

22/9/04

Dear James Boyle, the Commissioners and Secretariat,

We are writing to you as members of the committee of Transmission Gallery in Glasgow, and on behalf of our constituency. As you may be aware Transmission Gallery is one of the longest running and internationally renowned artist run spaces in the world, marking amongst its peers venerable institutions such as White Columns and The Artist's Space in New York. It is a truly independent initiative, established and maintained by successive voluntary committees of practising artists. Its alumni include many of the most significant visual artists to have emerged from Scotland in the past two decades. Importantly, Transmission is also in the unique position of speaking for over 400 members of the gallery, the majority of whom are practising artists within Scotland, as well as representing a vibrant community of artists in Glasgow, the most significant centre for the production of visual arts in Britain outside London. This enviable position is one Transmission has done much to create, fight for and maintain over the years.

At Transmission we are only too aware of the relatively low priority (and the meagre funds) given to the visual arts in cultural matters. We are concerned with the large number of artists practising in Scotland who are living below the poverty line, or who are juggling several jobs in order to maintain their practices. We are concerned that due to inadequate funding even the major institutions commissioning and presenting contemporary visual arts in Scotland (including ourselves) are unable to support artists with the fees recommended by the Artist's Union in Scotland, or even those stipulated by the Scottish Arts Council.

As citizens of Scotland, who are also practising artists, we would like to respond to your consultation paper 'Our Remit' in light of the crucial aim of supporting the producers; the grassroots artists and artists organisations. Those individuals and organisations who have generated so much cultural capital and who have worked consistently and

heroically to create a vibrant, healthy and relevant art scene that is unique to Scotland, and the envy of other artistic centres internationally.

The development of artistic, social and cultural skills, maximum value, access and facilities, creative potential, audience development and public engagement as identified in your consultation paper are meaningless without a healthy, committed, outward looking, professional and competitive grassroots sector. As we are all aware culture does not thrive in a vacuum, it must constantly be created, challenged, nurtured and encouraged. It is as a result of debate, hard work and constant activity in pursuit of excellence on the part of Scottish artists that Scotland has a visual arts sector at all, let alone one that is so highly esteemed.

These Scottish artists not only create the work and contribute to the debate surrounding the visual arts in Scotland they:

- Run galleries and artist run spaces
- Produce, edit and self publish magazines, books and fanzines
- Set up, run and otherwise support studio facilities
- Provide essential core staff to non artist led facilities such as the CCA, Fruitmarket and the DCA (these include part time office staff, invigilation and gallery guides and installation teams)
- Create and support an international network of interested professionals via peer review
- Work across artforms, most notably feeding an active Scottish music scene
- Contribute to the creative economy through their labour and acquisition of resources to sustain their practices
- Teach, organise and provide the expertise for a huge variety of 'outreach' projects, education and access programmes including artists working in schools, hospitals, prisons, special needs education, family days and as education and outreach staff in galleries and art centres.

When the consultation paper talks of Scotland leading the world in its services to its confident cultured citizens it needs to acknowledge the needs of those individuals and organisations who will deliver those world leading services. It is no good talking of the

citizen's right to culture without considering the producers; those for whom culture is not just a right, but a livelihood.

After all, artists are citizens too, and what remarkable citizens they are. These are citizens who will sacrifice their right to a secure home, a secure income, a secure future (how many artists have a pension scheme?), and will contribute their labour for free, for long hours and for many years, accepting that their contributions to the cultural life of their constituency is worth many times the minimum wage.

Scottish artists, however, are not sentimental about their contribution to the cultural life of Scotland. When Transmission started twenty years ago the Scottish art scene was notable for the number of artists fleeing the country to seek opportunities elsewhere. This trend has now been halted, and remarkably reversed. The Scottish art scene is now notable for its cosmopolitan and international flavour, attracting artists from all over the world to Scotland, and competing as an artistic centre with London, New York and Berlin. This remarkable reversal is no exaggeration, and no miracle. But without favourable conditions for the production, reception and debate of new work amongst a committed peer group, artists will cease to find Scotland a favourable environment to work within, and Scotland will cease to attract the interest and acclaim that attracts artists and bolsters the home grown scene. Without institutional and governmental support in the form of arms length funding to grassroots practitioners the visual arts in Scotland will wither and die back, and with it Scotland's reputation as a centre for excellence in the visual arts.

Transmission Gallery and its constituency would like to call on the Commission to recognise the contributions being made to the cultural life of Scotland by its visual artists. We would like the commission to recognise the ongoing and increasing needs of the grassroots visual arts community for support as its numbers swell. We would like to see that as Scotland moves into the 21st century its recognition and support of the primary producers increase. We all know where the activity is, we can all see the dedicated individuals and organisations, which are creating and supporting the visual arts in Scotland. In the past funding for the visual arts has been obsessed with buildings such as Tramway or the CCA and spectacles such as the year of culture or the Venice Biennale. These buildings and spectacles are seldom as important a concern as the

artists and individuals whose work they profile. The work of true cultural significance may not always be visible, taking place behind studio doors, in conversations in the pub, or in small ad-hoc collectives of artists planning a self initiated exhibition or event. But in Scotland we need to have the sophistication to recognise that these activities going on below the radar of media interest or layman's concern are what generates the events that set Scotland's cultural heritage in stone. Nobody can take away from Scotland its achievements in the field of the visual arts in the past two decades. History will always recognise the remarkable reversal of fortunes within the Scottish art scene throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s. But writing history from the bottom up takes an enormous effort and commitment. It is now time for the effort and commitment on behalf of the grassroots to be recognised and funded accordingly. Artists in Scotland would like to see the commission pioneering a trend towards the direct support of practitioners. No amount of consultation can tell us what we already know: That Scotland's artists are one of her culture's most undervalued, most publicly exploited resource. It is time for a second reversal in fortunes. A reversal in fortunes which results in funds being delivered not to major institutions, property portfolios and bogus consultancy firms, but direct to the artists where the work, and history, are being made.

Yours Sincerely,

On behalf of Transmission Gallery.

The Transmission committee:

Nick Evans

Charles Hammond

Lotte Gertz

Lynn Hynd

Lucy McEachen

Iain Hetherington