

*Point of Departure*, a mixed media installation by Edmonton visual artist Lyndal Osborne, who receives funding under the program of Grants to Established Artists.

Director's Report

# Director's Report

Shirley L. Thomson



## Reflections after one year on the job

Arriving at the Canada Council early in 1998 proved to be a revelation, even for a veteran arts administrator such as myself. At the top of my list of the best I've encountered in a year of superlatives are the board and staff of the Council, whose dedication to fostering and promoting all of the arts in Canada knows no bounds. Many of the complex issues which the Council—and all organizations—face today, defy neat and circumscribed analysis. It is through the skill, care, and generosity of board and staff that the Council will continue to evolve as the supple and knowledge-based organization which Canada's artistic community requires and deserves in the new century.

The Canada Council of the nineties has put much thought into addressing its major challenges: the increasingly pluralistic nature of the arts

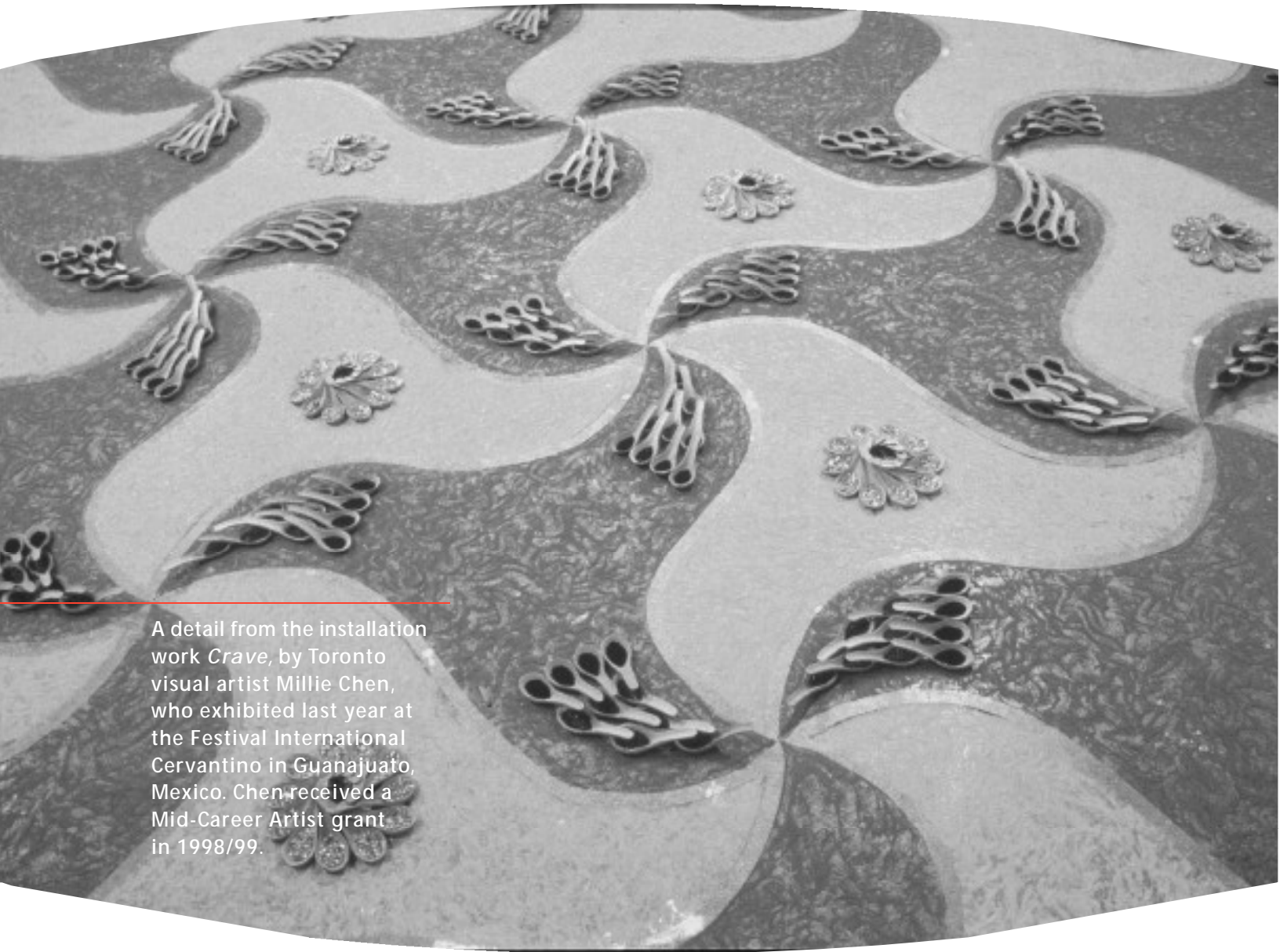
community and audiences; regional variations; the recognition and inclusion of the contribution of Aboriginal artists; the impact of new technologies on the way artists create and distribute their work and on the Council's processes; and—linked to new technologies—the effects of globalization on the arts in Canada, and on Canada's place in the world. Over the past year we have endeavoured to put in place the appropriate professional skills and organizational tools to enable the Council to rise to these challenges, with the acute awareness that the Council of the future must be flexible, human and very informed.

We continue to intensify our efforts of the past years to defend the artist's place in society and the value of public investment in the arts. Never before has the artist's humanizing and perceptive

*“Never before has the artist's humanizing and perceptive voice been so necessary as a counterweight to the all-pervasive influence of technology and the marketplace.”*

voice been so necessary as a counterweight to the all-pervasive influence of technology and the marketplace. We will work with the arts community to increase public knowledge and appreciation of the arts, with a special focus on young audiences.

The challenges for Canada as part of the global arts community will increase in complexity as international issues in areas like copyright, intellectual property, privacy of information and trade continue to evolve. There is no thought of rejecting outside influences, nor of reluctance to co-operate, co-produce or “co-think,” but there is a need to show pride and determination in saying “yes, this is Canadian—how wonderful it is, and how fortunate we are that it is supported by all Canadians through the Council.” Carol Shields, one of



A detail from the installation work *Crave*, by Toronto visual artist Millie Chen, who exhibited last year at the Festival International Cervantino in Guanajuato, Mexico. Chen received a Mid-Career Artist grant in 1998/99.

our shining literary lights and a former Council board member, writes about the artist's capacity to transform the world in a delicate parable about windows and light. Here are her words.

*"All we know is that a certain blocked-in window was freed in such a way that light flowed with a burst through it. Not real light, of course, but the idea of*

*light, which is infinitely more powerful than light itself. Illusion, accident, meticulous skill all played a role, and those who gathered to pay tribute were happy to set aside, for the moment, scientific proofs and to stand in awe of the power of creative achievement - a window that had become more than a window, better than a window, greater than a window, the window that would rest in the*

*mind as all that was ideal and desirable and transparent in the world of windows...."* (notes from Carol Shields' speech to the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts, Fall, 1997)

*Shirley L. Thomson*

Shirley L. Thomson  
Director

## Report of the year's activities 1998-99

The year just past can be characterized as a period of renewal and consolidation for the Canada Council for the Arts.

On the one hand, new funds enabled the Council to strengthen existing programs, long underfunded, and to undertake dynamic new initiatives that only began to respond to the explosion of creative talent in all parts of the country. On the other hand, the Council remained firm in its commitment to manage its operations efficiently and cost-effectively, keeping administrative costs to a minimum in order to protect the grants budget.

Looking ahead to the new millennium, board and staff focussed their collective energies on preparing a renewed vision and plan for the Council in a changing world. Recognizing that the arts will be our address in the global village, the Council is convinced that its mandate, to support the production of works by new and established artists throughout Canada, and to help build audiences for Canadian arts here and abroad, will assume even greater significance in the years to come.

### Leading up to 1998-1999

From 1994 to 1997, the Council responded to the federal government's deficit-cutting Program Review Exercises 1 and 2, which reduced the Council's parliamentary appropriation by 10.4%, by protecting its grants budgets and reducing its overhead and administrative costs. This had a deep impact on staff members, who were reduced by almost 50% (from 268 to 132), and on the way they work. The number of programs was reduced from over 100 to 54 (although numbers have risen somewhat with the new funds) and one annual deadline for most programs was implemented.

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In 1997, the government announced the welcome addition of new funds to the Canada Council, \$25 million a year for five years beginning in fiscal year 1997-98 up to 2001-02, and a \$10 million Millennium Arts Fund. The allocation of the additional funds represented an important signal from the government of its commitment to the Canada Council and to public support of the arts at the federal level.

The new funds enabled the Council both to reinforce its core programs of support to arts organizations including symphony orchestras, opera, theatre and dance companies, public art museums and publishers, and to address through targeted funding the strategic priorities that had been identified in the Council's 1995 Strategic Plan, *A Design for the Future*. In allocating the funds, the Council maintained its commitment to keep overhead costs at a minimum in order to protect the grants budget.

*Year one of the new funds:* In the first year, the Council decided that, for 1997-98 only, the \$25 million was to be allocated by means of special one-time grants to arts organizations currently receiving operating funds from the Council. The amount was equal to 20% of their Council operating grant. Programs for individual artists and for projects were also increased by 20% for 1997-98 only. Payments to authors through the Public Lending Right



*Requiem "click"* is an interdisciplinary collaborative performance by choreographer Suzanne Miller and composer/musician Allan Paivio. The project, which premiered at Montreal's Espace Tangente, received a \$30,000 creation grant from the Interdisciplinary Work and Performance Art program. Pictured: Marianne Thorborg.

Photo: Paul Litherland

Commission were increased by \$2.2 million. The remainder of the funds was reserved for special initiatives and operational support.

#### **How the new funds were allocated in 1998-99**

In April, 1998, the Council announced its plan and priorities for the distribution of the additional funding over the next four years. The plans were a further evolution of the directions originally outlined in the 1995 strategic plan, refined after extensive discussion with the board and staff, as well as

consultation with established disciplinary advisory committees. They reflected the Council's key priorities for the distribution of the funds: that existing core programs were in immediate need of reinforcement, and that a number of strategic priorities, identified by the Council as being of key importance in the long-term development of Canadian arts, required urgent attention.

Of the \$22,965,000 available, the funds were distributed as follows.

*Grants 1998-99 (in thousands of dollars)*

Reinforcement and Realignment		\$12,300	
Public Lending Right Commission		2,200	
Strategic Priorities			
Developing Audiences	1,900		
Aboriginal Arts	1,500		
Equity and Access	1,500		
International Development and Festivals	2,000		
Subtotal	6,900	6,900	
<b>Total Grants</b>		<b>\$21,400</b>	
Services, operating and administration		1,565	
<b>Total Expenses</b>		<b>\$22,965</b>	

**Reinforcement and Realignment**

Existing programs for creation, production and dissemination were strengthened with the allocation of approximately \$12 million of the new funds. Within programs, the Council made realignments to deal with historical inequities that had been exacerbated through years of stagnant funding and cuts. For example:

- Core programs of production support to performing arts companies, publishing companies and media arts organizations were significantly bolstered. The overall budget for production grants to organizations rose by 24% over 1996-97.
- A major program of operating support to art museums and public galleries was created, resourced from new and existing funds. Operating support to cinémathèques was reinstated.
- Support to individual artists for creation and production was strengthened, with funding increased by 16% over 1996-97. Success rates were raised in many programs for individuals.
- The Council's budget for all programs of support for touring and dissemination,

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including existing and new funds, reached \$18.2 million in 1998-99, an increase of over 109% since the publication of the Council's 1995 Strategic Plan. This is the largest percentage increase, and reflects the priority the Council has accorded since 1995 to the vital activity of linking the arts and the public: touring the performing arts, exhibition, display and showcasing of the visual media and interdisciplinary arts, as well as the distribution and promotion of the arts to new audiences across the country.

- Authors, illustrators and translators received an additional \$2.2 million through the Public Lending Right Program.

**Strategic Priorities**

In addition to reinforcement, the new funds enabled the Council to allocate approximately \$7 million of the new funds to the following strategic priorities:

**Developing audiences—especially young audiences—for the arts**

To ensure that the arts become more fully integrated into the lives of Canadians, the Council increased its support to the creation, production and dissemination of works of art destined for young audiences. It invested in the development of skills in programming, marketing and presenting works of art to young audiences. Through these initiatives, and by strengthening support to touring, exhibition and distribution of the arts and improving access to the arts for people of all

ages, the Council is breathing new life into the part of its mandate which charges us to promote the enjoyment of the arts.

### ***Aboriginal Arts***

Recognizing the richness of traditional and contemporary arts practices by Aboriginal artists, and the need to increase their awareness of and access to programs of the Council, the Council implemented a number of initiatives. Funding for Aboriginal arts was increased, both within regular programs, and through targeted initiatives. New programs or pilot projects were created in Aboriginal writing and publishing, dance, music, radio drama, film and Aboriginal curatorial projects in Visual Arts.

Increased efforts were made in communications, the most striking example being the Media Arts outreach and information tour of Aboriginal communities in the Prairies from November 1998 to February 1999. The tour generated close to ninety applications to the new Aboriginal Media Arts pilot program for artists working in film, video, audio and new electronic media.

Finally, a highly successful conference, *To See Proudly*, organized by the Council's Aboriginal Secretariat in Ottawa in September 1998, brought together Aboriginal artists from all across Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The conference more than met its objective, to provide a national forum for a dialogue between Aboriginal artists and between artists and the Canada Council. A follow-up conference is planned for 2001.

### ***Equity and Access***

To encourage the creative expression of artists from culturally diverse communities, the Council increased support to core programs across all disciplines and invested in special initiatives and multidisciplinary opportunities.

Among the most memorable special events of the year were the Showcases for Culturally Diverse and First Peoples Music Artists in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal in November 1998. The Showcases brought artists from these communities together with presenters from across the country, and many of the participating artists obtained performing engagements as a result, which will further their careers significantly in Canada and abroad.

The Council's Equity Office, which guides the Council's equity efforts and provides extensive outreach to culturally diverse communities, developed a new two-year initiative called Quest. The program is designed to increase access to Council funding for a new generation of emerging professional artists who have never received a grant from the Council.

### ***International Activities***

In recognition of the fact that artists function in a global environment, the Council has created new international programs in almost every discipline to enable artists to develop their artistic potential and promote Canadian arts abroad. The Council's initiative, which is small-scale and artist-driven, complements the work of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, which continues to assist major tours and exhibitions abroad. The Council's aim is to encourage co-productions between foreign and Canadian companies, thereby increasing international audiences for Canadian creations, and to facilitate exchanges and networking between creators, producers and artistic directors. The Theatre Section organized tours for artistic directors to France, Africa and Australia last year to encourage co-productions, and the coming season will show the results. International residencies are another area ripe for development, and possibilities are being actively researched.

Photo: David Cooper



Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet with its original, full-length story ballet *Dracula*, choreographed by Mark Godden, which had its world premiere in October 1998. Dancers: Tara Birtwhistle and Zhang Wei-Qiang.

### **Festivals**

Festivals have established their role as audience builders and popularizers of the arts. Every section is assisting festivals, either through targeted programs or within existing dissemination programs. Writers' festivals, theatre and music festivals and film festivals have become a staple of the cultural diet of most communities, large and small. Through its support to festivals, the Council tries to encourage organizers to be more innovative in their programming, thereby enriching their audiences' knowledge, and moving their

awareness and appreciation of the arts to new levels.

### **Also arising out of the Strategic Priorities**

In addition to the above actions, a number of other initiatives were undertaken that arise out of the strategic priorities and address pressing needs in the arts. To list only a few examples:

- The Theatre Section implemented the "Flying Squad," which provides hands-on assistance to not-for-profit theatre companies for organizational development.
- In the area of new media, the Council, the



Compagnie Flak with choreographer José Navas' 1998/99 creation *One Night Only 3/3*, a coproduction of the Canada Dance Festival, Candance Creation Fund and the National Arts Centre. The production played in Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto, Belgium, Portugal and Austria during the 1998/99 season, and will be touring Canada and Europe beginning in January 2000. Pictured: choreographer and dancer José Navas.



Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann

Banff Centre and Stentor created a partnership, "The New Media Canadian Creation Initiative," to enable artists to carry out research and create new works in electronic media at the Banff Centre.

- The Writing and Publishing Section launched a new pilot program, Spoken and Electronic Words, to increase access to Council funding for innovative literary practices which are not based on conventional book or printed magazine formats, such as dub and rap poetry, poetry performance, storytelling, electronic magazines, and literary expression

published or broadcast electronically.

- The Canadian Music Centre, with the help of a Council grant, embarked on the digitization of its library of Canadian contemporary music scores and its migration to the Internet.

#### ***The Millennium Arts Fund***

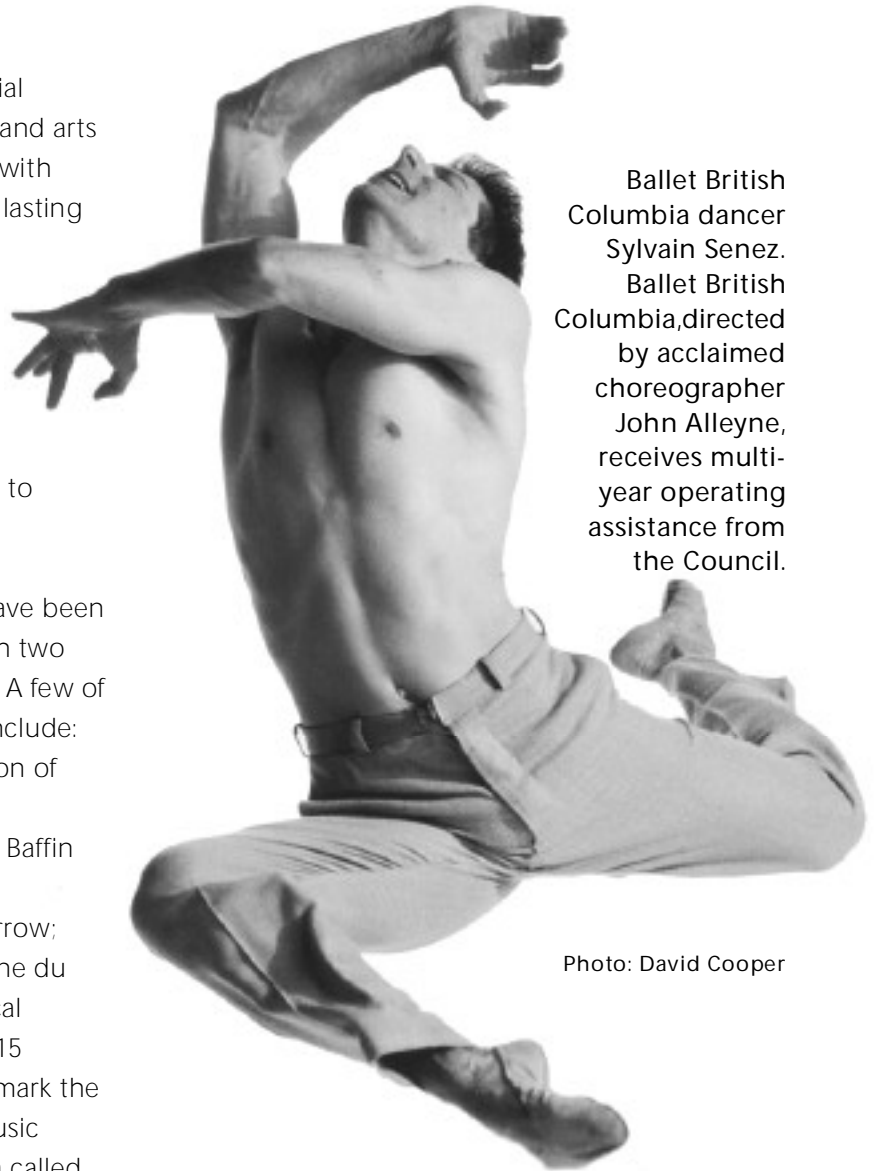
In June 1998, Minister of Canadian Heritage Sheila Copps confirmed the federal government's promise to provide \$10 million to the Council for the production of works of

art to mark the millennium. This special program provides professional artists and arts organizations in all artistic disciplines with funds to create works that will have a lasting impact, will be relevant to the millennium, and will enrich collections, repertoires and public places. The selection committees look for creativity, originality and inventiveness in successful projects, with a focus on reaching out to young people.

To date, over one hundred projects have been supported from all across Canada with two more competitions still to take place. A few of the rich tapestry of projects funded include: the Nunavut Arts and Crafts Association of Iqaluit for *Our Life in Stone*, involving a sculpture symposium in the Arctic on Baffin Island, uniting elders of the Nunavut communities with the artists of tomorrow; the Société de musique contemporaine du Québec, for *Esprits de clochers*, a musical involving roughly 15 composers and 15 musical organizations in Montreal to mark the millennium; and Toronto's Tapestry Music Theatre, for a Chinese-Canadian opera called *The Iron Road* about the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

### ***The Challenges Ahead***

If the events and actions of the past twelve months reveal anything, it is that the country's artistic community is in a state of creative ferment, embracing new art forms and new media, and challenging the boundaries of artistic expression fearlessly. The welcome and much-needed new funding has reinvigorated the Council's programs and enabled it to respond to many new pressing needs in the arts. But the quality of the thousands of applications submitted to the Council, and success rates which are in some cases still too



Ballet British Columbia dancer Sylvain Senez. Ballet British Columbia, directed by acclaimed choreographer John Alleyne, receives multi-year operating assistance from the Council.

Photo: David Cooper

low, reveal that there is much excellent work being produced throughout the country that deserves recognition, and that much remains to be done.

Braced by the new funding, and inspired by the dedication of Canada's artists and the promise they embody, the Council's board and staff continue to work together to plan for the future. A corporate plan is being developed to move the Council forward from the 1995 Strategic Plan, which was produced within the context of Program Review, and to establish a forward-looking set of objectives to take us into the next century.



A scene from *When Ponds Freeze Over*, a film by Mary Lewis about a Newfoundland teenager who falls through the ice and draws strength from her family history.

An essential component of the process is the newly created Research and Planning Unit, which will carry out the necessary function of developing performance indicators to measure the impact of our strategies and actions. The Unit will also evolve as an information resource for the arts community and the public, a need which has often been conveyed to the Council in recent years. The Council is a rich repository of forty years of information on the arts to which the public deserves greater access. A redesigned Website and intensified communications and advocacy

strategies will facilitate the sharing of information about the arts and reinforce the message that the arts enhance and improve our communities.

As the world of the arts is in constant flux, in never-ending evolution, the Council continues to face a multiplicity of issues that require its attention in the immediate and the longer term. Issues under review at present and in the coming months include:

*Peer review:* The Council remains committed to peer review as a cornerstone of its operation and is continuing to work on clarifying the process and making its procedures as transparent as possible.

*Artist-run centres:* The Visual Arts Section is reviewing the artist-run centres program and bringing it up to date with the current reality in which these institutions function. Consultations have been carried out with the centres across Canada and the redesigned program is scheduled to be in place by the end of this calendar year.

*Globalization:* The creation of international programs in every section reflects the Council's awareness that the reality we live in is international, and that the arts are our global calling card. The Council has a particular responsibility in the international arena through the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, which operates under the Council's aegis. The Council will work with the Commission to help promote the values which are the Commission's foundation: peace, respect for human rights and the right of citizens to intellectual and cultural enrichment. Another international dimension is our membership on the Team Canada Advisory Board which meets every quarter to provide counsel to the government on trade policy, market access and promotion, among other things. Here is another forum for the Council's voice, where it can help to achieve a harmonious level of respect for the contribution the arts make to the qualities of innovation, risk-taking and teamwork, so essential to entrepreneurship.

*Interdisciplinarity:* Under the restructuring process, the programs of support to creation, production and dissemination of

interdisciplinary work were moved into the Council's Media Arts Section where they have been housed for the past two years. Upon reflection, we have concluded that interdisciplinary practitioners will be better served with their own stand-alone unit. Interdisciplinary work is a mature and established form of arts practice, even while it is constantly testing the boundaries and moving us into new zones of perception. Programs are being reviewed in consultation with professionals in the field.

### ***A closing word***

The above overview demonstrates that the past year has been one of intensive work and development to address a number of pressing issues in the immediate and longer term. We know that many challenges lie ahead, and the Council is prepared to face them—as well as those which still lie beyond our present horizon—with confidence and determination.

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### Distribution of Grants by Arts Discipline 1998-99

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	<i>(in thousands of dollars)</i>
Music	\$21,558
Theatre	20,349
Writing and Publishing	17,415
Visual Arts	15,364
Dance	12,269
Media Arts	10,081
Public Lending Right Commission	8,033
Millennium Arts Fund	5,318
Other	1,370
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 111,757</b>

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