

Artistically Elevated Design

An Art Studio
A Social Design Studio



To: California's Elected Officials

“When creativity blossoms, thinking emanates. When thinking emanates, knowledge is fully lit. When knowledge is lit, economy flourishes.” - A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

(Please note that the content of this letter extends beyond the current state budget cycle.)

I would first like to acknowledge that my colleagues and I are appreciative of the counterproposal to the Governor's May Revise of restoring most of the proposed public arts funding cuts; however, the importance of restoring ALL public arts funding and increasing (and diversifying) future investments cannot be overemphasized as the arts are the foundation through which the flourishing of humans can be achieved and grounded into reality. **As the founder of an art studio that focuses on social engineering for human flourishing, we will always oppose any kind of defunding of the arts as it is harmful to the health of humanity.**

Something I have learned throughout my studies is that it is only through creative thinking that our society moves forward. All civilizations that are a part of the archaeological record have survived due to their arts, whether it be writing, pottery, architecture or some other form of art. This is another reason why it is imperative that we all have access to the arts and not just a select few. *We were all here and we all matter...*not just the people who can afford to explore their creativity and their souls. As representatives for our State, you all are uniquely positioned to open that gate.

From birth, we are taught the basics of life through gamification and creative play. These habits are solidified as we age and enter school but then tossed aside as we advance through the school system and enter the economic system; however, every industry relies on creativity to fuel its innovation, but yet, we have not cultivated a culture that reliably supports these skills and the development of a creative mindset. Although we are moving in a beneficial direction with the passing of Prop 28, the rate of technological advancement increases exponentially so shifting the way we view the function of the arts is imperative for our characters and hearts to keep pace with the development of that technology. *(it's important that we don't inadvertently annihilate ourselves; hopefully, you agree...)*

“Practice any art: music, singing, dancing, acting, drawing, painting, sculpting, poetry, fiction, essays, reportage...no matter how well or badly; not to get money and fame...but to experience becoming. To find out what’s inside you...to make your soul grow.”

- Kurt Vonnegut

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The unedited version of a verbal comment I provided at the California Arts Council meeting on Friday, 5/24/24, is reproduced here:

**"If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it."
- Zora Neale Hurston**

Our sector has received feedback from legislators who have said that we aren't loud enough about what we need to thrive. However, I want to acknowledge that sometimes people aren't silent about their pain but are actually very vocal; in cases like that, it is the lack of access to the ears of those that have the power and the strength of character to change things for the better through their actions. The strength of our character is revealed through the actions that we take and the actions that we do not.

There is a reason that it is Human Right #27 that states that we have the right to access the arts and to enjoy the arts.

Reducing funding violates this right as it would restrict access to the arts as was demonstrated by the CAC's Program Policy committee's proposed recommendations in response to the potential funding cuts. Due to understanding the impact that cutting any public arts funding would cause, this would be intentional harm perpetrated by our local and state governments and our elected officials.

There's a difference between taking \$1 from someone that has \$10 and taking \$1 from someone who has \$100,000. The impact is more severe in the former scenario...and The Arts and Culture sector is the former in this example. Impact outweighs Intention every time...as it should.

In actuality, public arts funding should be increased to support human flourishing. Many of the issues Americans complain about within the interpersonal realm of society can be mitigated through healthy character development, which is only achieved through engaging with the arts. *(In this context, engagement means practicing, contemplating and/or enjoying the arts.)* Even those who are opposed to the arts due to religious reasons still engage with the arts if they are adhering to a sacred text, which is a form of literature.

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Historically speaking, the State has benefited from our sector in a variety of ways. Although reciprocity has largely been absent in the relationship between the Creative Economy and the State, we have the opportunity to change that. If the healthy and sustained character development of humankind and the forward momentum of our society is a priority, [our State's elected officials] should reconsider divesting in the arts because our work sector is an essential element in solving the puzzles that unlock the potential of our society.

Although we helped our nation to sustain and recover throughout the pandemic, we ourselves have not been taken care of. Artists are officially the State's Second Responders so let's not fire the doctor after the doctor has healed us...for if we do, it is a reflection of a character deficit that goes much deeper than any deficit in a state budget. (*May we always remember the role the arts played, and is still playing, in our healing process.*)

Furthermore, as arts advocacy is a part of my artistic practice, I began thinking about the proposed cuts from different perspectives and something interesting came to mind: The people of California support the arts and want it uplifted within their communities, which was demonstrated by the passing of Prop 28. Is our government and its state and local agencies bound by "*the supplement, not supplant clause*" of Prop 28 when considering their budget allocations for the arts?

I ask this because the proposed cuts in funding would come on the heels of a major investment into our sector and looks eerily similar to school districts violating "*the supplement, not supplant clause*" of Prop 28. We are hoping that the impetus for the proposed cuts isn't from the subconscious knowing that there is increased investment in the arts in California's schools. If it is, then [the State's elected officials] would be using the availability of Prop 28 funding to supplant other potential state arts funding. This would break the State's own stipulation and would set a terrible precedent for the State's regions to follow; this type of thinking has the potential to devastate our field if other government entities begin to cut their budget allocations for the arts as well.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." - Benjamin Franklin

Again...

**"If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it."
- Zora Neale Hurston**

Thank you.

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Regarding GO-Biz: A Vision for the Development of the Creative Economy

**“Compassion and Empathy allow us to think of new ways for freedom to exist...
only then are we allowed to have a conversation worth having.”**

- Maeva Asare

Not only are the Arts the soil from which all other industries are born (*as artistic ideas literally give rise to our culture and our values*), it is our starting point from which we begin our lives as humans. In fact, our artistic and cultural practices are the very essence of our humanness.

As I work with cognates and word associations within the longitudinal study in my creative practice, I tend to notice these linguistic associations in everyday life. “Artist” and “non-profit” are not synonymous and are not the only path to support artists within our State. In addition to directly nurturing all facets of being a creative professional through the financial stewardship of State funds, I am a strong supporter of the California Arts Council having the resources and the capacity to give grants to all of the industries within the Creative Economy. The arts are the basis for all of the Creative Economy's subsectors and having a dedicated state agency from which all creative professionals can get support will help organize our sector, thus making it more unified, effective and productive. A self-sustaining Creative Economy can be built and achieved through cross-sectoral collaborations and partnerships.

Our creative workers contribute so much to our state's economy with so little investment from the State. Reciprocity matters and it has been largely absent in the relationship between our sector and the State; however, we have the opportunity to change that. Creative professionals should be able to enter our sector and get everything they need, from professional development to funding support. Although I tend to encourage the idea of “thriving before growing,” these expansions would build the necessary bridges that could shape a prosperous future for our workers that our sector has yet come to know. The ability to thrive as a creative could be a real possibility for everyone in our sector.

For instance, I had to seek support outside of California in order to upskill and participate in a board leadership training that was specifically designed for board members of arts nonprofits. (*The training was offered by an arts organization based in a different state.*) Programs and trainings designed specifically for our sector should be readily available for artists and other creative professionals within our own state. **Artistically Elevated Design** is in agreement with CAC's Vice Chairperson, Leah Goodwin, who said that a minimum investment of \$50M in CAC funding is required to even begin making a meaningful impact within our sector. The only thing I'd add is the diversification of how the CAC invests in our sector as it would create a more beneficial impact and shift the way the Creative Economy functions.

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To bring this letter to a close, I've included an updated version of my written comment from the 5/24/24 CAC meeting regarding the California Arts Council and GO-Biz:

As for moving the CAC to GO-Biz, I'd need more information and data before giving an opinion; however, as an artist who owns a business and encourages other artists to become entrepreneurs, our sector would benefit from the CAC having the resources to support artist-owned small businesses in the form of grants. This funding would help the economic development of artists and our sector. It would also support the rebranding of the arts and culture sector as a thriving economic driver (*who comes in peace but also means business*).

It would be much more beneficial if there were a partnership formed between the CAC and GO-Biz that would allow the CAC to directly address some of the findings of the portfolio review that was done by Scansion/WolfBrown in August 2022.

(The summary of the study can be found on pages 22 - 34 of the CAC August 2022 minutes; there is a link to the Council Meeting Book with the report on page 20. Tab F of the Council Meeting Book will pull up the report.)

The report highlighted that there was a gap of meaningful support within the way the CAC currently functioned and invested in the field. Key Finding #2 on page 24 listed "individual artists, artist collectives, small businesses, small cafes, community enterprises, etc" among the groups of people not strongly supported by the CAC although it is within their purview.

Artistically Elevated Design maintains the perspective that these gaps can be addressed once we reframe how we view the Arts and Culture work sector within the whole of the economy. In addition to direct grants, an example of meaningful investment could look like developing a new funding stream that encourages organizations to develop capacity-building programs for artists to increase their business acumen. (*Every creative worker should have the skills to freelance due to the nature of our sector.*) Rather than reducing CAC funding, a \$5M to \$10M investment in a partnership between the CAC and GO-Biz could be a great start to developing artists as capable business owners and key players in the growth and development of the economy.

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And as a gesture of respect for all of my colleagues who work for and/or have established arts nonprofits, I'm including a passage that was written on page 14 of the portfolio review (pg. 102 of the Council Meeting Book):

By shining a light on the diverse individuals, informal groups, and non-arts organizations that contribute much to California's arts ecosystem, we by no means intend to belittle the important work of the many committed arts nonprofits in the state. Rather we want to emphasize that if the grantmaking focus is only on nonprofits (even if that definition is expanded to other entities that seek grants through fiscal sponsorships), large portions of the ecosystem that enriches the lives of Californians with meaningful artistic and cultural activities is overlooked.

In closing, I do want to acknowledge that this comment and proposed changes came at a time when the Employment Development Department (EDD) raised concern within the film industry about artists' ability to use loan out companies within our state. Our right to be independent and to be respected as business owners (and to operate as such) is important and can be strengthened by a partnership between GO-Biz and an independent, fully resourced CAC.

It is my hope that we can all work together to shift California into a state that is respectful, enjoyable, accessible and a better place for all of our citizens to flourish. May we all have access to opportunities to explore the depths of our souls because with access comes the freedom to choose and the availability of better choices.

Peace and Productivity,
Maeva (My•ĒĒĒ•vuh)
Artist/Founder/Owner

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STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY WITH CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS

"Compassion and Empathy

allow us to think of new ways for freedom to exist...

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- Maeva Asare

Artists are the weavers of the destinies of the children of tomorrow; we are the cartographers of the creative mind, whose maps help those lost on their journeys. Art is where the soul meets science so the beauty flows from our fingertips as if they were the extension of the finger from Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*...if only Adam were an artist, he would have made the conscious decision to complete the connection.

Either way, here we stand now...resilient through it all despite the ever-changing perception that society has of us. All of us are just resident spiders on God's door adorning it with our own interpretation of a web...beckoning for the onlookers to be brave enough to knock...and if they're lucky (and to their surprise), She might just be home and open the door.

"Only when we understand the value of health,

can we understand the value of time...

then we can appreciate the value and function of money.

- Maeva (My•ĒĒĒ•vuh)

It is important to honor basic human rights before respecting biological and social/societal roles. Dignity matters. Artists are worthy of respect and are people worthy of a living wage and healthcare! Everyone in the world throughout time has consumed our products and yet, many have tried to invalidate the artists creating them. Advancement in the arts affects advancement in other creative fields and across work sectors; investing in the arts is an investment in the health of a culture: on the community-level and the individual-level.

Authored by Maeva (My•ĒĒĒ•vuh), LA-Based Artist/Founder/Owner

<https://bit.ly/My-EEE-vuh>

Peace and Productivity