



Study on the State of the Visual Arts in Francophone Minority Communities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A new *Study on the State of the Visual Arts in Francophone Minority Communities* was commissioned by the Association des groupes en arts visuels francophones (AGAVF) in 2022, in order to update the *Study on the Visual Arts in French Canada* that was conducted in 2001 by Marc Haentjens and Rachel Gauvin. This study is also an opportunity to take stock of the many initiatives of AGAVF, the only national arts service organization (NASO) representing the visual arts in Francophone and Acadian communities, and which was created following the recommendations of the earlier study. The data and observations presented in the seven chapters that make up the new study show that the needs of Francophone artists in minority communities are similar, in many respects, to those of artists from dominant groups, but also raise several issues specific to their situation. The study identifies a number of these issues, in terms of creation, education, and professional development as well as dissemination, infrastructure, and funding, and makes several recommendations.

In the first chapter, some contextualization allows us to link some of the issues facing Francophones in minority communities (FMCs) to broader issues affecting the visual arts as a whole across Canada, such as the economic precariousness experienced by artists and cultural workers, the limited public funding available to organizations, and the lack of data that limits a systemic and holistic understanding of the sector.

The second chapter presents an analysis of responses to questionnaires distributed in April 2022 to Francophone visual artists and cultural workers across Canada. If we compare the situation of artists today with the portrait painted by the earlier study in 2001:

- The community of visual artists almost doubled in size between 1996 and 2016, from 323 to 590. Women remain in the majority and there is a certain aging of the population, especially in Nova Scotia and Ontario. A few respondents belong to Indigenous communities, are racialized, and/or are immigrants, demographic categories that were not surveyed in 2001, as was also the case with regard to gender nonconformity and ability diversity.
- The number of respondents with a master's or doctoral degree has increased since the 2001 study, perhaps reflecting a decline in the number of artists with a bachelor's degree, while the number of artists who report being self-taught has remained constant.
- In terms of income, overall, there has been a slight decrease since 2001; even though more than half of respondents do not apply for any grants, overall, artists seem to depend more on grants than on sales, especially since few artists are represented in private galleries. A large number of respondents seem to earn their annual income in small increments, ranging from less than \$2,500 to \$7,500, while 43% of respondents say they invest the same range of amounts in their practice.
- Artists are very active in terms of exhibitions: almost one third of artists who devote the majority of their time to their practice have had more than twenty-five solo exhibitions. A lack of shared studio and production spaces is forcing more and more artists to set up their studios at home. Surprisingly,

many artists, including some young ones, do not have an artist website, perhaps opting instead for the accessibility of social media networks; respondents seem more comfortable using digital technologies for creation and production than for promotion and dissemination.

- Many artists have taken advantage of the COVID-19 lockdown to recharge their batteries and focus on creation, but others have had to deal with loss of income and exhibition opportunities. Overall, there is a very uneven level of interest for online arts activities.

The third chapter deals with the network of specialized visual arts structures and is based on a series of interviews conducted with leaders and other key representatives of organizations in the Francophone arts and community ecosystem:

- Since 2001, the network has expanded, with the addition of five organizations in four provinces. With few resources, the structures succeed in offering artistic and educational programming while serving as venues and gathering places for Francophone artist communities.
- Digital technologies offer advantages in terms of access, but do not replace either the appreciation of works in a gallery space, or in-person opportunities for meeting and exchange.
- From New Brunswick to Yukon, to flourish in French, in addition to the AGAVF network of exhibition spaces, artists must also rely on community galleries, some of which now offer good exhibition conditions, or turn to the professional distribution networks of majority groups in Canada, Quebec, and even internationally.
- The conservation and development of Francophone artistic heritage presents several challenges for the institutions that care for the collections.

The fourth chapter deals with support structures (schools, arts service organizations, copyright collectives, art galleries, arts education structures, curatorial and publishing resources). Compared to the communities of the dominant groups, in the Francophone sphere these institutions remain few and fragmented:

- AGAVF, the only NASO that represents and defends the interests of FMCs in the visual arts, proposes several initiatives aimed at the professional development of the milieu and the networking of its members;
- In terms of education, outside of Quebec, only the Université de Moncton and the University of Ottawa offer undergraduate programs in the visual arts in French. Moreover, despite the importance of the master's degree in the visual arts, the only graduate program outside Quebec is the bilingual one offered at the University of Ottawa. As for art history, again except in Quebec, no undergraduate or graduate programs are offered in French in Canada. Most artists and other arts professionals are forced to leave their home communities to study: once trained, graduates often continue their careers in the city where they completed their studies, contributing to the erosion of the already fragile artistic pool within the home community.
- A relationship with a curator allows artists and their work to be in dialogue at different stages of the artistic process. The interpretation of a work by a curator or a critic assists the artist (for whom feedback forms an inherent part of the creative process), produces a discourse that contextualizes or historicizes a practice, and provides didactic materials for the public. Independent curators play a key role in securing recognition for FMC visual artists, by assisting in the development of a solo exhibition, by including them in group exhibitions or through the publication of critical texts or exhibition reviews in specialized magazines.
- Aside from a few artists represented by major private galleries and participating in contemporary art fairs, the entrepreneurial difficulties encountered by gallery owners also impact artists in the context of a Canadian art market that remains modest; as a result, many artists prefer to sell directly out of

their studios or via online channels, even though digital platforms cannot replace the kind of physical interaction with the work that is possible in traditional art milieus;

- The digital shift tends to favour media arts organizations, which exacerbates the gap between the two disciplines (visual and media arts), yet has not prevented AGAVF member organizations from integrating into their operations some of the digital strategies put in place during the pandemic.
- One of the study's findings is that the resources available to artists within the Francophone community are often limited and that artists must, in general, turn to majority (Anglophone) institutions. In this respect, Moncton appears to be a relatively unique case, with an unusually high number of French-language institutions: post-secondary institutions, a university gallery, and artist-run centres (many of them located under the same roof, at the Aberdeen Cultural Centre).

The fifth chapter focuses on public support, including the Canada Council for the Arts and the Department of Canadian Heritage, as well as the various provincial and municipal arts councils, and seeks to document the sources of public support available to FMC artists and arts structures.

- Although funding for FMC artists has increased, particularly for artists applying to Canada Council programs for the first time, a significant number of artists do not apply for grants.
- With respect to funding for organizations, the analysis confirms that several significant gains have been made, primarily at the federal level—a result of new investments at the Canada Council for the Arts. However, four member organizations in the AGAVF network remain excluded. The Council's stated goal, with the introduction of its New Funding Model—to increase project funding and, proportionately, to reduce core grant funding—has not been helpful in this regard. It is also worth noting the gains made for organizational funding, to address this exclusion on the Council's part, in the negotiation of the latest Official Languages Action Plan (2018–23).
- As for Canadian Heritage's Official Languages Support Programs (OLSP), these are delivered by regional offices according to provincial and territorial priorities. This has resulted in unequal support for the member organizations in the AGAVF network, in comparison to programs in the so-called "language disciplines"; and has even led, in New Brunswick, to a total absence of funding for visual arts structures. These circumstances also make it necessary for arts organizations to forward continual arguments regarding the essential contribution of the visual arts to the life of the community. This issue represents a systemic delay in funding for the visual arts, which have long been excluded from funding programs in favour of the "language disciplines."
- In the provinces, FMC artists and organizations have access to the same programs as those that serve organizations and artists from the Anglophone majority. In Ontario, core funding for Francophone organizations (with the exception of dance) is provided through the Ontario Arts Council's Francophone Arts budget (formerly the Franco-Ontarian Office). As for projects, organizations have access both to the Francophone Arts program as well as the majority programs. This is also the case for grants to artists.
- Everywhere, the amount of research and creation grants available to artists remains modest, even though they also have access to various development, travel, or work acquisition programs; in several provinces, recognition awards accompanied by cash prizes are also granted, following nominations by the artists themselves or by third parties.
- This chapter also contains three tables that illustrate the evolution of funding at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels.

All of these observations form the basis of the issues and recommendations that make up Chapters 6 and 7 of the Study. These relate to creation and production, education, exhibition, funding, and structural and community factors. In response to these findings, the courses of action are presented in order of priority, depending on whether they fall within the purview of AGAVF, of the partners of the FMC under the aegis of

the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française (FCCF), or even of all of the sector's partners under the umbrella of the Visual Arts Alliance.

Here are the main recommendations:

Creation and production

- Support efforts by members to include artists from ethnocultural and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in FMCs by organizing activities focused on building significant relationships between artists and communities.
- Support efforts by members of the AGAVF network to reach out to the new generation of artists in FMCs by organizing activities focused on participation by the next generation in the development of the visual arts in the communities.
- Support artist-initiated development of the milieu/network by mobilizing regional Francophone support structures.
- Support demands that aim to improve the socio-economic conditions of artists and arts professionals, in particular by joining with the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française (FCCF) in its efforts to articulate a pan-Canadian vision of support for the arts and culture sector.

Arts education and professional training

- Expand and consolidate basic visual arts training in the FMCs by studying the possibility of setting up a pre-university summer program in the visual arts accessible to all FMC high school graduates and supported by institutions offering existing programs (e.g., those in Moncton and Ottawa) and possibly through collaborations in Quebec (e.g., UQAM).
- Continue the collaboration established with the RCAAQ and other arts sector organizations (e.g., CARFAC, RAAV, IMAA) to raise awareness among artists, administrators, and related occupations of the benefits of professional training activities aimed at demystifying the field and at better informing and resourcing artists and other arts professionals throughout their careers.
- Continue and enrich initiatives, such as the *Incubateur en commissariat*, that aim to enhance and better resource the related occupations that support the work of artists; take into account, in this regard, the recommendations of the *Automne des commissaires* meeting held in Moncton in November 2022.
- Adapt the *Incubateur en commissariat* model for other related occupations, such as publishing, preparatory technicians, etc.
- Support the FCCF's La Ruchée program to resource schools and teachers in the visual arts field, with input from artists and member structures of the AGAVF network, to facilitate development of innovative arts education programs.

Dissemination and circulation

- Raise artists' awareness of the professionalization efforts of Francophone community infrastructures across Canada, with a view to consolidating the professional distribution network.

- Make funders aware of efforts to professionalize Francophone community infrastructures in FMCs and raise awareness regarding their positive impact on community life.
- Create unifying and structuring projects that help make visible artistic practices within the FMCs and stimulates the production of discourse.
- Establish national and international distribution channels and develop strategies to finance the circulation of exhibitions.

Funding

- Continue to work with the signatories of the *Collaboration Agreement* between National Arts and Culture Agencies and FMCs—beginning with the Canada Council for the Arts and the Department of Canadian Heritage—to explore ways to increase federal support for the development of the visual arts in FMCs.
- Continue to promote the contributions of the visual arts to the vitality of FMCs, and, in particular, to enable organizations in the Atlantic provinces to seek funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage's Official Languages Support Programs (OLSP).
- Make funders aware of the importance of human resources in the areas of curating and arts education in FMCs, and, to this end, advocate for an increase in core funding for arts organizations.
- Invite the FCCF to follow up on its earlier pilot project aimed at documenting investments in Francophone arts and culture in the provinces of Manitoba, Ontario, and New Brunswick; and recommend the same type of monitoring for municipalities where members of the AGAVF network are located.

Structures

- Support AGAVF members wishing to redevelop/improve their spaces by taking advantage of the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund and drawing inspiration from recent projects (e.g., SAW Centre, in Ottawa, and GNO/Place des Arts, in Sudbury).
- Encourage and support collective projects that allow for creation of artists' studios in various locations, provision of adequate work spaces and equipment, and negotiated access to equipment and expertise in universities and colleges for professional artists in FMCs.
- Continue the work begun by the FCCF, the RCAAQ, and IMAA to make digital development tools available to AGAVF members.

Community supports

- Produce and disseminate a “mapping” initiative delineating the current visual arts ecosystem that promotes the emergence and success of artists and arts professionals in FMCs.
- Articulate and communicate, both to partners in the Francophone communities and to funders, a discourse that demystifies and upholds the place of the visual arts in FMCs and celebrates their role in creating vibrant communities.

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