

An ArtsLink Alphabet - Herménégilde Chiasson

First of all I want to thank you for inviting me to your annual meeting. For two years I was the president of the French counterpart of your organization, the AAAPNB or (New Brunswick Professional Acadian Artists Association) and I can understand the challenges and the enthusiasm that such gatherings can generate especially in their formative or early years of existence.

I am also quite honored to be your guest speaker today. Usually, in this province, we have a tendency to believe that salvation will come from outside, that vision will be imported and that the expertise is something that we can only dream of. But then this invitation brought a great deal of questions and my mind started to race the minute I received your invitation as to what I could say that would be pertinent and hopefully inspiring.

Whenever I am confronted with a subject so vast that it would necessitate a full book to cover, I have a tendency to produce fragments, hints, notes in preparation for the magna opus that might eventually follow. Besides I am convinced that post-modernity was born out of the impossibility to produce a synthesis, the amount of information now generated being far too enormous to think of drafting some kind of inventory, let alone compression.

So this is one of these subjects. Arts in New Brunswick or the relation between the arts and society or the relation between the arts and the artists.

I have chosen to give it a special form that we all know and which is linked to the great system of communication of the western world, namely the alphabet. As a writer I have always been fascinated by this system of combination but also as a tool of classification that can be both playful and useful. After all we are artists and our mission is to renew the world so why should we do everything like everybody else.

So for the next minutes I will refer to letters, referring to words, referring to concepts, referring to situations which I hope will draw some kind of interest as to the situation of the arts in our province.

A as in Arts

The arts are so central and so important to our lives that it would be impossible to produce a list that would take in consideration its many aspects. Of course the arts are always associated with culture of which it has become the most privileged form of expression, culture itself being related to identity, which is central to our presence on a variable scale. Its by the arts that we define a civilization and that we get an idea of its existence in terms of values, of projects and of legacy. This is quite a broad view that stands at the foundation of why we have chosen to make the arts one of if not the priority of our lives.

It might not come as such when we are mixing blue and yellow to make green or choosing this adjective instead of that one but deep down, it seems to me, this is the motor of our activity. I believe all artists obey to the same prerogatives whether they are trained or self-taught, doing traditional or avant-garde works, whether they live in Hartland or New-York. Art, by keeping a record of our existence, is an enterprise against death. It's a way to increase conscience in order to stay on top, to justify, to explain to ourselves the complexity of the world, to communicate on a higher level and, if ever possible, to add beauty to the troubled and cynical age that we live in.

The arts in New Brunswick are not different in their motivation but they are different in their conditions of existence. We live in an age when artists meet to discuss their material limits and we tend to forget the spirit at the base of our activities. Most of the time we talk about money and we forget the conviviality and the solidarity that might compensate for the hardships of our lives in the art world. Our situation in this province is different and unique and we should address it in order, like in judo, to use it to our advantage. The arts have always been at the center of innovation and we should be a model for the other sectors of activity. In that sense, I believe we can create a new level, a new conception of awareness and responsibility.

B as in Business

The other day I was invited at Moncton's City Hall to attend the presentation of the document for the city's first Cultural Policy. In the discussion that followed, one of the councillors congratulated the drafting committee for its insistence on connecting the arts with the business community who might give the artists some clues, some lessons on management.

Patricia Pritcher in her ground breaking essay “Artist, artisans and technocrats” which relates the results of a 15 year research in a billion dollar budget company, came up with these categories that she identifies with those who dream big: artists, those whose dreams are to the human scale: artisans and those who despise dreams: technocrats. These categories corresponds to different types of management.

The artist-manager is seen as adventurous, changing, intuitive, entrepreneurial, imaginative, visionary, unpredictable, emotional, inspiring and funny. That type will not accept a conventional analysis of the market. He spends a lot of energy and acts with force. This type of management has little to do with a formal analysis. One of these managers told her: “In reality what is a strategy? A detailed plan? No, a strategy comes from astrology, from dreams, from love, from science fiction, from social perception, from one’s capacity to guess, from exentricity, probably a bit of craziness... creation is storm.”

She goes on to say that the artisan is moved by prudence while the technocrat obeys to the arrogance of knowledge. She points out that artisan and artists are able to work together while using technocrats as consultants but that technocrats can not function with artists and artisans that they consider too scattered and unreliable. She concludes that an artist-manager should be at the top of the organization because every organization needs dreams to inspire and to motivate its team and that the dream should be at the top of the organization.

This is a very brief summary of a fascinating book... on management. Imagine.

C as in Colonial

Our colonial ways of behavior are deeply rooted in our minds. There seems to be a mental dependency over patterns that have been inherited from our tensions and from our past won or lost wars. New Brunswick is a 750,000 people province. We have no time and no energy to lose in promoting ideas and rivalries that have been bred outside of us and at different historical times.

We are proud to say that we are the scale model of the country but we tend to omit that we have also reproduce the two solitudes model. As for me, I must admit that my knowledge of the anglophone cultural scene is somehow limited by the boundaries that have been installed and maintained by a colonial perception of our culture. There are

people who have been instrumental in breaking these barriers and I am sure, that in the future, there will be, there must be, more of them.

Everybody that I know on the francophone side welcomes the creation of Artslink and, along with AAAPNB, I am sure that the arts will finally have a strong and at times united voice to advocate the importance of culture to bridge our solitudes and to move away from that colonial outlook, an outlook where a great deal of our energy was devoted to the promotion of our apprehension instead of our conviviality.

D as in Department

Culture in our province has always been part of a larger department. We are now part of Wellness, Culture and Sport. During the 1995 provincial election campaign, along with a group of anglophone artists, the AAAPNB decided to create a common front in order to address the idea of culture and to see where it was standing on the then political agenda of the province.

We had produced t-shirts and a poster listing a series of stats related to the state of the arts in the province and in the country. We held a press conference and on the candidate's debate, Abbé Lanteigne the Radio-Canada anchorman, asked McKenna, the same question we had put on our posters and our t-shirts : Is there a possibility that there might be someday a New Brunswick Department of Culture. McKenna answered very briefly that «No, there won't be a Department of culture» and that was it. But, for the first time, in New Brunswick, culture, the C word had been mentioned in a political debate. We thought that this was some kind of victory.

Nicole Barrieau in her article : The Cultural Sector in Atlantic Canada: Its Economic Impact writes that "New Brunswick is currently the only province in Atlantic Canada without a true department of culture."

E as in Education

How do you evaluate art? All we know is that it has become a very individual activity and that its results are mostly seen in other ways than a more concrete approach. Maybe this is why we can evaluate a sports activity better than a painting

because when the puck goes in the goal you know that it's a sure score while you can spend many hours trying to figure out what you should see in an abstract painting.

One thing that can not be measured but that sure shows is that a student who devotes time to some form of artistic activity will have better grades and a greater curiosity in classroom. I have two young grand children living in Montreal who are students at a school that devotes 10 hours a week to music learning and many hours to activities related to other forms of artistic activity. A few months ago that school was the subject of a report on television in which they were stating that these students also perform better in other academic matter than their average counterpart.

I still remember that very moving letter published by a student in the spring of 1999 after a series of suicides had traumatized the Polyvalente Mathieu Martin in Dieppe. In her text she pleaded for more exposure to the arts and for other activities related to a spiritual opening instead of a purely science oriented education maybe because science has a set of very measurable results. This is by no way a critique or a preference or preaching for my parish. I simply say that unless we learn to equilibrate our lives we will move into very serious problems not only as individuals but as society as well.

F as in First Nations

First Nations people have been carefully removed from our discourse and our history has remained somehow silent about their story which does or must exist outside of the folkloric and comforting vision that we tend to isolate them in. Our province is no different than the rest of the country. We take for granted that that they were there before us and then this terrible thing happened. From then on we have been looking at each other with guilt on our side and anger on their side, two feelings on which we will never build anything let alone a communication line that whichever way we look at it will always pass through our actual cultural landscape.

This reminds me somehow of the Acadian culture with the 1755 expulsion as the center date and event of an unending drama. It's from the seventies on, from the creation of the Université de Moncton and the advent of a culture where art has been at the center of a new discourse on identity, that Acadians have been able to come to terms with their historic deficit and to generate a renewed sense of their identity. Acadians too are plagued with a folkloric vision that we have to shed in order to open new lines of

communication, more atune to modernity, which in my book is nothing more than a way to talk to the rest of the world about issues they can understand and relate to.

I believe that this could also be true of First Nations art as it is true about all those who have been deprived of a consequent and authentic vision of themselves, stories that can only be told from the inside, stories that are hard to hear, hard to imagine, hard to admit, hard to voice but who speak to the soul instead of an endless debate that no court judgement can really settle.

G as in Government

Governments (national, provincial and municipal) are now seen as the great providers and the main funding agencies of the arts in this country. According to a recent report 91% of Canadians believe that the government should provide for arts and culture in Canada. Of course this also accompanies a certain vision, a certain image that may vary depending on the expectations of these various sources of financing. For the different levels of arts councils, the arts are funded on the basis of excellence which is a also variable notion that may also be subject to certain conditions depending on the various juries whose mission is to wisely allow these funds. But what is excellence?

Excellence is usually seen as a form of awareness, as a knowledge of discourse and/or a position inside the art world. The dialogue, the dynamics that goes on between the applicants and the jurors has always intrigued me but it has also, for some odd reason, reminded me of the creation of a new academy with its contriving rules and its somehow arrogance in defining what is art and why this particular art, the one that will be funded, has reached excellence.

I have sat on many juries of various disciplines, at various levels of governments, and it breaks my heart when you get an application by someone who does not fit at all in these categories of excellence. But they pay taxes, their government supports the arts and this, they have been told, is the only place where they could get funding for their projects. But then you put these naive efforts next to a more sophisticated form of art and you realize that the idea of democracy is truly incompatible with excellence. And then you feel guilty and you say that this should be your last jury. And then you forget.

H as in Here or Home or Heart

What is it about here that could be more than elsewhere? Because it is home and, as the title for a Newfoundland exhibition on folk art once stated : «Home is where the heart is». The heart is the siege of emotions and emotions is what gives intensity to great works of art.

It is strange that living in large cities such as Toronto or Montreal people like David Adams Richards or Antonine Maillet never moved away from home in their works. On the other side, it is also strange how living here we always keep an eye for what is going on in these large cities.

Could it be that we need to distance ourselves in order to create great works like Joyce who recreated Dublin to a point where you can now book a guided tour in his imagined literary city.

I would like to quote David Adams Richards from his essay «Artists tell our truths» an essay in which he wrote : «It is imperative to support our writers and artists. They are the only ones who can tell the truth about us. And there is a terrible and essential and poignant reason why we must seek to tell this truth.

In telling the truth about ourselves, we alone can give justice to our people and our province, to the work that we do and the lives that we live.

If only one of our artists is sanctified enough to show this once every 30 years, I give you my solemn promise New Brunswick will never, ever have anything to fear.»

I as in Image

The reason why I have such faith in art is because it represents the most powerful tool of social change. Artists can create visions, images, dialogues, music, spaces, movements that are new and different but who are also pertinent to a transformation of the image we have of ourselves.

Art is mostly concerned with language, form and content and it is well known that people who master these elements can create a strong, inspired and motivated discourse in whatever field they chose to intervene. Great art is always articulate and will reach us in a way and at a time that we might not expect. It speaks to our body, our mind, our heart, our soul on an intense and emotional level. That is why we, as artists, have a

huge responsibility for we have the power of doing magic and, if we do not assume that responsibility we might turn into apprentice-sorcerers. Art is truly a powerful tool.

In this province we have a huge image deficit. It's not all to say that we are proud we need to show it and to prove it. In the long run we will be proud of what we do and not of who we are, which is always a mere accident. We need to rid ourselves of that image deficit to craft and promote an image in relation with our reality. Some people are already working on this but we need to understand that the models, the subjects, the images have to come from us and from here in order to be truly effective.

J as in Jobs

It is very important for a collectivity to have artists of their own who share and articulate their way of life. I have always been wary of the fact that the Canadian International Development Agency has a policy of bringing back its representatives after five years, otherwise they become part of the social tissue of the collectivities where they have been working. This would mean that after five years, you become a Quebecker or an Ontarian and a tourist when you return here.

The reason that surfaces to justify most exiles is the idea of jobs. We cannot support most, and surely not all of our artists and it is much more glamorous to starve in Toronto or Montreal than to starve in the Atlantic Provinces. Sometimes, I totally understand that attitude and sometimes I can't stand it. There doesn't seem to be a point of equilibrium.

What I usually see in this artistic job orientation is a metaphor and somehow a justification of what has been played out on a much broader scheme. We live in an "unlivable" land and as a subdued statement, as someone said point blank like at the end of Billy Joel's song, Pianoman, "If you're that good, what are you doing here?"

If we are to maintain ourselves as a society, we need to support or at least show some interest or concern for the art being produced here. Otherwise, we will become eternal consumers of an imported reality that we will end up taking for our own - a very schizophrenic experience and perspective.

K as in Knowledge

Everybody is now getting very aware that we are moving from a resource to a knowledge based economy. The problem is how do we do this. What is the part of the arts in this process? Many people wonder about this new age of abundance and the benefits that it will carry. There is a difference between thinking and knowing, the same as between information and knowledge but a greater gap still seems to exist between knowing and believing. This might be the gap that the arts have to fill. Believing is more concerned about faith and hope. It involves the whole being and it speaks to the soul. It can say strange things like the idea that all heretics should be eliminated or that we have to foster a greater understanding among ourselves.

What do we believe in? That is the question that the arts must address at this point in time in New Brunswick. How to make us believe in this new social contract that we have to draft for the development of this land and the possibilities that it carries. The arts are concerned with the mind, to which knowledge would speak, but also and probably more so, with the soul who can move mountains. Sometimes you feel, as an artist living in this province, that you need and that you have this kind of faith.

L as in Links

We live in an age where we have to draw connections in order to increase our efficiency. The linkage of the arts falls in that prerogative. It could take place on a large scale if you are looking for the funding of a feature film or the construction of an art center. But it could also mean a linkage of human resources in order to whether the storm and get through hard times.

For seven years I was president of the Aberdeen cultural Center in Moncton, an old school that we squatted, saved from demolition - we have an unending need of parking space - and turned into an art institution which doubles as an heritage building. It now stands in front of a park, a green space, who use to be a baseball park and has become the extension of a vibrant art community. More than what that building stands for, the importance of Aberdeen might be best represented by the links it created with the community but mainly by the links that artists were able to establish, to support each other, to share in their success as well as their drawbacks.

In that sense Artslink is much more than an arts organization. It also stands for a renewed sense of confidence in the social mission of art in this province and the linking of artists to create a platform where this new vision can be build.

M as in Modesty

Modesty seems to be our middle name. I often say that we should put in the school curriculum a course about how to brag ourselves. It seems that we have been even more plagued by that attitude in the arts. When we look back on our history and the quality of art that we have produced we should be really concerned about why we are not more conscious of our accomplishments. This situation is perennial and it is due largely to the fact that we do not have a better record of what we did.

For instance we still do not have a history of the arts in this province and this is not for lack of interest. John Leroux, who did that fabulous history of architecture in the province, has sold the first edition of his book in a record time. We don't even have a comprehensive history of this province where we could tell how we came together, how we manage to get along and what are the challenges that we overcame. Newcomers to this land would sure appreciate what kind of venture they are moving into.

I strongly believe that a publication on the arts in New Brunswick would generate a sense of pride and a real motivation for the artists working in this province and would become an important source of knowledge for the general public.

N as in Numbers

Numbers have their own demagogy for translating our reality. There are only 10 numbers but 26 letters and we usually learn to count before writing. In French, which as you know, has a gender for everything, the numbers are masculine and the letters are feminine for very obvious reasons.

As president of the AAAPNB, I remember going to Fredericton to meet with the minister of the then Department pertaining to culture. We had put together a report in which we were quoting various stats on the importance of the arts in the economy of the province. The minister asked us where we had gotten these numbers. We said from

Statistics Canada. He said «It can' be. This must be wrong». And that was it. We got in the car and went back home.

From that encounter I have come to the conclusion that stats related to the arts are always subject to a form of discrimination for we do not seem to fit in the world of numbers. The result is that the arts are still not seen as an industry that contribute to the growth of the economy and the promotion of an image worth millions in side benefits.

From that encounter I also came to the bitter conclusion that since we are not credible as entrepreneurs, we might be better effective to use our ability with language, in campaigning and making ourselves more present in the political arena but on our terms, using other resources than these more subdued and discredited numbers.

O as in Organization

An organization such as Artslink requires a great deal of diplomacy and some sectors might feel neglected in favor of others who might seem to be more prone to promote themselves on their own. Needless to say, it has always been by offering a united front that arts organization have been able to advance their cause.

To lure people to join and remain in the AAAPNB, in my role as president, I thought it might be a good idea to promote different projects that would involve different sectors, would be useful for promotion and would also be a way to fundraise. For instance I noticed that visual arts formed a large segment of our membership and I thought it would be interesting to create a project that would involve them on a more specific basis. We decided to create an art calendar with works chosen by an independent jury, a calendar produced and distributed by the Association. The project folded after two years but I am sure that it would have been a great tool if it had been pursued over a longer period of time. We also decided to produce a gala for the recognition of the francophone arts in the province. This finally materialized after my departure from the Association but it is still going strong and with time it has gained momentum and profile and both the artists and the public are waiting for the event with high expectations and curiosity.

Some sectors might have a punctual interest. I remember the increase in membership from the music sector when we had worked an agreement with MusicAction, an organism that helps in the funding of the recording industry. The same

occurred when the media sector used the Association to manage funds later devoted to the founding of their own organization.

P as in Promotion

We all agree that we need more art galleries, theaters, musical venues, publishing houses and media productions. The problem is always the promotion of these products. Some years ago, the ACOA (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) put together a package of 5 million dollars on a period of five years for the promotion of the arts that it finally had come to consider as a marketable product.

Most of that money went in consultant fees to figure out what should be done and in the production of lavishly illustrated brochures about the artists work. Most of that money went to consultants who were paid 75 dollars an hour from the moment they left their home while the artists who had all the answers watched the train go by.

More people attend cultural than sports events and yet if you look at the media, sports news and program are part of their everyday texture while the the arts pays for its advertisements. Sometimes, as a return on investment, these ads will generate an article or a report but most of the cultural activities escape the quantity of promotion that sports enjoy. This is why a venture such as the Salon section of the Telegraph Journal, is a true breath of fresh air in its will to highlight in a most generous way, the contribution of this province's art scene.

Q as in Question

The arts are not about answers but about questions. If you ask the right questions you will get the right answers. Questions are always collective but answers are individual. It is very arrogant for an artist to have all the answers and the public will eventually get annoyed by this attitude. That is why the arts have the social mission to articulate the best possible questions but to leave the answers to the audience.

You probably have noticed that the word articulate starts with the word art. To be articulate is to move away from confusion and self-indulgence in order to reach a higher form of communication.

What kind of questions should we asked ourselves? Being overwhelmed with modesty we know that ego and arrogance will never be our downfall but we also tend to shy away from issues pertaining to a more concrete and at times disturbing view of ourselves. Issues that art can question in its own compassionate way and in which the public would recognize the need for an answer.

R as in Romantic

I had also thought of R as in Revenue which is quite an opposition to the myth of the artist as outcast and martyr which is usually the vision that the modern world has been promoting in the general public. If you look at the lives of the great artists who have been made into films you will notice that they are usually self-destructive or neurotic. Basquiat, Pollock, Surviving Picasso or Frida to name a few. The fact is that being an artist is a very dangerous work that carries high responsibility. Dangerous because you deal with emotions and responsible because you keep the only true record of what will stay of us for future generations to build on. Society at large usually wants something else, something lighter, more atune to the comic relief than to the serious wake-up call that great art usually carries.

In view of that mission the concept of revenue seems to be detrimental for making art seems to be such fun that you wonder why artists would expect to be paid in return and besides its hard to conceive that you would do that for a living. Hence the question, «yes but what is your real job?». The other vision is that art is a form of priesthood and that if you join those ranks you should expect to suffer, and besides suffering has always been a stimulus for great art.

We have yet to find a way to make sure that artists are considered as an essential part of society and for that reason expect and deserve the benefits that other functions enjoy for their contribution. This might mean to add an amendment to our social contract but I have no doubt that it will for it has to come.

S as in Scene

New Brunswick, unlike all the other provinces in the country, doesn't have a focussed art scene and I have often wondered whether this might be a problem or an advantage. The institutions are scattered in a way that it has become harder and harder to think about them as provincial instead of municipal. The Symphony is in St. John, the Ballet in Moncton and the TNB in Fredericton. The Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton, the Museum in St-John, the Galerie d'art Louise et Reuben Cohen in Moncton and the Owen's Art Gallery in Sackville. And so on... And I am not mentioning the situation taking place on the francophone side which could easily be compared between Edmundston, Caraquet and Moncton.

What are the drawbacks and what are the advantages of such a situation. In terms of drawbacks, it is quite obvious that we could all benefit from a more concentrated and focussed art scene but in terms of advantages, I wonder if this has not created a sense of sane competition among the various cultural institutions, having an impact on the style of the artists operating in these cities.

This is why, due to the configuration of that art scene, I have always thought that it would be important to design some form of communication, a web site comes to mind, to learn from and about each other throughout the province, to keep in touch but also to inform the public about the various events taking place in different cities.

A work of art is always a small signal which - if it is not amplified, by the media or word of mouth - will remain exactly that, a small signal.

T as in Tourism

There are many visions of what the art should be use for if art is to be useful in a more accountable way. One of these is the touristic vision of art. In that vision the arts contribute to other events, places or celebrations. The arts becomes an accompaniment and there is always funding, mainly governmental money, for that kind of thing. The reason is that for once the stats are working. You create a moment for which many people will come and therefore you need to be entertained and stay as long as you can and spend as much as you can afford. We, as artists have become experts at producing these events, taking part in these trips overseas or creating works that will enhance this touristic vision. A vision usually drawn to the production of works who fall in the realm of the picturesque, the typical, the famous «joie de vivre» and above all the entertaining aspect.

There is nothing wrong with contributing to these events but we all know that they are ephemeral and that they will not repeat themselves. I believe that we should invest in the creation of strong infrastructures that could represent us on a far and wide view instead of these organizations that are put together for a moment and then taken apart like a circus leaving town. Leaving us with our day to day struggle.

U as in University

We live in a place where culture is something that you have to reach. Not like in Europe where culture is everywhere. We are really surrounded by much more nature than culture. Museums are scarce, concert hall almost inexistent, theaters an exception and most of our architectural accomplishments are less than 50 years old.

So our idea of culture is mostly virtual. That does not mean that we do not have an idea of what an esthetic experience might be. But those moments of intense beauty might be something very simple that would get discarded when confronted with the idea of beauty encountered in universities or art schools.

So when a student arrives from one of these remote places that are part of the texture of this province, we have a tendency to be very skeptical of an esthetic experience that might involve say a beautiful sunset (the idea of nature) and that would be soon replace for a Malher symphony, a painting by Matisse or a Pablo Neruda poem (the idea of culture).

Great artists are made by confidence in their inner vision, using outside vision as a mere reference. Along that train of thought, I had a teacher at Mount Allison who once told me : «Culture is what they do to us, art is what we do to them».

V as in Vision

Thomas Hobb, a St-John native now teaching at the Université de Moncton, in his article «Let's Get Creative: The Forgotten Role of Culture in New Brunswick's Quest for

Self-Sufficiency», speaks of the importance of culture in the promotion of a change of attitude and the creation of a new vision for our province.

He relates the importance of culture in the promotion of a new mentality, a mentality that would take in consideration our imagination and not only the touristic or economic vision of that sector, which, in his opinion is a commendable view but one that will not put the emphasis on creativity, on dynamism allowing the creation of new products and especially the creation of a new image, of a new identity.

On that matter Hodd quotes John Holden, former Head of Culture at the British think-tank Demos, who warns that "regional policy needs to lose its obsession with economic development and to encompass a much broader set of concerns, making culture both a primary building block and an expression of regional identity, prosperity and well-being."

W as in Work

Art is work. We have to believe and to abide by that statement. Art is work.

According to a Hill Strategies report on Canadian artists, our earnings in 2006 were averaging \$22,700, compared with \$36,300 for all Canadian workers. The gap between artists' average earnings and overall labour force earnings is 37%. New Brunswick is one of six provinces where earnings are less than 18,000\$. According to the Arts Council of Canada that number dropped to 12,900\$.

Between 1990 and 2005, the average earnings of artists decreased by 11% (after adjusting for inflation). In the overall labour force, average earnings grew by 9% during the same timeframe (after adjusting for inflation).

According to that survey our province has 1,900 of the 146,000 artists that claimed that status in Canada. The majority being concentrated in Ontario where you have 57,000 artists.

Considering that artists are an above average educated work sector this is truly indicative to what extend they are willing to go in order to accomplish what I would call our mission for this is a true calling and a responsibility that escapes most people.

X as in Xylography

Xylography is the oldest technique of reproducing images commonly known as woodcut. It has that rough, edgy quality of craftsmanship and this moving presence that comes with the distance of those who were reduced to this kind of reproductions for understanding the world around them. The same will be said of us when in two hundred years from now, people will look at our blurry iphone videos.

We now have an almost absolute confidence in technology to bridge the distance that separates us from major art centers. The body can stay behind, the spirit will move on. But somehow we still need that physical presence to feel alive. We still need to hold in our hands something as primitive as woodcut engravings. This is why this faith in technology has its limits for we are still beings of flesh and blood.

Technology is a divisive tool that isolates us in front of our shrinking screen. Art is a gathering force, a force that we are losing and that we need, to give a consistency to our common faith. When, in this province, do we get together, anglophones, francophones, first nations and newcomers? What cultural event could bring us together on a scale of let's say The Rolling Stones concert in Moncton.

Y as in Youth

Youth is the ultimate force of renewal in a society. It is both true and false. It is true if youth is seen as force of innovation which we all have in us and it is false if we consider that being young is a fashionable statement whose claim to fame is that it is new and obliterates everything that came before. This will only lead to recreating the same pattern of arrogance and bitterness that all generations have experienced. Beauty turns to magic when young and youth come together in a quest for knowledge and the energy to foster innovation that we are now, in this province, experiencing as a loss.

Youth proves itself by answering to challenges. It seems that we have not been able in this province to craft a challenge to the height of our young people expectations. We have not been able to connect young and youth. Young with energy and youth with expectations. What has this to do with art and culture?

A lot, because art and culture are exactly about this. About changing mentality, about valuing innovation, crafting challenges, creating new ways to face them, fostering a new class of citizens conscious and responsible, aware of their position and functioning at the top of their capacities and their involvement in government. I understand that this wishful list functions better in the «what» perspective but is much more difficult to move on to the «how» zone of possibilities. As usual the answer is always collective.

Z as in Zen

The zen says that all life is suffering and that suffering is caused by desire. The way to reach nirvana is to eliminate desire and to do everything in the current. If that is so we must be in nirvana for we, as artists, have learned to lower our expectations.

This brings to mind a question with which I have been confronted many times, this little voice inside that says : Why are you doing this? Because it's the only thing I can do? Not really. Because it's the only thing you can stand doing? Could be. Because it's a question of sanity, keeping your head together? Most likely. But whatever it is, we all agree that if our social role might be problematic, our motivations are always clear. As artists we provide a collective voice for the true reasons of living, the main being beauty and by beauty I mean truth.

We live our lives for beauty. We work to buy subsistence but once this primary need is satisfied, we want to surround ourselves with beauty. From housing to clothing, from commodities to personal care, from our ways of expression to our ways of living we are collaborating and we long for the creation of an orderly, harmonious and peaceful world. We are against whatever could destroy this fragile equilibrium. We understand that art is a field of research, of comfort and of communication. It's a wonderful way of being alive and giving that life the beauty that we deserve as individual and as a society. Living here, in this province, in this day and age, is no different than in the rest of the world. We should never settle for less. Go with the flow but the flow is going somewhere, to that somewhere where we should be.