



19 March 2013

Marc Mayer
National Gallery of Canada
380 Sussex Drive
P.O. Box 427, Station A
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 9N4

Dear Mr. Mayer,

As Canadian representatives of the Art Libraries Association of North America (ARLIS/NA), we are compelled to comment on the latest announcement of staff reductions at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC). According to your interview with the Ottawa Citizen published February 28th, the staff of the NGC Library & Archives "is being reduced by about one-third."¹ The contention that this latest round of cuts "will result in no diminishment in the services delivered by the Gallery"² and that the NGC Library and Archives will still be the "largest art library in Canada"³ suggests a troubling and fundamental misunderstanding of what constitutes a library.

Art and design librarians throughout the country look to the NGC Library & Archives as the intellectual foundation of Canadian library services, and regard this announcement as tantamount to the destabilization of access to the rich resources contained in this collection. Such a course of action will seriously compromise excellence in art librarianship in Canada and, by inevitable extension, imperil excellence in research and scholarship in Canadian art. Skilled library workers build collections that are acquired and organized according to intimate knowledge of the needs of one's library community; they provide the human interface to these collections through reference and instruction services; and are—through their participation in professional organizations—conduits for integrating local collections with other national and international library networks. Thus, this destruction of the workforce nurturing the NGC collection will inhibit the ability of the remaining employees to provide the intellectual, creative and professional knowledge-based access that transforms a repository of books, images, or databases into a library.

The foundational tenet of librarianship is not the act of building collections, but the action of facilitating access to information. Culture, too, it must be stressed, is not a by-product of the accumulation and consumption of information but a dynamic, ongoing dialogue between creative acts and their reception, and it is this dialogue which is in jeopardy through the continued evisceration of the information infrastructure which supports it. The NGC may remain the largest *assemblage* of art books in Canada; however, we fear that this iconic source of Canadian art scholarship will lose its ability to function as our national library, and thereby cease to participate in the development of Canadian culture.

We have grave concerns about the continued ability of the National Gallery of Canada to fulfill its mandate, that is, "to develop, maintain, and make known, throughout Canada and internationally, a collection of works of art, both historic and contemporary, with special, but not exclusive, reference to Canada, and to further knowledge, understanding, and enjoyment of art in general among all Canadians."⁴ We look forward to hearing what steps will be taken to monitor the effects of the announced organizational changes and to ensure these cuts do not result in a deterioration of service to the international art community of curators, artists, researchers, libraries, and the Canadian public, so that we may report back to our membership.

¹ Don Butler. "National Gallery of Canada cuts 29 positions to balance budget." *The Ottawa Citizen*. 28 February 2013. Web. <http://www.ottawacitizen.com/travel/National+Gallery+Canada+eliminating+positions/8030492/story.html>

² National Gallery of Canada. "The National Gallery of Canada Announces changes to its Organization – Invests in revenue generation initiatives and enhancing the visitor experience." Press Release, Ottawa, February 28, 2013. Web. <http://www.gallery.ca/en/about/1424.php>

³ Don Butler. "National Gallery of Canada cuts 29 positions to balance budget."

⁴ National Gallery of Canada. "A Unique Mandate." Web. <http://www.gallery.ca/en/about/>



Sincerely,

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cc. Rt Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada
cc. Hon. James Moore, Minister of Canadian Heritage
cc. Moira McCaffrey, Executive Director Canadian Art Museum Directors' Organization