

# Letter to the Editor

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*Executive Director*

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Thank you for offering this space to clarify questions raised in Emma Metcalfe Hurst's exhibition review of *Apparition Room* at the artist-run centre Western Front, Vancouver, BC, published in *Archivaria* 96 (Fall 2023), pp. 164–72. The exhibition in discussion was a display of media artworks and performance documentation by artists represented in Western Front's archives, documenting 50 years of artistic programming.

On page 171 of the review, Metcalfe Hurst writes, "Further, the act of using archives to make new works raises questions about the legal and ethical rights of a curator or artist to manipulate and (re-)use the intellectual property (artwork) of another artist, as well questions about compensation for this use."

And in an accompanying footnote, she furthered,

Audiovisual and media art archives often face issues about consent with regard to newly digitized records due to outdated contractual agreements that predate the birth of the Internet. Today, archival best practices incorporate ethical approaches, and archivists are trained to ask for consent from creators in order to maintain good relationships with people and communities in addition to documentation.

While we understand the importance of questions of ethical use and compensation in relation to archival material, in the specific context of a review about an exhibition at Western Front, we feel that the open-endedness of Metcalfe Hurst's statements left room for conjecture about our own operating practices, which we wish to make clear.

Like the best practice example identified by Metcalfe Hurst in her footnote, principles of ongoing consent, self-determination, and fair remuneration are foundational to the way Western Front works with artists. We practice these principles in how we both engage artists in our programs and maintain and provide access to archival records in which they are rightsholders, including encompassing the changing contexts of technology and dissemination. Across the development of *Apparition Room*, the curator Lee Plested and Western Front's curatorial and archival team remained in active dialogue with the artists/estates included throughout the exhibition's development and presentation to ensure consent was gained and maintained. Furthermore, the artists/estates were paid artist fees above the minimums recommended in the fee schedules of best practice bodies such as Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA) and Canadian Artists Representation/le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC). Beyond the ethical imperatives behind ensuring such consent and compensation, these are also well-established requirements of government funded and professional arts organizations like Western Front and are standard practices within these spaces today.

Thank you for letting us provide this extra information.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Gibb

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