

**Hong Kong Arts Development Council
International Arts Leadership Roundtable 2017**

Plenary 2: Applying Technology in the Arts

Funding the Arts in the Digital Age: A Canadian Approach

Full transcript of speech by

Mr. Simon BRAULT

Director & Chief Executive Officer of Canada Council for the Arts

First of all, thank you very much, again to the Hong Kong Arts Development Council for including us (Canada Council for the Arts) in this discussion for the second year. I just want to present very briefly our point of view on where we are in Canada in terms of thinking about the future of digital and why we should pay attention to it.

Canada is a very vast country. I'm always struck when I come to a place like Hong Kong where there is a constant quest for space and in our country there is a constant quest to occupy the space because it's impossible. I mean, we have a vast country and with a very, very small population. So for us the question of connecting with the rest of the world is a question of sustainability at every level including the arts.

When I was here last year (Roundtable 2016), I mentioned many different initiatives connecting Canada with Asia, the Asia-Pacific region, and I won't go back into those examples. What I want to say is that we are absolutely committed right now in Canada to again playing a bigger role on the international stage. It's clear that when the new Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Justin Trudeau, was elected, one of the first statements was that Canada would be back on the world stage again after ten years of being really under the radar with the previous government.

It means that for the Canada Council one of the decisions we made when we had confirmation of the progressive doubling of our budget over five years was that we would double the investment we are making to make sure that Canadian artists would be more present on the world stage by supporting touring activities, by supporting travels of our artists, international co-productions, etc.

What we want to address today and what we want to tackle is really the question of arts and digital. Last spring, we organised in Montreal a huge Arts in a Digital World Summit to bring together the arts world and the digital world, to accelerate and build momentum for a conversation that we want to foster through a special digital fund. You can find in Canada artists who are at the forefront of artists of digital creation. They are artists who are exploring territories with technologies that are absolutely striking.

At the same time when we look at the bulk of the arts sector in our country, the portion of the cultural activity that we do support at Canada Council, we must admit that the sector is seriously lagging behind. So we did kind of a large study in Canada, a survey,

to find out where is the average theatre, dance, ballet, orchestra in our country in terms of their capacity to adopt and to cope with and to really use digital to scale up their work and we realised that it's very, very minimal.

In fact, we also did a research to find out exactly what were the strategies adopted all over the world in order to advance this creative economy or the digital economy to find out that in many of the countries the strategy did not include seriously the artists and did not include seriously the traditional art forms. So we realised that we have this contradiction where our government really entrusted us with the doubling of the budget, we are about or we start to make a serious reinvestment in the arts. But if we don't do something to help the sector to transit to the digital era, we may be in a situation where a lot of the things will happen in this digital postindustrial world and the art sector will remain more or less with the same business model and the same habits and the same approaches that are pre-digital and that will hurt them (the Canadian art sector) and marginalise them more and more.

So we decided to create the [Digital Strategy Fund](#). It's a transition fund of \$88.5 million (in Canadian dollars) over five years to facilitate from the art sector proposals that would help them to really take advantage of digital. There are kind of three components to that fund. One is around digital literacy, one is around public engagement, so all the different ways that through digital you can augment the engagement of the public with the arts; and the third part, which is the most challenging one is around the new ways of working that are more adapted to digital, because the way we organise and we encourage the arts sector in a country like Canada was truly through a constant quest for excellence but also a system of competition, a system of granularity, a system of silos, systems where people in the theatre always fight to have more money than the people in music when they want more money than the people in visual arts. We feel that the future is really around collaboration and cooperation and that the argument of that digital fund is that you should present projects that won't give you a specific edge as a company, but that will benefit the sector or the subsector that you are part of.

We just had the first applications (of the Digital Strategy Fund). It's too soon to know exactly where we are but we know that we already see a different mentality and we already see different associations and networking, people who are not the usual suspects for the Canada Council, working with traditional artists or organisations.

We see the question of digital as a question of sustainability of the arts sector. We also believe profoundly that digital needs more art than art needs digital. So we really believe that we need to redefine a kind of a humanistic approach that will fit the digital era to make sure that we won't lose control and that human beings won't be excluded from a model of civilisation that is now emerging worldwide.

You can see, if you go on the website, we wrote "[A manifesto for the arts in the digital era](#)", trying to explain that as a very famous French writer-philosopher, Eric Sadin, said, "Disruption is less an intention and more a consequence". So we are in this discussion right now with the arts sector where the art sector used to say constantly, "We are very creative" but they confused the notion of being creative and the notion of being innovative. You can create theatre everyday but you can't do it more or less the same way the Greeks were doing it a thousand years ago.

Innovation is new models, it's new ways of doing things. So we think that the question of innovation is really needed in order to make sure that creation will have the impact it should have in our society. So to rephrase what I said, I like to make a parallel with a sentence by a very famous Italian poet who said that art is the proof that life is not enough, and I think our challenge for the near future is to make sure that art will be the proof that technology is not enough. So it's really kind of a re-organising and reframing the discussion around digital.

We can say that the digital era troubles, fascinates, disturbs, excludes, rallies, inspires, impoverishes, disappoints or galvanizes us. It affects all of us, it affects every nation in the world and the big question is to take advantage of digital to redefine the relationship between arts and society.

I was listening to the precedent panel and I do agree that all those arguments about what the arts could do are real, we need to repeat them, but I profoundly believe that it's time to change that conversation. I think that digital is pushing our society in a zone where if you don't come back with a very strong proposal of the role of the arts in society, again, we will expel ourselves of the civilisation we are trying to build and to control.

So that is my message today and I look forward to the discussion with the panel. Thank you.

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