me, actually gave really nice intro to what I want to say. And that is, I want to address a question that came up at the end of last night or yesterday at the end of the day. What this man just said is that the people who are at the top of art bureaucracies have to get their shit together. And I think that's wrong. I think artists have to get their shit together. And who I want to address right here is the artists in the audience. Someone yesterday suggested that the majority of our audience is art bureaucrats—extending that to artists who are attached to alternative galleries. We keep coming back to funding alternative galleries, rather than funding artists—we've got to talk about funding artists!

government, to bring people together, once a year, for a couple of days—just to talk!



Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Well, I agree with you. And, in— in a sense, we're doing that already, because the Department of Communications has money in this conference, and I believe we also have money in the ANNPAC conference. Ah— I would like to think, ah— that, throughout the year, we're in fairly close contact with most organizations in— in the arts. Ah— sometimes I'll call in or just drop in if I— ah— I was in a city once and I dropped in on a gallery, with nothing on my mind, I just wanted to talk. And ah— as soon as I left the gallery, the phone started to buzz, ah— trying to find out what I was up to!

[Keith laughs.]

I just wanted to talk! I wanted to see the operation. And, ah— I agree that that has to be formalized, we have to do it more consistently, and

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15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"



Glenn Alteen, from grunt gallery yesterday, also started off addressing this question. And I think what he was trying to say is that, what hasn't been addressed at the conference today is that there are artists who do not have access to Canada Council funding, there are galleries that do not have access to Canada Council funding because they haven't been operating long enough, or the artists as individuals don't have the right criteria, they don't have the proper education, they don't have the years behind them, they don't have the seniority within the art scene to be able to get those funds.



And, we're talking about survival here—this is the name of this conference right? Survival of the arts—well, a few tips from some of us in the audience for survival, as artists: Never pay for toilet paper. There are ways to get free food. There are a lot of problems with artists who don't have proper studio spaces, we've heard this today already, but we're not talking about what

more evenly, and ah— we're certainly going to take that into account in the Task Force report.



Question [05], from the audience:

Um, I sort of would rather address the audience here. The ah— man who spoke just before me, actually was really nice intro to what I want to say. And that is, I want to address a question that came up at the end of last night, um, or yesterday afternoon's um— the end of the day. And— what this man just said is that the— the people who are at the top of art bureaucracies have to, um, get their shit together. And I think that's wrong. I think artists have to get their shit together. And who I want to address right here is the artists in the audience. Someone, ah, yesterday, suggested that ah, the majority of our audience is art bureaucrats, and—extending that to artists who are attached to alternative galleries. We keep coming back to funding alternative galleries, rather than funding artists—we've got to talk about funding artists!

15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"

artists really need. We keep talking in circles about Canada Council funding, or about funding from the businesses. I think what we need to do as artists is to organize ourselves, to start communicating with each other, communicate within the cities alone! I mean, I don't know half of the artists in this city—I don't know most of the artists in this city! And I think that before we have a conference of artists from the international realms, we've got to start talking to each other, we have to start taking responsibility for the problems that we're having as artists. I would personally like to suggest that the arts community within Vancouver start talking to each other, that perhaps we look at holding some kind of a small-scale conference of artists within the city, that we start looking at concrete proposals to help us out in our everyday lives, and also in long term proposals for artists. Thanks.

[Applause from the audience; mic feeds back.]



edited transcript



textural transcript



15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"



Um, Glenn Alteen, from grunt gallery yesterday, also, he started off addressing this question. And I think what he was trying to say is that, what hasn't been addressed at the conference today is, um, artists who do not have access to Canada Council funding, who do not have access to Canada Council funding because they as a gallery haven't been operating long enough, as individuals don't have the right criteria, they don't have the proper education, they don't have ah, the years behind them, um— they don't have the seniority within the art— art scene to be able to get those funds.



And, we're talking about survival here—this is the name of this conference right? Survival of the arts—well, a few— a few tips from some of us in the audience for survival, as artists: Never pay for toilet paper. Um, there are ways to get free food. Um, there are a lot of problems with artists who don't have proper studio spaces, we've heard this

Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Marion has a—

[Keith is interrupted by mic feedback.]

Question [06], from the audience:

I'd like to add to that that the Vancouver Artists League is having a quarterly general meeting on the 30th of this month. And all artists are invited to attend. And I think that can be a forum for, this type of discussion.



Now I have one brief question that I'd like to address to the speaker. I've been going through this discussion paper. And, from what I've seen, it looks quite interesting. I have a question about statistics. I noticed, on the final page, you say that the average annual income of Canadian visual artists is \$7,843 a year. And I'm wondering if that figure reflects money made through the production of art, or if it's based on the collection of welfare and monies raised from secondary employment?

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15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"

today already, but we're not talking about what artists really need. We keep talking in circles about Canada Council funding, or about funding from the businesses. I think what we need to do as artists is to organize ourselves, to start communicating with each other, communicate within the cities alone! I mean, I don't know half of the artists in this city—I don't know most of the artists in this city! And I think that before we have a conference of artists from— within— you know, the international realms, we've got to start talking to each other, we have to start taking responsibility for the problems that we're having as artists. Um, I would personally like to suggest that the, um, arts community within Vancouver start talking to each other, that perhaps we look at holding some kind of a— ah— a small-scale conference of artists within the city, that we start looking at concrete proposals to help us out in our everyday lives, and also in long term proposals for— for artists. Thanks.

[Applause from the audience; mic feeds back.]





Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Those figures are based on the production of art, but as the bottom line says, they're aggregate figures. And that group also includes commercial graphic artists and designers, and that puts a distinct warp in the figures. I think many artists in this country would be very happy to have \$7,800 a year as an income.



Question [06], from the audience:

Just that I've— never—

[Applause from the audience.]



Just that I've never made \$7,800 in my career as a professional artist. So, I question that figure...

edited transcript

Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Marion has a— oppo—

[Keith is interrupted by mic feedback.]

Question [06], from the audience:

Uh, I'd like to add to that— that the Vancouver Artists League is having, um— a quarterly general meeting on the thirtieth of this month. And ah— all artists are invited to attend. And I think that can be a forum for, um— this type of discussion.



Um, now I have one brief question that I'd like to address the speaker. Um— I've been going through this ah— this discussion paper. And, um— from what I've seen, it— it— it looks quite interesting. I have a question about statistics. Um, I noticed, um— on the final page, you say that the average annual income of Canadian visual artists is seven thousand eight hundred and forty three dollars—um, a year. And I'm wondering if that figure, um— reflects money made through the production of art, or um— if it's based on

15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"

Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Marion Barling has warned me of the dire and possibly mortal consequences of running over my allotted time. So, I have a clock that tells me my time is over. Before I do end— Pardon?

[Interjection from the audience.]

Okay, but I'd just like to finish what I was going to say first. I'd like to thank you. I hope that we can look forward to your ideas, and your contributions.



I think there's one person today that we haven't thanked, and we all should thank, and that's Marcel Masse, who has put the arts and culture number one on our agendas, and has worked very diligently and tirelessly for the arts in Canada. And he's had a bit of a false start, but I think he's done great things. It's certainly he, by the way, that made the status of the artist the number one priority at the Department of Communications and I think he deserves some recognition for that.

the collection of welfare and monies raised from secondary employment?



Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

Those figures are based on the production of art, but as the bottom line says it's at— they're aggregate figures. And that group also includes commercial graphic artists and designers, and that— puts a distinct warp in the figures. I think many artists in this country would be very happy to have seventy-eight hundred dollars a year as an income.



Question [06], from the audience:

Just that I've— never—

[Applause from the audience.]



15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"



[Applause from the audience; mic feeds back.]



Question [07], from the audience [Sandra Semchuk?]:

I just have one question. I'm appreciative of all the issues that are being dealt with, but what they're concerning is, like, fringe benefits, or what people in normal jobs get, in terms of fringe benefits. And we don't—at this point—have the security of income yet, which is our major problem. So, one of the things that I would point towards is that most of us do want to sell our work! I am, for example, very grateful that we do have a Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography at this time, that actually does purchase Canadian photography. One of the things I'm wondering is, were proposals made, ie., to offer income tax breaks to people who purchase Canadian art, or further encouragements to the private sector

edited transcript



Just that I've never made seventy-eight hundred dollars in my career as a professional artist, now. So, I question that figure...

Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

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and to the public sector to continue to develop collections?



Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

It has been pointed out to the Task Force repeatedly, at this point, that the visual arts are the only element of the arts community without an industry attached to it. So, for a writer, they have the publishing industry. For filmmakers, they have the distribution network, when they can get into it. Broadcasting. But for the visual artists, we have no outlet. And we've been looking at several ideas of how we might be able to resolve that problem. Tax measures are certainly some of the suggestions that have been made. An expanded mandate for the Art Bank is another suggestion that's been made. Some program to allow artists easier and fairer access to the dealer network, is another.



Well, I think that's all for me.

start, but I— I think he's done great things. And uh— I think he deserves— it's certainly he, by the way, that made the status of the artist the number one priority at the Department of Communications and I think he deserves some recognition for that.



[Applause from the audience; mic feeds back.]



Question [07], from the audience [Sandra Semchuk?]:

Um, I just have one question that I— I'm appreciative of all the issues that are being dealt with. Ah— but what they're concerning is skirting around— are like fringe benefits, or what people in— in normal jobs, ah— get in terms of fringe benefits. And we don't—at this point—have the security of income yet, which is our major problem. So, one of the things that I would point towards and that is that— that most of us do want to sell our work! I am, for example, very

[Keith laughs, nervously.]

Thank you very much, you've been very kind.

[Audience applauds.]



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grateful that we do have a Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography at this time, that actually does purchase Canadian photography. Ah— one of the things I'm wondering is— is— in the proposals, were proposals made, ie., to ah— offer ah— income tax breaks to people who purchase Canadian art, or further encouragements to the private sector and to the public sector to continue to develop collections?



Keith Kelly, Department of Communications:

It has been pointed out to the Task Force, ah— ah, repeatedly, at this point, that the visual arts are the only element of the arts community without an industry attached to it. So, for a writer, they have the publishing industry. For filmmakers, they have the distribution network when they can get into it. Um— broadcasting. Ah— but for the visual artists, we have no outlet. And we've been looking at several ideas of how we might be able to resolve that problem. Tax measures are certainly some of the suggestions that have been made. Ah— an



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15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"

expanded mandate for the Art Bank is another suggestion that's been made. Ah— some ah— program to allow artists easier and fairer access to ah— the dealer network.



Ah— well, I think that's all for me.

[Keith laughs, nervously.]

Thank you very much, you've been very kind.

[Audience applauds.]



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CLOSING REMARKS (1986)

Hank Bull, for the Vancouver Artists' League:

I have one announcement I'd like to make. This conference has been very successful! And it gives us all great pleasure in Vancouver to have you here from across the country and around the world, for this, and for the ANNPAC[/RACA] AGM. It's beautiful weather and everything—it's just perfect!

There's one person in particular—besides Marcel Masse—that I think we should thank today.

Someone who has worked tirelessly for a long time—you know, this thing has been prepared over three years of conversation! But, in the last six months, one person really has done most of the work to make this conference possible, and has done a fantastic job and really has worked very hard. I'd like you all to thank Marion Barling!

[Enormous and lengthy applause from the audience, continuing over Hank Bull's speech.]



00:28:35

Hank Bull, for the Vancouver Artists' League:

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Ah, someone who has worked tirelessly for a long time and ah, you know, this thing has been prepared over three years really, of conversation!

But in the last six months, one person really has done most of the work, ah, to make this ah, conference possible, and has done a fantastic and really has worked very hard. And I'd like you all to thank Marion Barling!

[Enormous and lengthy applause from the audience, continuing over Hank Bull's speech.]



15: Keith Kelly, on the "Status of the Artist"



And I have just a small gesture. This is just the beginning of a thanks that will go on for months!



[Marion thanks Hank, and they talk off-mic as the clapping and cheering continues.]



Marion Barling, conference coordinator:

I, of course—

[Pause, as mic feeds back.]

I, of course, accept this on behalf of the three other women who have worked very tirelessly with me: Jil Weaving, Donna Hagerman, and Dawn Richards.

[More applause from the audience.]



And I have— just a small— a small gesture. This is just the beginning of a thanks that will go on for months!



[Marion thanks Hank, and they talk off-mic as the clapping and cheering continues.]



Marion Barling, conference coordinator:

I of course—

[Pause, as mic feeds back.]

I, of course, accept this on behalf of the four women— or, the three other women who have worked very tirelessly with me: Jil Weaving, Donna Hagerman, and Dawn Richards.

[More applause from the audience.]

Oh, I've almost forgotten my ever-ready announcements!

[Someone in the audience laughs.]

**

Video In would like me to announce that there's a reception on Thursday the 12th of June, between six and eight—just an open house for anybody to drop in. So, that's at Video In between six and eight on the 12th of June. We will now have a 10-minute break. Mona Hatoum is still continuing with her performance until the end of the break, when we will finalize with the Artists' Summation Panel. Thank you.

[Brief claps in the audience; tape cuts.]

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**

Oh, I've almost forgotten my ever-ready announcements!

[Someone in the audience laughs.]

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Video In would like me to announce that there's a reception on Thursday the twelfth of June, between six and eight—just an open house for anybody to drop in. So, that's at Video In between six and eight on the twelfth of June. We will now have a ten-minute break. Mona Hatoum is still continuing with her performance until the end of the break, when we will finalize with the Artists' Summation Panel. Thank you.

[Brief claps in the audience; tape cuts.]

**

[Tone.]

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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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00:30:56

Francesca Bennett, project coordinator:

Thanks for listening. 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'd like to follow along, all of the transcripts and audio recordings are linked at unitpitt.ca, [directly [here](#).]

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