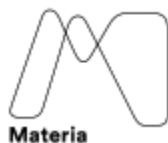


Brief Presented to a House of Commons Parliamentary Committee

**by
Kathy Ouellette
Executive Director of Centre Materia**



Monday, April 23, 2018

Foundation of Materia

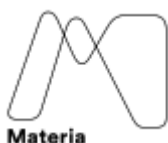
To understand Materia, you must first know the Maison des métiers d'art de Québec.

The Maison des métiers d'art de Québec resulted from the 1997 consolidation of three studio-schools active in the development of arts and crafts: École-atelier de textile et reliure, École-atelier de céramique and École-atelier de sculpture de Québec.

MMAQ's 1999 acquisition of a building at the intersection of rue de la Couronne and boulevard Charest in Quebec City was seen, at the time, as a bold move. On the one hand, the Saint-Roch neighbourhood had not yet been revitalized and faced many challenges to development. On the other hand, the three not-for-profit organizations that were the project proponents supported both a specific and concerted vision of their development. This transaction was nonetheless a visionary business decision, not the least because of the boom that the Saint-Roch sector has since experienced.

In 2000, the Maison des métiers d'art de Québec created the Galerie Materia on the ground floor of its eight-storey building. The objectives of this project were to provide Quebec with an exhibition space for contemporary fine crafts and to encourage the development of dialogue around arts and crafts practices. By annexing a public gallery to the three schools, the Maison des métiers d'art de Québec opened up to the world, both literally and figuratively: not only by attracting passers-by through its large display windows but also by giving masters from all backgrounds an opportunity to exhibit their works and make them known.

In 2003, the Galerie Materia became the Centre Materia, an artist-run centre supervised by a board of directors independent from the Maison des métiers d'art de Québec. However, even today, Centre Materia owes its viability to substantial financial support from MMAQ.



Mission

The mission of Materia is to disseminate and promote research and creation in the field of arts and crafts, nationally and internationally. The only expressive arts and crafts artist-run centre in Canada, Materia promotes knowledge and recognition of this practice and its creators. The centre therefore strives to highlight the work of the greatest creators, as well as the next generation of artists in the field, by presenting them in a professional environment. Materia has come to occupy a unique place for the dissemination and interpretation of works in contemporary arts and crafts. Over the years, the excellence of the events presented at Materia is helping to change attitudes and broaden perceptions of expressive arts and crafts. The high quality of Materia's exhibitions is an eloquent testimony to its contribution to the careers of craftspeople.

Benefits

Since it was first established, the centre has exhibited the works of nearly 600 creative craftspeople who have been selected by peer juries. With five or six exhibitions a year and a number of satellite events such as conferences, round tables, symposiums, performances, videos, and print and digital publications, Materia has to the present day coordinated more than 100 exhibitions and welcomed nearly 70,000 visitors. In total, there has been over \$680,000 in direct benefits for artists through exhibition rights, copyright, fees and sales of artwork.

The close contact between Materia and MMAQ has a direct and daily impact on its users, whether they are teachers, students, artists and craftspeople, professionals or amateurs. In addition to its regular exhibition activities, Materia helps members and non-members draft their professional documents, analyzes and comments on artists' files and grant applications, supports a variety of creative and production projects, helps search for exhibition space, provides exhibition furnishings to small organizations and groups in the community, nominates candidates for various awards, sits on community committees and juries, etc.

Materia also participates in developing MMAQ artist residencies. There are times when seasoned artists work in the same space visited by MMAQ users, and then the works of those artists are exposed in the Materia hall. In this way the public can see and understand the creative process, from idea to display. The installation and dismantling of exhibitions is also a learning opportunity for the next generation.

Through its mission, the selection of artists exhibited and its actions, Materia helps construct discourse and thought regarding a vast area of expertise.

In Quebec City, Centre Materia is located in the core of a neighbourhood with a high concentration of cultural, highly artistic and innovative facilities. In addition to its proximity to MMAQ, the centre is very close to the Université Laval arts building, Université TELUQ, several artist-run centres, private galleries, artists' studios, co-working space, a library, Théâtre La Bordée, the Maison pour la danse, not to mention small and medium-sized theatres and many private companies that work in the digital entertainment industry. This neighbourhood, like Montreal's Quartier des spectacles, could be considered a cultural district that has formed over the years with various kinds of financial support from the municipality. It would not take much for this sector to achieve greater recognition, naturally focused on creation, innovation and knowledge development. This district, as a focal point, would certainly attract a complementary business offering, improve cultural tourism offerings, structure a common vision of the various cultural facilities and rely on the diversity and complementarity of the offerings to develop collaborative projects.

Issues

Materia's main challenge is funding for operations. There are artist-run centres that are recognized and whose mission is supported, and then there are others, like Materia, that are recognized but not supported. Therefore, after nearly 18 years, the centre is hoping that its mission will be recognized by the Canada Council for the Arts.

We occasionally receive grants from the Canada Council for projects. Project funding is essential, but this type of funding is short-term. True, it contributes to the dissemination of risky research projects, but it does not help organizations in the long run. Corporate memory, the development of expertise and the transfer of information are concepts that are difficult to implement in the short run. I need not stress the importance of having a solid vision for the future along with an efficient strategic plan. Strong strategies, with a lasting impact on the community, are not developed in the here and now.

According to Mana Rouholamini of the Canada Council, the amounts allocated to projects last year increased by 224%, while the amounts allocated to operations increased by only 55% during the same period.

Impacts

The impacts are manifold, particularly on salaries and employee turnover. I am the Director of an artist-run centre that employs four people; three of the positions are permanent and one is casual. As Executive Director, I have a bachelor's degree and my annual salary is \$29,700. The Project Coordinator, who has a master's degree in museology, is paid \$22,300 a year. The Director of Visitor Experience, who is also involved in installing exhibits, has a technical Diploma of Collegial Studies and earns \$15,600.

Retaining personnel is exceedingly difficult. On average, executive directors keep their positions for 3.4 years, project coordinators, 1.4 years, and directors of visitor experience, 0.6 years.

These staff movements hinder the centre's development and make it difficult to form stable business relationships. There is practically no marketing, corporate functionality is tenuous, and we are constantly losing expertise, not to mention the time and expense involved in hiring and training staff.

To balance its budget, Materia must close for the summer, thereby laying off the Director of Visitor Experience. It must also operate for a temporary six-week period without management. While Materia is closed, no work gets done; as much as possible is done in advance or once it reopens. This doesn't include what management does without pay and what is simply never done for lack of time. The solutions put forward are those that have the least impact on the quality of the exhibitions and featured artists. Expecting to reach the organization's full potential under these conditions is wishful thinking.

In addition, over time, meaningful projects for the arts and crafts community simply had to be abandoned. For example, Materia regularly published catalogues of exhibitions of experienced artists in which historians and curators reflected on the situation of the community, the artistic approach of one individual or the techniques of another. An online store, which brought together up-and-coming and experienced artists, was closed due to the fact that the employees at that time did not have the necessary resources and the time to put in the effort to publicize it.

Anemic funding and non-indexation of operating grants also have a direct impact on the centre's viability. Today, Centre Materia's main subsidizer is another not-for-profit organization in the cultural sector, the Maison des métiers d'art de Québec, providing funding of just over \$93,000. This amount covers the rent of the exhibition hall and Materia's offices, and payroll management and accounting expenses. In these financially challenging times, MMAQ, Materia's founder, has an unshakeable belief in the centre's raison d'être. However, some boards of directors question this contribution. In a sense, Materia remains dependent on MMAQ.

The minimum wage in Quebec will be increasing by 6.67% in May 2018. Since artist-run centres like Materia provide services to the public, they cannot raise their prices to compensate for losses. Cultural workers will be adversely affected (fewer hours or job cuts), or there will be a direct impact on service delivery and exhibitions.

Ultimately, for Materia, an increase in the amounts allocated to operations, as well as an increase in the centres entitled to these grants, is critically important. Financial assistance to the mission, confirmed for several years (e.g., three years), would make it possible for artist-run centres to better plan their cultural offering in the long term, stay on top of research in their sector, and be more attentive to their members and create a sense of belonging with them. But, above all, it would improve the quality of life of these passionate artists and cultural workers.