

APPROPRIATION ART: A Coalition of Art Professionals

Interview with Gordon Duggan by Cornelia Sollfrank

Canada's artists and arts professionals are lobbying for influence on a copyright legislation that impacts the creation and dissemination of contemporary art. They express frustration with the restrictions on creativity that the current laws impose.

14 September 2006, Berlin

Appropriation Art Coalition: "Change Canadian Copyright Law, or Bring the Government down. Make Art!"

In June 2006 the Canadian Appropriation Art Coalition went public with an open letter, addressed to the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Canadian Heritage. At the same time, the coalition started their web-log . More than 600 Art Professionals had joined the coalition in the few weeks of its existence. In their letter with the subject "Canadian Copyright and Cultural Reform" the art professionals – amongst them individual artists, curators, as well as arts organizations and institutions – expressed their concern over Canada's copyright policies and the impact these policies had on the creation and dissemination of Contemporary Art. The Coalition argued that "Canada's current copyright laws put at particular risk those artworks using appropriation, such as conceptual art, art video & film, sound art and collage". According to their understanding of contemporary cultural practice, the practice of appropriation was not an exception, but "has become a fundamental part of many creative cultural activities". In their argument they claimed the legitimacy of appropriative practices by pointing to the history of art in which a long tradition of such practices has been inscribed. The three main demands of the coalition are 'fair access', 'certainty of access' and 'creative access'. For the first time, artists demanded publicly that law should not merely protect their work, but also grant freedom for artistic production. The coalition claims to represent artists' interests who would need the exceptional right to access the work of others for their own creative production. Unlike other initiatives and groups who have raised their voice in this field in the last years, a special characteristic of the Appropriation Art Coalition is that they support copyright. Instead of criticizing the existence of copyright law in general, they call for "Balanced Copyright Laws". As Gordon Duggan, one of the representatives of the initiative put it: "We are creators, and we rely on copyright laws for our livelihood." Thus, what the coalition is fighting for, is to treat the artist, the creative producer as an exception. He/she should be granted access to the work of others without limitations, because he/she creates new work by building on the work of their predecessors. And to make sure that this will be the case, the needs of Canadian artists shall be heard and considered in copyright policy debates.

Full audio version: <http://artwarez.org/static/audio/gordon-interview.mp3>