

Northern Ontario Community Based Arts Practitioners Circle

*A post forum discussion about our collective identity, potential, dreams, and challenges.
Wikwemikong Hub Centre, June 10, 2007*

Over the weekend, there were many significant realizations on how to organize and be represented as a sector. And then we began to organize. At the conclusion of the forum, a circle of Northern Ontario community based arts practitioners was called to establish an ad hoc steering committee to provide initial stewardship. To give some dimension to the emerging organization and to facilitate communication, it was given the temporary name of *The Community of Artists of Northern Ontario* (CANO). Everyone present at the start of the meeting agreed to sit on the ad hoc committee.

Avoiding lengthy discussion around definitions, we agreed that what we are endeavoring to represent, is the art and creative expression of communities, and the practitioners, programs and organizations dedicated to nurturing this practice across Northern Ontario.

We acknowledged collectively that our very practice as northern community based artists, our art, and our ability to be effective creators, is influenced by environment, by geography, and by climate, and that these shared and common influences supercede the need to keep the participants of the sector separated into streams by language and cultural background. (Franco-Ontarian, Native, mainstream) While it is imperative that existing funding remain intact (we cannot deconstruct what already exists, hard fought over decades, in order to move forward), it is recommended that new funding opportunities be designed to help these streams come together, plan together, and work together more easily.

We acknowledged that we are each others best resources - Northerners inherently understand the context of other Northerners, and that collectively we cover the broadest range of expertise imaginable, and this consideration is paramount as we look for the human resources to support the evolving infrastructure.

A cultural mapping exercise to identify some of the arts practitioners of Northern Ontario who were not at the gathering, quickly resulted in an additional 140 names, and then another 260 more, and since then another 110 more and no end in sight in the growing list.

Next Steps

The **Community of Artists of Northern Ontario** ad hoc advisory committee will be gathering in the near future to continue to explore the nature of our emerging association. We will begin by inviting those who appeared in this initial circle, as well as several people from regions that were not well represented at the forum and who have expressed interest. We anticipate several meetings of the ad hoc committee before determining the structure and make-up of the first official working advisory committee.

And finally, about our fears ... delegate Esther Osche of Birch Island expressed our collective fears when she shared the following statement:

"I was just thinking about the creative force and power that works through people, and definitions kind of lock you into a place, or get you to try and corral this creative force that is expressing through people, and as soon as you try and tinker with that, and you think you have the corral built up, and you go 'there, I finally got it', and everybody comes to look ... and it's not there. Where did it go? So it's better to just work with what is expressing, because I think the creative force defines itself, and in many unique ways, through

people. I understand that you need a structure, to bring everyone's minds together, to acknowledge and define how we are going to work amongst one another with this force. And I understand how mission statements and terms of reference are important, to communicate to others our intent, but I get concerned when we try to get it all fenced in and packaged. It starts to lose its meaning."

It is our hope and our intention that it remains flexible, organic, living, and relevant to the people of our communities.

The Community of Artists of Northern Ontario Ad Hoc Steering Committee

When the first circle was held of the **Community of Artists of Northern Ontario** on Sunday June 10, 2007 at the Wikwemikong Hub Centre, those present agreed to stand as the ad hoc advisory committee to provide initial stewardship. This includes:

Alan Asher	Sudbury
Joahna Berti	Manitoulin Island
Nathan Cheechoo	Moosonee
Moreen Cox	Atikokan
Jennifer Garrett	Atikokan
Jane Grann	Thunder Bay
Alex Goss	Owen Sound
Catherine Cheechoo Gull	Moosonee
Don Kavanaugh	Kenora
Laurie McGauley	Sudbury
Monique Monatch	Moose Factory
Joe Osawabine	Wikwemikong
Esher Osche	Birch Island
Celeste Scopelites	Sudbury
Bob Yellowhead	Summer Beaver
Becky Ziegler-Girouard	Sudbury
Deborah Barndt for Zainab Amadahy	CAO Representative
Ron Berti	Debajehmujig Representative

Friendly associates of the Advisory Committee present in the circle:

Linda Albright	ANCY (Toronto/Tillsonberg)
Denise Bolduc	Independently, Sault Ste Marie/Toronto
Cheryl L'Hirondelle	Independently, Various Places in Canada
Marilyn McIntosh	OAC (Thunder Bay)