

The artist-run centres that I knew were places where one came initially to take part, to give. The rewards were nowhere except in the engagement of each one of us in its activities. For all kinds of reasons, mainly related to our demanding and consumer society I believe, it seems today inevitable that they should become places where one produces and where one takes. But my hope is that the funding agencies continue to support the essential, exploratory mission of the artist-run centres, without which Canadian art would not be what it is; that curators continue to invest in their openness and resist the temptation to control or frame them; and that artists continue to find in them a place animated by and for them, and not merely a space for exhibition, to add a line to their CV. Perhaps I am getting older and all this is banal nostalgia. Even if that is the case, it doesn't prevent me from hoping sincerely that new generations of artists and historians will have access to these places of incomparable opportunity.

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(1) An artists' organization may or may not be non-profit, and it may not have its own gallery. It may not even show work. It must be conceived, staffed, and accounted-for by artists.

But of course I am already hitting gray areas. Many artists support their own practices by working in artist-run organizations or centres (ARCs). Frequently, these artists must separate their own artistic practice from their job description. Many board members also separate their own artistic practices from their board roles. (In a non-profit organization, board members should not be exhibiting or performing for remuneration. However, many ARCs were and are initiated by artists who, instead of whining about not having access to exhibition facilities, quite constructively started their own.)

So, then. what do we mean by "artist-run"? Artists are in charge? An individual, or a collective? A board, or the staff? Is there a membership, and is that membership active or passive? Are all of the members "artists"? Are all board and staff members artists? Does this matter?

(2) I really don't know how useful the idea of "artist-run" is today (forty years after the Canada Council gave a huge \$40,000 grant of confidence to InterMedia) because I don't get a sense that many of the non-profit, "parallel," (non-public) galleries are all that different or distinguishable from their public and even (some of) their private counterparts. Whether the focus is on single artists or tightly-curated group shows, one could be looking at an ARC but also a public or private gallery. The initial ARCs were formed at a time when then-emerging practices like video art and performance art were not yet absorbed into a larger "art world," but that has changed (with the possible exception of performance art). Even hermetic-appearing installations are not unusual in either public or some private galleries. Perhaps overtly "political" art is likely to be restricted to ARCs, especially those with grass-roots or "community" mandates. (However, as an example, there was once Toronto's Partisan Gallery, which eschewed government funding since their administrators considered the arms-length excellence-is-all-that-matters criteria to be essentially apolitical.)

Again, what exactly is meant by "artist-run"? Different galleries or organizations have different definitions. Several ARCs, notably in Vancouver, have curators. That is not necessarily a public-gallery model and, in many respects, it is diametrically opposite a private-gallery model or structure. Whether galleries with curators (hired for two or three year periods) are "artist-run" presumably depends on the role of the board as well as the other staff members.

Many prototypical ARCs were formed by artists needing and realizing places to show their work. This, by definition, requires dealing with bureaucracies, and artistic temperament is stereotypically considered to be at odds with bureaucratic discipline. (Many artists, of course, have long incorporated bureaucratic language and other strategies into their practices.) With many, if not most, ARCs, paperwork rapidly accumulated to the point that specific administrators were necessary to deal with that paperwork.

The term "artist-run" (or artist-controlled) was originally oppositional to "privately-run" or, for that matter, "community" or "municipally" or anything state-managed or governmental. So, what exactly does "artist-run" refer to when organizations describing themselves as such are highly-dependent upon governmental funding, and when private sector fundraising is also a *de facto* operational necessity? Is "artist-run" still oppositional to both public and private management, and why might it matter whether it should be?

What is important to both applying and exhibiting artists is their perception of the gallery or organization in question. Probably more important than the question of whether the gallery or organization is “artist-run” is the perception of the gallery or organization being accessible rather than overly-bureaucratized. Is this or that gallery one where granting of an exhibition appears to be a lengthy process, with at least one committee involved in that process? It is a truism that, particularly in the 80s, many younger artists perceived the ARCs as being overly-bureaucratized and simply “out of touch.” I feel many artists may well perceive galleries with identifiable curators, or even private dealers, to be accessible in a way that ARCs are often not. Submitting artists frequently like to know who is making decisions, and why those in charge might be qualified to be doing so. “Artist-run” does not mean bureaucrat-free. It may well mean the diametric opposite. Artists can indeed be persnickety bureaucrats, especially when they feel that such is the role that is expected of them.

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(1) Une organisation artistique peut avoir un but lucratif ou non; elle peut être dotée d'une galerie ou non. Peut-être n'expose-t-elle aucune oeuvre. Elle doit toutefois être fondée par des artistes, qui y travailleront et qui en seront responsables.

Bien entendu, j'aborde déjà des zones grises. Plusieurs artistes soutiennent leurs propres pratiques en travaillant dans les centres d'artistes autogérés. Il n'est pas rare que ces artistes doivent aussi séparer leur propre pratique artistique de leur rôle au conseil d'administration. (Dans une organisation sans but lucratif, les membres du conseil d'administration ne peuvent pas exposer leurs oeuvres ou donner des performances en échange d'une rémunération. Cependant, de nombreux CAA ont été et sont toujours initiés par des artistes qui, plutôt que de se plaindre de ne pas avoir accès aux lieux d'exposition, sont proactifs et ouvrent leurs propres espaces). Alors, quel est le sens du terme « autogéré »? Ce sont