

**Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, MAWA  
Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee  
Final Report 2005**

**Final report prepared by  
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## Preface

In 2003 Mentoring Artists for Women's Art (MAWA) undertook a comprehensive assessment of the organization's programs and resources. This process was timely given that 2004 would mark MAWA's 20<sup>th</sup> year in operation. During our history many changes have taken place, but the driving philosophy *to encourage and support the intellectual and creative development of women in the visual arts by providing an ongoing forum for education and critical dialogue* has remained stable. At the core of our programs are the mentorships for which MAWA is celebrated well beyond our borders. MAWA is the only organization in Canada to offer a range of mentorship programs to women in the visual arts. These programs range from weekend workshops to year-long mentorships, with much in-between.

The 2003 assessment determined that MAWA was doing many things right. The Foundation Mentorship Program, the year-long mentorships and the intensive six-week Mentor in Residence programs, involving an established Canadian artist as mentor, provide women with the skills, knowledge and confidence required to pursue professional practices. Last year we were honoured to have Rebecca Belmore as one of our Mentors in Residence. Belmore is this year's Canadian representative to the *Venice Biennale*, the foremost international exhibition of contemporary work.

We learned from the assessment that while MAWA has had many successes, it has not served Aboriginal women artists adequately. The strategic plan resulting from the assessment included the establishment of an Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee to determine how we might work more effectively with Aboriginal women artists. Our objective was to diversify and broaden our contact with the urban Aboriginal community. The role of this Committee was to develop strategies to enable the full participation of the urban Aboriginal community in MAWA's programs.

Winnipeg has a large Aboriginal population that is predicted to reach 15.3% of the city's total by the year 2016. At MAWA, we recognize that it is

incumbent upon us, as a cultural organization, to recognize this important segment of our community. As an organization that serves the needs of women artists, it is critical that MAWA determine how we might work with Aboriginal women artists to the benefit of all women and the community in general.

It's been a pleasure to work with the members of the Committee: Cheyenne Henry, Steven Loft, Catherine Mattes, Melissa Wastasecoot and Jacqueline Weenusk who offered thoughtful and insightful information, advice and recommendations. Thank you also to Julie Nagam, who participated in the Committee when her travels as a consultant to produce an assessment of rural and remote Manitoba visual artists for MAWA brought her to Winnipeg.

I am most grateful to Cheyenne Henry who has prepared this report. Her enthusiasm for this project and her skillful elucidation of the Committee's recommendations make it a comprehensive and most useful document.

Thanks are also due to Roewan Crowe, Chair of MAWA's Board of Directors for taking part in Committee meetings and for so ably editing the report and to Meera Singh, Sarah Crawley and Sharon Hanson for transcribing the proceedings of the meetings.

MAWA is grateful to the Capacity Building Program of Canadian Heritage, the WH and SE Loewen Foundation, the Thomas Sill Foundation, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Manitoba Arts Council, the Winnipeg Arts Council and our private donors and members for so generously supporting this project.

Vera Lemecha  
Executive Director

# **Mentoring Artists for Women's Art, MAWA**

## **Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee**

### **Final Report - 2005**

#### **Introduction**

Winnipeg is a unique urban centre in that it has the highest urban Aboriginal population per capita in Canada. Winnipeg also has an impressive and growing Aboriginal artistic community. More and more Aboriginal people are flocking to the arts from both traditional and contemporary backgrounds. Despite this, there is a lack of participation by Aboriginal artists in many current art programs that offer opportunities to artists. There are many reasons behind this and in order to tackle this issue there needs to be continuous dialogue and recommendations coming directly from the Aboriginal community. Often the challenges Aboriginal communities face, are complex and overlapping. Many of the concerns are deeply embedded in social, political and economic issues and cannot be adequately addressed without consideration of these aspects.

For over four decades Aboriginal visual artists have been contributing in vital ways to the larger process of empowerment. As Aboriginal

people repeatedly assert, their art cannot be separated from politics, for self-representation - and the re-presentation of history that is a part of the process - is profoundly empowering. Art has been at the heart of politics just as politics have been, and remain, at the heart of Aboriginal art, whether the specific subject is historical or contemporary, ironic or lyrical, sacred or mundane. (*On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, Lynda Jessup and Shannon Bagg, p.119)

According to statistics, Canadian artists in general, are the lowest paid of the labor force in Canada. Within the prairie provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Aboriginal artists, on average make an annual income of approximately \$15,600. The overall average earnings for other non-Aboriginal artists is \$23,500. This reveals a 28% earnings gap between Aboriginal artists and non-Aboriginal artists ("Aboriginal Artists," *Diversity in Canada's Arts Labor Force*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Hill Strategies Research Inc., February 2005, p. 14). These staggering statistics show how poorly artists are paid for their cultural labour. They also show that although there are more Aboriginal focused programs and opportunities available for Aboriginal artists, there is still a great need for outreach into Aboriginal communities in order to make these opportunities accessible, and to redress the earnings gap.

Additionally, within the mainstream arts community there is great need for



more cultural and artistic dialogue and discourse concerning the critical aspects of Aboriginal art. Aboriginal artists and cultural workers must lead these discussions in order to uncover and take apart underlying Eurocentric ideas and stereotypes used to discuss Aboriginal art and culture.

Establishing partnerships with Aboriginal arts and cultural organizations will increase the presence of Aboriginal voices, and will help to solve these problems. Developing initiatives for Aboriginal focused cultural activities, as well as offering engaging opportunities for Aboriginal youth are two direct routes that can be taken to increase Aboriginal participation. The arts sector is one of the few areas that can adapt easily into other sectors and through this can aid in bridging cultural and societal gaps. It is vital for Aboriginal arts and cultural workers to be leaders in this process.

## **Report Objectives**

Many of the fundamental problems and obstacles faced by Aboriginal artists are interlocking, and reveal the history of colonization and its harmful impacts. These problems also show that there is a lack of Aboriginal voices in issues of representation and policy development. This report is intended to give a broader view of the obstacles that Aboriginal women face in pursuing an artistic practice in the mainstream sector, and to make recommendations to support these women artists to establish an identity as practicing Aboriginal artists in North America. The recommendations given are intended as a resource for MAWA to use in future initiatives. As well, these recommendations are intended for other arts and non-arts organizations. The process of establishing a majority of the recommendations made in this report will have to be implemented and pursued with diligence, consistency and an openness to a process of development over time. It is suggested that pursuit of the recommendations by MAWA should be made in a relationship of dialogue that is always inclusive to the Aboriginal arts community. This is especially required since many of the recommendations are somewhat new and will need a demonstrated flexibility that will allow for change and development over time.

## **Report Summary**

### **Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee Members:**

Cheyenne Henry - Researcher/workshop facilitator, Art City

Steve Loft - Executive Director, Urban Shaman Inc.

Catherine Mattes - Curator, Art Gallery of Southwestern  
Manitoba

Julie Nagam - Rural and Remote Program Consultant, MAWA

Melissa Watasecoot - Web Designer, Urban Shaman Inc.

Jackie Weenusk - Aboriginal Arts Secretariat, Manitoba Arts  
Branch

### **Background**

The Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee (UAAC) was organized by Mentoring Artists for Women's Art through a recognized lack of Aboriginal women artists and their participation in MAWA's programming. This lack of participation by Aboriginal women artists is also seen more generally, within the mainstream arts community. MAWA is devoted to developing opportunities for Manitoba's women artists in their creative and professional development. Through programs such as the Foundation Mentoring Program, artists are mentored over a period of a year. Aboriginal participation in MAWA's programs is seen as vital and important, especially considering the Aboriginal demographics of Winnipeg. MAWA took the

important step of inviting those who are recognized by their peers in the Aboriginal arts community, to establish the UAAC for the purposes of seeking recommendations for change within MAWA's mandate.

UAAC was made up of a variety of Aboriginal arts and cultural workers. The committee attended four meetings over a period of four months. Each meeting lasted half a day. In the first meeting, general obstacles that Aboriginal women face in pursuing artistic practices were identified. Also identified were the obstacles that they face when accessing or participating in MAWA's programs. In the next two meetings these obstacles were discussed and recommendations on how these obstacles could be dealt with were made. The final meeting served as a brainstorming action plan session.

The committee members were able to reflect on and balance out a diversity of issues. Each member offered a unique and differing perspective of the Aboriginal arts sector. This proved to be extremely important, as there are many vital areas to focus on when dealing with such a diverse group. Within the many concerns that were voiced in the meetings, there were some common themes. These issues included: educational opportunities, advocacy in rural and urban Aboriginal communities, family and social issues, as well as the lack of critical dialogue and writing from Aboriginal perspectives. Outreach served as an important topic since many Aboriginal

communities are still left in the cold in terms of accessing certain opportunities. A disconnect still exists between mainstream arts and Aboriginal arts communities. An advisory committee made up of Aboriginal people working in these areas is vital in creating partnerships that will benefit both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations.

Many of the issues raised in the meetings were given from personal perspectives and professional experiences of each committee member. All of the committee members have worked within both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal arts sector. Also, many have experience working in community-based organizations. There is a lack of support to implement arts initiatives in urban and rural Aboriginal communities. There are not enough resources made available to support a strong Aboriginal arts community. Like many other Aboriginal initiatives, there needs to be partnerships developed within many sectors and communities. These are just a few of the concerns that came up in the committee meetings.

Many of the questions that MAWA had, in regards to increasing participation, helped direct and focus the advisory committee discussions. The advisory committee had the difficult yet productive task of pinpointing obstacles and formulating an action plan. In the end, a priority was placed on the recommendation that MAWA hire an Aboriginal person to act as a liaison with the Aboriginal community, and to also aid in creating an inclusive presence for other Aboriginal people within MAWA. This will directly benefit

Aboriginal women artists as well as MAWA. This will help MAWA in educating and working alongside Aboriginal women to create much needed support and opportunities for professional development. It was concluded that in order for MAWA to reach out into Aboriginal communities, an outreach component is necessary. This will facilitate outreach into various sectors and organizations. This decision proved to be unanimous amongst the committee.

## **OBSTACLES FACED BY ABORIGINAL WOMEN ARTISTS IN THE PURSUIT OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES**

The many obstacles that Aboriginal women artists face, in their pursuit of professional art practices, were named by the Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee. The barriers ranged from socioeconomic issues and the lack of educational and artistic training to the general lack of information and promotion of opportunities for Aboriginal women artists. These issues are over-lapping and intertwined with a variety of other issues. Often the greatest challenge is confronting issues that stem from economic constraints. Aboriginal people face the great challenge of overcoming poverty, which affects all aspects of their lives. As stated in a recent report from Winnipeg Regional Health, "People living in poverty face difficult challenges that may ultimately have an effect on their health and well-being" (*Population Health Profiles, Aboriginal People, CHA Report, 2004*). This is a huge barrier that many Aboriginal people struggle against. The context of systematic poverty must be taken into account when considering the other obstacles Aboriginal women artists face.

- 1. Lack of access to arts education and continuous educational programming, in and outside of Winnipeg.**

## **Background**

Lack of access to arts education and continuous educational programming, in and outside of Winnipeg are crucial obstacles that many Aboriginals face when pursuing education in the arts. Accessibility, as well as funding issues, create a complex and intertwined process that involves educators, band councils, federal funding supports and post-secondary institutions. Navigating through these different layers of educational funding can often be overwhelming, especially for those women who are also raising families or who have relocated from remote rural communities into an urban setting. Although the number of Aboriginal students entering arts programs is growing, it still represents a small number in comparison to other areas of study. Advocacy by pre-post secondary and training institutes would create more awareness of the opportunities available for arts training. Advocacy and education about opportunities in the arts and cultural field is also required in high schools. Studying art is still viewed as “not practical.” There is a lack of information regarding future employment in the arts and cultural field. There is a need for more advocacy by arts organizations to address these issues. Consistency in outreach efforts is key to developing these initiatives.

- 2. There is no art curriculum in schools in rural areas. This affects how we perceive the value of art in our community.**



The importance of engaging young people in artistic activity is critical to their evolution as creative thinkers. It is they who will soon be leading Canada's growth in terms of cultural, social and economic development....A curriculum that integrates artistic expression promotes successful learning outcomes that benefit young people, educators, the artistic community and Canada's overall development. (*ARTSSMARTS, Using the Power of Arts to release the creative potential of young people-A handbook for artists and educators*, Canadian Conference of the Arts, 2003.)

### **Background**

The lack of art curriculum in schools in rural areas is turning into a universal problem in education curriculums across the country. This poses an even greater risk for reserve schools, since curriculum development is often negatively impacted due to the lack of resources and funds. Given the challenges of isolation and poverty that most reserves in Manitoba face, there is a great need for activities that are engaging, and that offer opportunities for expression to children and youth. Direct links are made between the value of engaging activities, such as art, and the benefits this has on child development. Also art can be a vital tool in the continuation of cultural awareness for future generations.

**3. Minimal access to other contemporary female Aboriginal visual artists.**

**Background**

In Manitoba there is minimal access to other contemporary female Aboriginal visual artists. It was brought forth by the committee that there is an overall lack of Aboriginal contemporary artists practicing in Manitoba. In order to offer a variety of artistic practices in visual arts programming, there needs to be more research on a national level, to find practicing, prominent and emerging Aboriginal women artists. In general, there is a lack of Aboriginal artists exhibiting their work. Often the focus is on group shows, which does not support the development of a sense of individuality within Aboriginal arts. There should be a focus on supporting more solo exhibitions. With this opportunity there will be a rise in professionalism among Aboriginal women artists.

**4. Language, social and economic conditions.**

**Background**

Language, social and economic obstacles are difficult to describe due to the understanding that is needed about the generational effects of colonialism.

These obstacles affect many different areas such as: raising families (both as a single parent or with a partner), transportation, poverty, stereotypes (in both ethnicity and art practice), housing issues, location (urban and rural), access to technological resources (for example, computers and internet), art supplies and a general lack of knowledge about opportunities in the arts.

There are different issues facing urban and rural Aboriginal artists. Rural Aboriginal artists face the obstacle of having to move into more urbanized areas in order to access opportunities. This experience is often a difficult transition for many reasons such as: leaving their communities and family, language barriers, the overwhelming experience of city life and lack of knowledge about available resources. Artists in the urban setting, often face issues of poverty, poor housing conditions, location (inner-city) and transportation. Each is an obstacle in and of itself, yet education about these issues would create a better understanding about the barriers faced by Aboriginal artists.

## **5. Limited funds, lack of supplies and studio access for artists.**

### **Background**

Aboriginal artists experience limited funds, a lack of supplies and less access to studio space. These conditions exist in both urban and rural settings. Often, for the individual, a lack of education and opportunity has

increased the risk of poverty. The reality of living with poverty is even more dramatic when one considers the experiences of Aboriginal women who are raising families, whether as a single parent or with a partner. These artists cannot even consider purchasing supplies or renting a studio space when basic survival necessities are the focus of all resources. Also, for those living in rural areas, art suppliers are virtually unheard of. This is why there is a need for advocacy and awareness of those opportunities in the arts that do exist. These opportunities must be made more accessible, and must take into account the difficult conditions that many Aboriginal women face.

## **6. Lack of formal education for artists.**

### **Background**

A lack of formal arts education exists for Aboriginal artists. Although increasing numbers of Aboriginal people are attending post-secondary institutions, many of the programs of choice are based on work prospects after graduation. Pursuing studies in the arts is not fully advocated in Aboriginal communities since arts education is not considered a practical area of study. Also, since contemporary art practices are not advocated as often as traditional arts forms are, there is a tendency to focus on traditional practices. These traditional practices do not involve formal education, and are not fully validated in the mainstream. Programs offered by institutions

and organizations to expand an artist's professionalism are often geared towards artists that already have some knowledge of how the arts sector works. This leaves out a significant portion of Aboriginal artists.

## **7. Lack of information for Aboriginal artists**

### Background

Until recently, there has not been Aboriginal focused arts groups, galleries or opportunities for advancing and promoting Aboriginal art. This has had much to do with what was seen as constituting Aboriginal arts. Promotion of Aboriginal contemporary art in Winnipeg has been fairly recent. Urban Shaman Gallery is one out of only three national galleries, which focuses and promotes Aboriginal contemporary art. It has been in operation since 1997, and in the past few years has gained much attention and earned a reputation for innovation. It has only been recently that programming and operations of the gallery have been established, so that outreach can be focused on as a priority. Additionally, as full-time staff capacity grows, they will be more able to take on the role of outreach.

## **8. Few Aboriginal representatives and voices in the arts.**

## **Background**

There needs to be more Aboriginal representatives and voices in the arts. In regards to Aboriginal representation in galleries and museums, there are only a small number of Aboriginal artists who have received opportunities to represent Aboriginal art. This is problematic and has been expressed in the ways in which Aboriginal art is interpreted by non-Aboriginals. Due to the lack of inclusion of the Aboriginal community in critical discussions about contemporary Aboriginal art, Eurocentric notions of what Aboriginal art is has been established and needs to be challenged.

Additionally, for those Aboriginal women who are active in the community, their workload is heavy, especially in the non-profit sector. Because of the demands, duties and responsibilities Aboriginal women carry, it is often difficult to find the energy to continue with a consistent promotion of the arts. There needs to be more efforts and participation by other individuals and organizations, both within the arts community and outside, to increase the numbers of those who are participating in organizing and cultural efforts.

## **9. Few young representatives speaking to youth in the community**

### **Background**

In Aboriginal communities there is an acknowledged need for youth to be

validated and recognized as prominent members of community. The future of Aboriginal communities is represented by youth and children. In order for youth to become more active and involved, their ideas must be solicited and welcomed. As well, they must be involved in the process of decision-making. This increases an awareness of what is going on in community and increases the ability and confidence of youth to take on leadership roles in the arts. Statistics show that a majority of Aboriginal children and youth in Canada, approximately 59%, live in poverty. Therefore, it is essential that they are given as many opportunities as possible, in order to build confidence and to develop abilities that can help them to further their futures.

- 10. Lack of promotion. Dynamic Aboriginal women artists are needed to inspire other women.**

### **Background**

The promotion of Aboriginal women artists is rare. Within the Aboriginal arts community there is still a higher ratio of men having exhibitions than women artists. Places like MAWA and other women's organizations are important resources to advocate and promote on the behalf of women artists. There is a need for a link between those organizations that are not based in the arts with those that are arts related. This would serve to

create a larger support system from which to provide the much needed advocacy of Aboriginal women artists.

**11. No context at leadership levels to promote art and culture.**

**Background**

Surprisingly, there is not enough dialogue between Aboriginal artists and Aboriginal leaders. At best, traditional practicing artists have managed to receive some recognition through selling works to Aboriginal organizations. Although purchasing this art is supportive to the artists, there needs to be more substantive measures taken. Aboriginal people in leadership roles need to be educated about contemporary art practices and about the unpaid and underpaid work of many Aboriginal artists. As stated previously, there is a need to educate others about the Aboriginal arts labour force as a growing yet underpaid and under-valued sector.

**12. Lack of business experience**

**Background**

Aboriginal business is rapidly growing and entrepreneurship is considered an important strategic area for Aboriginal economic development. Despite this,



there is a lack of business experience within the Aboriginal arts sector. Due to the fact that there is disconnection between the arts sector and other Aboriginal sectors, such as business, the arts do not benefit from the growth of Aboriginal business. Links with Aboriginal business planning and arts initiatives could greatly benefit both areas.

**13. Lack of promotion concerning the links between history and art as narrative to see how art is a way to help communities.**

Indigenous artists in all fields across the Americas are seizing this opportunity to reflect upon the past, depict contemporary realities and present a vision for the future. Many of their works will be overtly militant and accusating; others will try to unravel complex histories and redefine relationships of Aboriginal peoples within a constantly changing environment.

**Background**

The arts sector is one of the few areas that can easily maneuver from sector to sector, and from issue to issue. Art has always been a tool to represent history, experience, identity and society. Engagement in art can be a strong tool in communities to aid in sustaining culture.

**14. The concept of 'art' has become limited.**

**Background**

There are many different art styles and artistic practices that are acceptable within the mainstream arts community. Yet, when referring to Aboriginal art, there is a tendency to differentiate between “craftwork” and “art”. This argument could be more broadly taken as the arguments of traditional versus contemporary. This is problematic because both traditional and contemporary artists are affected by the various obstacles. In addition, this distinction further divides the Aboriginal community. It is important to recognize and validate both forms. An inclusion of both traditional and contemporary art forms helps to further educate and promote the rich diversity of Aboriginal art and art practices.

**15. Pressure to be 'traditional.' There should be opportunities for both contemporary and traditional artists.**

**Background**

There has been a general pull towards traditional art forms by Aboriginal people. Although these art forms are vital and important in sustaining Aboriginal culture, they have also made a dramatic impact in determining

what constitutes Aboriginal art. Just as with any other culture and group in society, Aboriginal people and cultures are not static. Sustaining traditional art forms plays an important role in culture and art, yet it is important to recognize that there is a growing number of Aboriginal artists that practice contemporary art as well. These artists often experience difficulties in dealing with the stereotypes that result from a major focus on traditional art forms by the mainstream.

## **OBSTACLES THAT MAKE PARTICIPATION IN MAWA PROGRAMS DIFFICULT FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN ARTISTS**

Currently, MAWA provides programming that is sensitive and inclusive to the many issues and challenges that women face in pursuit of their artistic practice. Yet there are issues and challenges specifically pertaining to Aboriginal women artists. Many of these were covered in the general obstacles section but we have outlined some of the obstacles that would affect Aboriginal women that are already practicing artists.

Observations by the committee:

1. There are very few mid-career artists in the Aboriginal community. Most remain emerging due to a lack of access into the arts community. MAWA's programming should be open to Aboriginal artists at early stages.
2. It would be beneficial to have a mentoring program for youth. This would assist youth before they entered art school.
3. It is important to get key people in Aboriginal communities to act as mentors. Currently, there are no Aboriginal mentors. This needs to change. The biggest impediment is that there are only a handful of

established Aboriginal artists living in the province.

4. Many Aboriginal women artists do not go through a standard arts education, this needs to be recognized.
5. Issue of using the phrase “professional artist” is problematic, as it excludes many artists. Could use the term “practicing artist” instead.
6. When publicizing who is eligible for programs it must be clear that programming is open to emerging and mid-career artists.
7. It needs to be acknowledged that the resources available to Aboriginal women artists are very limited.
8. There is a lack of visibility and advocacy of MAWA and its programming.
9. Programming that is child-friendly should be incorporated.
10. Art spaces must be made accessible to Aboriginal artists.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN ARTISTS IN MAWA PROGRAMS**

### **Recommendation 1:**

**It is necessary to have an Aboriginal person as a spokesperson to speak for MAWA.**

This is a vital step in creating awareness of MAWA and their programming in Aboriginal communities. This person would need to actively pursue many various organizations and institutions within the Aboriginal community as well as places with large Aboriginal populations.

### **Actions:**

1. Hire an Aboriginal woman to work with MAWA. Perhaps this position could be an internship for a recent graduate, who could then spread the word about MAWA and its mandate. This position would require a person with strong presentation skills, and knowledge of both the arts and non-arts Aboriginal community.

### **Projected Outcomes:**

This opportunity would be vital in creating a direct link into the Aboriginal community. This could create future partnerships and

collaborations with other Aboriginal artists, organizations, both non-profit and corporate. If this internship is pursued, this opportunity would also benefit the intern, as it would be a way to gain valuable work experience.

**Recommendation 2:**

**Create a list of established, female Aboriginal artists and provide them with information about MAWA and its programming.**

This would require some research and development of a database of Aboriginal artists, curators, organizations, publications, etc. By the creation of an Aboriginal database, future advocacy and promotion, would be easily facilitated into Aboriginal communities. This would create networks and contacts for future outreach.

**Actions:**

1. Create a database of Aboriginal artists, curators, organizations, publications, etc.
2. Contact organizations such as The Thunderbird House and the Aboriginal Centre of Winnipeg, both organizations have vital contacts in the Aboriginal community.

**Projected Outcomes:**

An increased awareness of MAWA and its programming within Aboriginal communities. Also the database will create a computerized network to send out general invites, calls for submissions, press releases and workshops that MAWA offers.

**Recommendation 3:**

**Increase visibility of MAWA in Aboriginal communities.**

If visibility of MAWA is increased, people will become educated about MAWA's mandate. We believe they will then feel welcome to learn more about MAWA's programs.



**Actions:**

1. In order to create a visibility within the Aboriginal community, MAWA needs to send out advertisements of MAWA's programming and other MAWA related information to various Aboriginal media outlets, schools, and post-secondary institutions. Some of these could include:
  - Native Communications Incorporated, NCI radio
  - Aboriginal People's Television Network - APTN
  - The Drum, Sweetgrass News
  - The University of Manitoba's Access Program - This program has a high level of Aboriginal students in their program and are active in promoting opportunities sent to them.
  - Redwire Magazine - A B.C. Aboriginal youth based magazine.
  - Aboriginal specific schools such as, Children of the Earth and RB Russell. High schools must be approached to stress the importance of art and culture, especially contemporary art to youth.
2. Educate other outreach organizations about Aboriginal arts and culture, perhaps through special workshops and info-sessions with the organizations suggested above.

**Projected outcome:**

Through actively pursuing potential future partnerships and

collaborations with Aboriginal groups and organizations, a more inclusive environment would be created, making potential participants feel welcome.

**Recommendation 4:**

**Exhibitions should take place after the Foundation Mentorship Program.**

If exhibitions were organized as part of the Foundation Mentorship program, an excitement and visibility of emerging artists would be generated in the community. If these were held at various venues, this could establish a working relationship with other non-arts related organizations.

**Actions:**

1. Exhibitions would need to be held in both the arts and non-arts community. Perhaps consideration could be given to exhibiting in community centres, schools (both high schools and post-secondary), as well as rural venues and locations.
2. Introduce interested individuals from rural and remote communities to MAWA and to the Winnipeg art scene. This would also help to bridge the perceived gaps between urban and rural art.

3. Contact an Aboriginal curator, present them with a broad idea and allow them to expand upon these ideas.

**Projected Outcomes:**

This would create more of an opportunity for Aboriginal people to exhibit their work, especially for emerging artists. Also this could generate visibility of Aboriginal contemporary artists in the Aboriginal non-arts community.

## **WAYS MAWA CAN FACILITATE PARTICIPATION BY ABORIGINAL ARTISTS IN EXISTING MAWA PROGRAMS**

### **Recommendation 1:**

**MAWA should have openings for participants who are in the early stages of their career such as fine arts students, artists that may not have exhibited yet and traditional artists.**

### **Actions:**

1. The category of “professional artist” is often problematic. It would be more helpful to use the phrase “practicing artist.” There needs to be new ways to publicize who is eligible so that it is clear that MAWA’s programs are open to artists in different stages of their careers.
2. Develop and initiate a youth focused “Pre-Mentorship Program” where the mentors are full-time fine arts students.
3. Redefine emerging artist status to include those who may have not been formally educated in post-secondary institutions or those who show a genuine interest of art. This could include those that have just begun their art practice and would benefit from being mentored.
4. Include and solicit the participation of both traditional and

contemporary artists.

**Projected Outcomes:**

More opportunities would be created for new artists to develop through the benefits of mentorship, ultimately creating more professionalism and experience within the arts.

**Recommendation 2:**

**Solicit key people in the Aboriginal community to act as mentors.**

Currently, there are no Aboriginal mentors. This needs to change. The biggest impediment with this is that there are only a handful of established Aboriginal artists living in the province.

**Actions:**

1. Approach Urban Shaman Gallery to aid in finding potential mentors.
2. Allow traditional artists to become mentors such as elders in the community.
3. MAWA would need to broaden the search for mentors to the national level, due to the lack of Aboriginal artists that are practicing at the

senior levels.

4. Invite a mid-career Aboriginal artist to mentor.

**Projected Outcomes:**

Opportunities would be created for professional development for those asked to be a MAWA mentor. This would especially be the case if the mentor were a traditional artist. This would also create a way of exposing traditional artists to the professionalism of contemporary art practices. As well, this would contribute to building an atmosphere in which both traditional and contemporary artists are welcome.

Considering that there is not a single program in Manitoba that offers mentorship programs for Aboriginal people in the arts, this would create a model for other organizations.

**Recommendation 3:**

**Risk-taking is key. The Foundation Mentorship Program needs to take risks on mentees. Selection should not be about quality of work but the potential of the work and the artist.**

**Actions:**

1. Allow Aboriginal artists that are studying fine arts to integrate

participation in a mentorship program along with the School of Art.

This would increase visibility of MAWA and expose students to MAWA before they have completed their studies.

2. Send calls for submissions to the Aboriginal non-arts communities.

Allow access and be open to those community members that can aid in finding people that they would define as artists and potential mentees.

#### **Projected Outcomes:**

By allowing for flexibility in the definition of an artist, opportunities will be created for those artists who have great talent and drive but who have not yet had the opportunities to develop their skills. This would offer them the support they need to expand their current art practice into a professional career in the arts. This would increase awareness of future opportunities and also provide incentives and support to continue their artistic practice.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

**A bursary program is necessary. The financial resources available to Aboriginal women artists are very limited.**

**Actions:**

1. Approach Urban Shaman Gallery since they are willing to support one bursary for an Aboriginal mentee.
2. Media Arts Project Grant, Canada Council for the Arts could fund a portion of the program.
3. Investigate other non-arts Aboriginal organizations and corporations to fund a bursary program. Suggested organizations include:
  - Manitoba Metis Federation
  - Southern Chiefs Organization
  - Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
  - Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

**Projected Outcomes:**

The creation of more accessibility and resources for Aboriginal artists who need financial aid.

**Recommendation 5:**

**Engage a larger community by having the workshops and First Friday talks at other venues. These venues do not have to be arts-related.**



**Actions:**

1. Look into hosting First Friday events at various Aboriginal political organizations such as Southern Chiefs organization and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.
2. Host the sessions at community centres and Aboriginal training centres, such as Urban Circle Training Centre, Thunderbird House and the Aboriginal Centre of Winnipeg, where there are high concentrations of Aboriginal people.
3. It is necessary to increase awareness and understanding of the culture of contemporary art in Aboriginal society. Including this as a topic would help to validate and educate about contemporary practices.

**Projected Outcomes:**

This would encourage advocacy and provide education about the various issues concerning Aboriginal artistic practices. This would also establish an inclusiveness and expansion of contemporary art into the broader Aboriginal community.

### **Recommendation 6:**

**Offer workshops directly related to Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal social issues in relation to the arts.**

### **Actions:**

1. Offer workshops on the following topics:
  - How racism informs our ideas about art
  - Does community art heal?
  - Benefits of art engagement for children and youth
  - Entrepreneurship and art
  - Community Art being quite distinct from Fine Art
  - Can Community Art serve as an instrument for healing, for visual communication, and to justify and define ideas of culture?
  - Contemporary versus Traditional art practices
  - Colonialism and Art
  - Intellectual and copyright issues
  - What is Aboriginal Art?
2. Invite Aboriginal elders to give talks on the importance of maintaining traditional art practices.

### **Projected Outcomes:**

Educating about a wide range of topics relevant to Aboriginal artists,

as well as educating about the impact and importance of art in Aboriginal communities.

**Recommendation 7:**

**Create more venues to encourage and promote critical dialogue about Aboriginal art.**

**Actions:**

1. Apply to the Artists and Community Collaboration Fund (ACCF) through the Canada Council for assistance with funding when bringing an artist/curator into the city. This program is designed to bring together professional artists and the broader community through creative collaborations, giving the arts a stronger presence in everyday life.
2. Look into the Aboriginal Curators Program through the Canada Council for the Arts to help assist with a Curator-in-Residence program. A curator could then be sponsored to work with MAWA in Winnipeg for one year. The focus on this residency would be mentorship with an emphasis on curatorial work.
3. Encourage and allow an Aboriginal curator to include both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists in their shows. This allows a greater arena

of artists and issues that Aboriginal curators are currently undertaking.

**Projected Outcomes:**

Create opportunities for critical dialogue on culture and art by  
Aboriginal art historians, curators and artists. This would also be  
beneficial for emerging, practicing and established Aboriginal curators.

## **NEW PROGRAMS OR PARTNERSHIPS THAT MAWA COULD DEVELOP TO SUPPORT ABORIGINAL WOMEN ARTISTS**

### **Recommendation 1:**

#### **Host an International Symposium on Aboriginal/Indigenous Women and Art**

It is recommended that MAWA host a symposium reflecting on the obstacles, issues and topics of relevance to Aboriginal/Indigenous women and artistic practices. This would greatly increase and educate on a broader scale of Aboriginal/Indigenous reflections about art today. This would also provide opportunities for raising concerns in relation to artistic practices, celebrating women worldwide and spreading the importance of creativity in its many forms. This could be an opportunity for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists to share knowledge.

### **Actions:**

1. Look at other symposiums as examples (MAWA's "Locating Feminism" symposium and "Performing 'Heritage': Contemporary Indigenous and Community-Based Practices" symposium in Brazil).
2. In terms of funding, The Aboriginal Arts Secretariat would be a great resource for such a project (contact Louise Profeit-LeBlanc, the Aboriginal Arts Coordinator of the Aboriginal Arts Secretariat in the Canada Council for The Arts).

3. Produce a publication coinciding with the symposium. This would be a great way to include critical writing and dialogue from the event.  
Alternatively, a supplement in the MAWA newsletter might serve a similar function.

**Projected Outcomes:**

An international symposium would build a greater awareness of Aboriginal/Indigenous artistic practices and also the many social and critical issues related to these practices, thus benefiting both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

**Recommendation 2:**

**Contact the Banff Art Centre about the possibility of partnerships and/or co-sponsorships.**

**Actions:**

1. Contact Lou-Ann Neel, Artistic Director of the Aboriginal Arts Programs at The Banff Centre. Also Anthony Kiendl, Director of Visual Arts and the Walter Phillips Gallery at The Banff Centre and Director of the Banff International Curatorial Institute.

2. Organize retreats for Aboriginal women artists.
3. Offer a Banff residency, as well as one closer to home.
4. Tap into the opportunities that are already in place in Manitoba that could offer co-sponsorships.

**Projected Outcomes:**

By using opportunities and programs that are available and tailoring them to the needs of Aboriginal women artists, a broader support network for Aboriginal artists would be created.

**Recommendation 3:**

**Connect with the Aboriginal People's Television Network. This would be beneficial for programming. MAWA could propose ideas for training/mentorship in film and video.**

**Actions:**

1. Contact APTN for a list of production companies in Manitoba in order to gather more information and ideas about internships, training and mentorships.

2. Propose programming ideas to APTN and collaborate with them.

Topics could include:

- Women in the director's chair
- Youth initiatives
- Girls in film
- Documentary and drama

**Projected Outcomes**

Not only would this create more opportunities for Aboriginal women artists in film and video, but it would also create more visibility through televised media, in the Aboriginal community.

**Recommendation 4:**

**MAWA could provide a summer internship for an Aboriginal woman who is studying in a post-secondary institution. It would not have to be arts-related program of study.**



**Actions:**

1. A possible source of funding could be the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resources Development (CAHRD), who could also assist in finding a suitable intern.
2. Contact the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg and Brandon to advertise for an intern.

**Projected Outcomes:**

Creating an employment opportunity and experience for an Aboriginal student.

**Recommendation 5:**

**Hire an outreach worker to work with MAWA to help make connections within the Aboriginal community and to facilitate some of the ideas discussed in this report. This would be a very important first step.**

**Actions:**

1. To secure more funding for the Aboriginal Outreach worker, contact Canadian Heritage (Mireille Lamontagne, Museum Consultant, Museum Assistance Program, Canadian Heritage).
2. Contact the Winnipeg Foundation for potential funding of such a

position.

**Projected Outcome:**

Creating direct links into the Aboriginal community via an outreach worker would be invaluable for MAWA.

**Recommendation 6:**

**A critical reading group and a focus on critical writing practices would be beneficial in raising critical dialogue within the community.**

**Actions:**

1. There is a need for developing writing skills in the Aboriginal community. Creating a mentorship program that focuses on critical writing would be beneficial. A potential mentor for that program could be Candace Hopkins (Banff Centre) or Leanne L'Hirondelle (critical writing in art, Chicago Art Institute).
2. Create collaborations with writing groups, such as the Aboriginal Writers Collective, to put forth issues and dialogue relating to critical writing on Aboriginal art and culture.
3. Outreach with Native Women in the Arts (based out of Toronto), who

promote performing arts, lectures, poetry and publications for women artists. Perhaps set up a mentorship outside of Winnipeg in connection with this organization.

**Projected Outcome:**

More critical dialogue and publications on Aboriginal art.

**Recommendation 7:**

**Establish an Artist-in-Residence program in other areas of the province. This would assist in connecting the larger arts community in Manitoba.**

**Actions:**

1. Research into rural Aboriginal arts communities and possible art venues. This would include community and cultural centres, etc., since there are very few arts-related venues.
2. Contact the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba for collaboration and links with other venues.
3. Include those artists who are practicing traditional art forms.

**Projected Outcomes:**

Creating opportunities that are inclusive to rural artists. Also engaging both rural and urban Aboriginal artists together.

**Recommendation 9:**

It would be beneficial to have a mentoring program for youth. This would support young artists before they enter art school.

**Actions:**

1. Offer grant-writing workshops. This is key to moving artists from 'emerging' to 'mid-career status.'
2. Collaborate with Aboriginal specialized schools and programs such as Children of the Earth High School and R.B. Russell High School.
3. Establish a collaboration with Urban Shaman's current youth outreach arts program, "Pointing with the Lips."

**Projected Outcomes:**

More Aboriginal youth will become aware of opportunities that exist in the arts field, before entering post-secondary institutions. This also

may give youth incentives to further their own practices. This would provide valuable professional tools at an early stage.

## **ACTION PLAN**

From all of the recommendations that the Advisory Committee suggested, the one that is a priority and was unanimously accepted was that MAWA hire an Aboriginal woman to work as an outreach worker in the areas of liaison and program development. This position would be an ideal way to bring forward the many varied tasks involved in implementing the recommendations brought forth by the Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee. This person would need a variety of skills to be able to work within the diverse structure of Aboriginal communities, both rural and urban. A detailed description of what the position would ideally encompass follows.

### **Proposed New Position**

1. Suggestions for Job title:
  - a) program development
  - b) outreach
  - c) liason
  - d) coordinator
  
2. Job description:
  - a) act as liaison with Aboriginal communities to develop and research programs to increase Aboriginal participation in

contemporary artistic practices.

b) create partnerships with Aboriginal (art and non-art) organizations.

c) facilitate workshops.

d) work with MAWA's director.

promote cross cultural awareness within MAWA's staff, board, and membership.

f) grant writing.

3. Qualifications:

a) Aboriginal woman

b) experience in community development

c) art background – degree or related experience

d) good writing and editing skills

e) good communication skills

f) good teamwork

g) grant-writing experience (may be challenging to find this)

h) computer knowledge/experience and asset

i) willing to travel

j) valid driver's license

k) knowledge of contemporary Aboriginal issues

l) knowledge of Aboriginal language an asset

## **Outcomes of Proposed Position:**

### **Short term:**

- a) increased professional development skills
- b) increased artistic development
- c) creating greater access to opportunities
- d) create partnerships with Aboriginal community
- e) create relationships with Aboriginal organizations (arts and non-arts organizations)
- f) increased employment and opportunities

### **Long term:**

- a) increased number of Aboriginal women pursuing professional careers in contemporary art.
- b) providing long-term programming for artists – increasing sustainability
- c) increase the diversity of MAWA's membership
- d) permanent paid position for Aboriginal woman artist
- e) interns working with Aboriginal women artists  
increased economic viability – sustainable income for Aboriginal women artists



## **Personal Note**

The step that MAWA took in establishing a committee to find ways of increasing participation by Aboriginal women artists was much needed. It is important as a Manitoba organization to recognize the large number of Aboriginal people as a vital and dynamic group to work alongside with. Invitation to take part in the advisory committee was an honor as well as an eye-opening and empowering experience. As a young Aboriginal emerging artist, as well as a single parent, it was quite important and vital to find other Aboriginal mentors and leaders that I could confide with and learn from. This proved even more valuable when I found issues arising pertaining to my ethnicity and practice as an artist. There are many areas in which my mentorships helped me to realize the opportunities that exist and also how to create those initiatives when there were none. Those experiences have played a major role in guiding and directing my career. If it was not for those people who played prominent roles it would have been much more difficult to keep a positive vision for the future. This vision is driven by a strong support and advocacy for the arts in our communities. There is a strong need for Aboriginal people to analyze and discuss what art means to us today. These issues vary and are distinct, just as Aboriginal populations are. But the benefits and importance of this engagement with the arts would serve the Aboriginal community greatly. It has been proven that art directly benefits those that engage with it. In

terms of the benefits it plays on an individual's well-being, art can be used as a tool for education, creative collaborations and strategies for almost any sector. Contemporary Aboriginal arts is growing, as is the revival and maintaining of traditional art forms and culture. It is very important for Aboriginal communities in Canada to have access to this and it is even more important to be the interpreters and leaders of Aboriginal art, in its varied definitions.

My own personal experience on this committee gave me an opportunity to give back something. I felt very lucky to be able to sit on a committee which wanted to establish ways for more Aboriginal women to participate in the excellent opportunities and programs offered by MAWA. It was also inspiring to be connected to a group of gifted and hardworking people that have devoted themselves to working on behalf of Aboriginal artists. For Aboriginal communities this kind of devotion is the utmost importance and needs to be continuously supported. Many of the issues that were raised within the committee were very personal to each member. This has been due to the experiences of being an Aboriginal person in society. I applaud MAWA in their efforts to aid and promote Aboriginal women artists.

Cheyenne Henry

## Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee Biographies

**Cheyenne Henry** is a visual artist and arts administrator/researcher. She graduated from the University of Manitoba in 2004 with a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies and Anthropology. She has been informally mentored under the direction and guidance of many established Aboriginal artists from Winnipeg. Her artwork has been exhibited in group exhibitions and eventually she would like to complete a body of collage and installation work. Currently she sits on the board of Urban Shaman Gallery, an artist-run gallery for contemporary Aboriginal artists, as well as acting as a liaison between the U.A.A.C. and MAWA's board. She is currently working as a researcher and workshop facilitator at Art City, a community arts center which offers free, high-quality art programming to inner-city children and youth. Her research work is part of a national study on the benefits of art programming with children and youth. This is collaborative study with ANCY-The Arts Network for Children and Youth and several other art centers across Canada. Cheyenne is also active in promoting Aboriginal social issues through writing, as well as through her time volunteering with CKUW-the University of Winnipeg's campus and community radio station.

**Steven Loft** is a Mohawk of the Six Nations and the Director of the Urban Shaman Gallery in Winnipeg. He is a curator, writer and media artist. Formerly First Nations Curator in Residence at the Art Gallery of Hamilton and Artistic Director at the Native Indian/Inuit Photographers' Association, Loft has curated *The Very Soul of Me: Modern Artists Exploring the Spiritual*, *Unity of Nations: Contemporary First Nations Art* and *Language of Intercession*. He has also co-curated *alt.shift.control: musings on digital identity* and *Machyderm: What is Wassailing...?* He has also written for numerous publications. Loft's video productions include *Survival of the Fittest*, *Out of the Darkness*, *Tax This* and *2510037901*. His videos have been screened at festivals and galleries across Canada.

**Julie Nagam** grew up in rural Manitoba and has lived in Thompson, Manitoba for the last three and a half years. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Arts with a major in Women Studies and minor in Native Studies and Art History from the University of Manitoba. She was awarded a full scholarship to the University of Iceland and the Iceland Academy of Arts where she worked with Iceland's Center for Research on Women. She is working towards a BFA in Visual Arts and a Masters Degree in Native Studies at the University of Manitoba. She has conducted research for the Thompson Multi-Cultural Centre and the Thompson YWCA. She has worked with various social justice movements and is dedicated to making a difference for women.

**Catherine Mattes** is a curator with an MA in art history from Concordia University. Mattes was an active board member of Urban Shaman Gallery for four years, and has been involved with Nation2Nation, a national Aboriginal arts group. In her curatorial practice Mattes focuses on Aboriginal issues and art. Examples of her curatorial projects are: *Re:Collections – First Nations Photography* (1999, Winnipeg Art Gallery), *Rielisms* (2000, Winnipeg Art Gallery), and *Blanket(ed)*, an exhibition and collaborative exchange between Urban Shaman Gallery and Boomalli Aboriginal Artists' Co-operative, Sydney Australia (2001). Mattes has contributed writings to Urban Shaman Gallery, MAWA, the Indian Art Centre, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Aboriginal Voices, and Border Crossings. Last year Mattes taught sessionally at Brandon University, and is presently the Curator at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba.

**Melissa Wastasecoot** has worked at Urban Shaman Gallery for four years. She is a multimedia artist and is experimenting with soundscape and digital audio. She will be relocating for several months to help establish a commercial contemporary Aboriginal art gallery called 'The White House Gallery' in Brantford, Ontario near the Six Nations Reserve. She considers herself to be an activist in the Aboriginal community and philanthropist.

**Jacqueline Weenusk** is currently working as an Aboriginal Public Administration Intern in the Arts Branch of the Department of Culture, Heritage & Tourism. She graduated with Honours from Keewatin Community College in Thompson, MB with a Diploma in Business Administration, Accounting major. She is Cree from Bunibonibee First Nation and proud to speak her language fluently. She has lived in Winnipeg for two years where her two children attend school. When she's not working and the kids are not in school, she likes to spend her time back home in Northern Manitoba. Her experience in the arts is mainly in the traditional arts practice. Her mother has been a traditional apparel-maker and traditional beader all her life. She designs and makes skirts, jewelry, gauntlets and buckskin jackets. Her mother continues to practice her beadwork to this day and Jacqueline has taken on the role to pass this skill down to her daughter. During Jacqueline's tenure in government, working in the Arts sector has been the most beneficial and challenging because she's "learned so much about the dynamic arts based industry and the arts and culture infrastructure and environment." Her future plans are to continue lifelong learning in business administration either through work or training while she raises her children.

**Roewan Crowe** is an artist, writer and interdisciplinary scholar who blurs the boundaries between art, academic disciplines and writing. She has published stories, poems, theory and art in numerous publications. Through the use of visual arts and scholarship she investigates questions of form and representation, particularly in relation to issues of violence, including sexualized and racialized violence, the violence of the West, war, globalization and colonization. She is also engaged in an exploration of the radical power of art and imagination to create and sustain community. Roewan is currently Chair of Mentoring Artists for Women's Art board of directors and is honoured to have been a MAWA mentee.

**Vera Lemecha** is a curator and writer and is Executive Director of Mentoring Artists for Women's Art. She has held the positions of Director, Anna Leowens Gallery (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design); curator of contemporary art, The Glenbow; curator, The Dunlop Art Gallery; has taught at York University and the University of Regina; and was Program Developer of the *Arts and Cultural Management Program*, the University of Manitoba.