

The Artist and Public Art in Canada

Jack Wise worked as an artist in Canada, in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s. There is an interesting position for artists in our society. They are revered and admired, but often live in poverty, for unless people are willing to buy the type of work they create, they cannot make a living. Jack Wise at times found himself in such a situation. Jack Wise's friend and fellow artist Bill Porteuos asked "Do we want to have more Jack Wises and how can we have more people like Jack if we're making them grovel?" He had this to say

You can't look at an individual artist and say "They are worth supporting." I think you have to look and say "Art is worth supporting". This person is afflicted with this addiction to making objects and making miraculous objects that are extraordinary and are not common. I remember Jack discussing the idea that artists in our culture do work in spite of culture, in spite of their society, not because of it, and I don't know if that has changed. And Jack was a person who managed to get grants.

Jack Wise was able to sell many of his paintings. People who commission and purchase art works are called patrons. In many societies, during many periods of history, patrons have played a very important role in supporting the arts. A patron may be an individual interested in art or the artist, a collector, a family, a business, a religious institution such as a mosque, monastery, church, temple or synagogue, or even the government. A patron may commission a work, having something made specifically for their uses, or they may buy something that has already been created by the artist. When Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Italy, he was commissioned by the Pope, at the Vatican in Rome. When Emily Carr painted images of the West Coast, she worked without knowing who, if anyone, would come to own her work.

In Canada, the government is often looked to for support of the arts. Municipal governments set aside a percentage of the budget for certain buildings to include public art. Many art galleries receive government funding. Jack Wise applied for grants, money to be used for research, travel and projects, from the Canada Council for the Arts.

Arts Patronage Activity

Visit the Canada Council web site at www.canadacouncil.ca

How does Canada Council support artists?

How would you apply for a grant for your art project?

Do you think it is important that Canadian artists be supported by their Federal and local governments?

Find an example of public art in your community. This could be a sculpture, mural, wall hanging, garden landscape or many other things.

Who created this art?

Is it someone from your community?

Who is the patron?

Was the art a gift?

Part of a corporation's office building?

Part of a park or school?

How would your environment be different if there were more art objects around you? Less?

Does art have to be something like painting or sculpture? What about graffiti? Is that public art? Do people commission graffiti? Visit the web site of your municipality (try typing in the name of your City Hall or even your public library's web site).

Can you find out anything about art in your community?

Does your town, city or province have an "Arts Act" or "Culture Act" to support the arts?

Artists often worked for the courts, creating manuscripts, paintings, architecture and other works of art for kings and emperors. In the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance, the guild system grew in Europe. People would enter training as apprentices to masters in their fields, living in distinct quarters of their towns. Guilds were set up for sculptors, builders, painters, weavers, potters and others in the arts, in addition to the guilds for bakers, brewers, cobblers and all types of merchants. These sites explain the guild system.

Encyclopedia Britannica:

<http://www.britannica.com/bcom/eb/article/4/0,5716,39194+1+38409,00.html>

Guild Hall

<http://renaissance.district96.k12.il.us/guildhall/guilds/guilds.html>

Are there guilds today?

Would artists and patrons benefit from a guild system in Canada?

Read what Bill Porteous and Jack Wise had to say about artists working in our society.

Do you agree?

Do you disagree?

Were the arts produced by guild members inspired by their society?