

ART AND LABOUR LAB

Launched on May Day 2022 at Struts Gallery, the Art and Labour Lab is a participatory project that uses conventions of 20th century job centres to archive intersections of art, cultural work, and labour organizing. Over two weeks, visitors contributed to a growing collection of resources and ideas related to art and labour.

As a space, the Art and Labour Lab fostered conversations among gallery visitors about realities for workers—from cultural workers, student workers, and artists to those working for small businesses and in precarious sectors—during the "great resignation" spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This publication documents some of the conversations and resources collected during the Art and Labour Lab's occupation of Struts Gallery, in Sackville, New Brunswick.

Learn! Create! Share! Organize!

GALLERY AND MUSEUM UNIONIZATION IN THE USA IS GROWING.

WHAT'S THAT ABOUT?

In the 2021 article "Will unions make a difference at US museums?" in Apollo Magazine, writer Dana Kopel attributed increasing unionization of museum workers to stagnant salaries, hours of unpaid overtime, and a top-down culture that treated lower-level staff as disposable. For workers, there was a desire to align museum and gallery working conditions with their stated commitment to diverse, progressive programming.

While large museums and galleries are increasingly unionized, where does this leave small and mid-sized cultural spaces, whose size and growth mindset often drives staff to burnout? What can they learn from unionization efforts in larger institutions?





EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS (EAPs) ALLOW EMPLOYERS TO AVOID CREATING TRULY SAFE WORKPLACES.

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a counselling service designed to help employees who have concerns that affect their well-being and/or work performance. These programs are usually provided a large service provider, and are often accessed for mental health support.

One critique of EAPs is that they are short term solutions that *do not address deeper systemic issues in the workplace that contribute to stress*. Another is that EAPs are inadequate in addressing the wellness of BIPOC, trauma survivors and folks of other marginalized identities.

EAPs are part of benefits typically (but not always) afforded to people with steady employment. Why shouldn't folks in more precarious sectors be able to access them as well?

HOUSING FOR WORKING CLASS FOLKS AND ARTISTS IS HARD TO COME BY.

Housing and work have always been intertwined. In the 20th century, some unions (like the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union) established co-operative housing to resist market forces and ensure affordability for their members.

Today, it's harder and harder for low wage workers to find housing they can afford in cities. As a result, they are displaced and spend more time and money commuting to their jobs. Similarly, artists and art organizations are finding it difficult to remain in urban centres—long home to working class, immigrant and creative communities—due to skyrocketing costs of living.

Ways to fight for affordable housing include getting involved with local politics, speaking up at city council meetings, or get involved with grassroots groups supporting tenants rights and advocating for progressive housing reform.

HEALTHCARE TAILORED TO ARTISTS AND ARTS WORKERS: DOES IT EXIST?

Yes. Toronto Western Hospital is home to the Al and Malka Green Artists Health Centre. Their vision is to have a positive impact on the overall health and wellbeing of professional creative and performing artists. It is the only clinic of its kind in Canada that serves the entire artistic community.

The Al and Malka Green Artists Health Centre offers services such as psychotherapy, physiotherapy and naturopathic medicine. Many services are covered by OHIP, and some are provided for a fee. Through their Joysanne Sidimus Fund, services are subsidized for artists in need so they only pay a fraction of the cost.

A recent study *Artists In Mind: A Report on Artists' Mental Health and Well Being in Nova Scotia* reinforces the need for more physical and mental health services for artists across Canada, and includes a list of national resources for visual artists, dancers and musicians.

THERE ARE MANY MIGRANT WORKERS IN NEW BRUNSWICK AND NOVA SCOTIA. HOW CAN I HELP ADVOCATE FOR THEM?

"Migrant workers are employed on temporary contracts and have no direct pathway to permanent residency. They work in a high risk industry (where) health and safety problems are common and may go unreported. Research indicates these workers face many barriers to accessing healthcare and insurance, and fear of loss of employment or forced return to their country of origin." (Migrant Worker Health Project)

There are many groups active in Canada advocating for migrant workers' rights that could always use volunteers from New Brunswick! Design skills are always sought after in campaign development Art students, artists and designers can help with this! Here is a list of organizations active in Canada:

<https://www.migrantworker.ca/for-migrant-workers/organizations/>

DID YOU KNOW THAT CIRCUS PERFORMERS ARE UNIONIZED?

It's true!

The American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA) is an AFL-CIO affiliated labor union founded in 1939 to represent performing Artists and Stage Managers in live performances in the Variety field. This includes circus performers, as well as theme park performers, skaters, comedians & stand-up comics, Cabaret & Club Artists, magicians, and others.

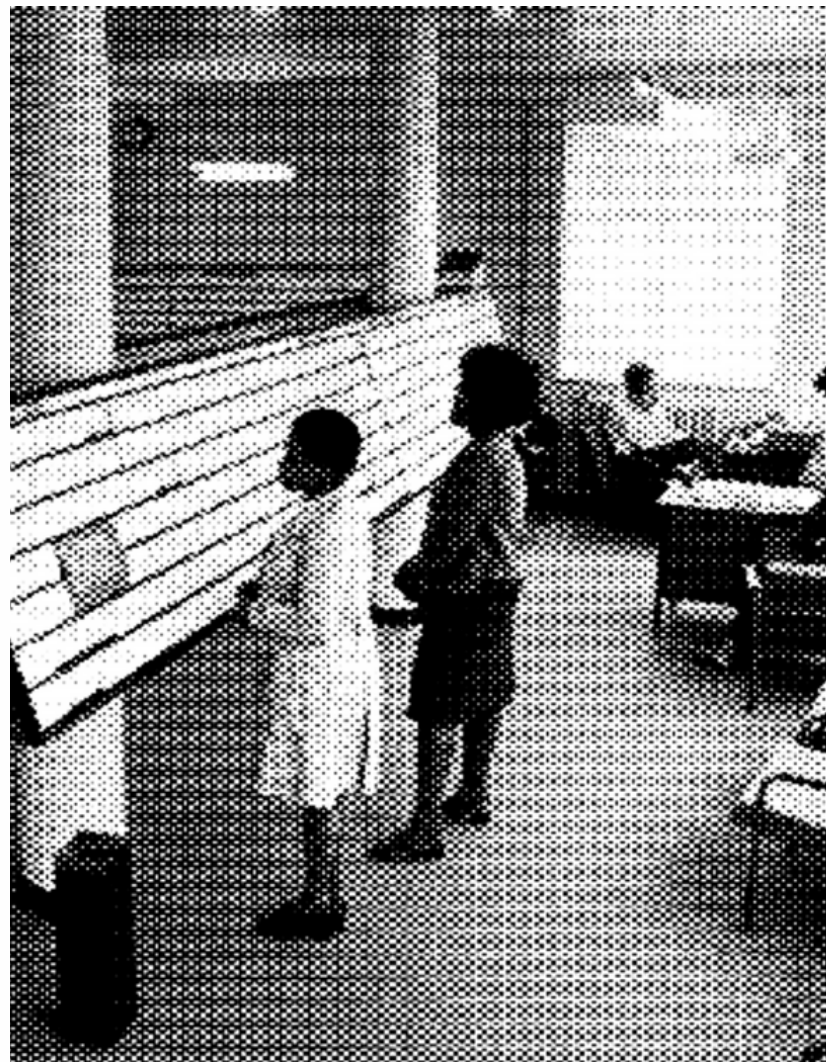
AGVA offers its current and previous members emergency aid through the AGVA Sick & Relief Fund. This fund pays a variety of member bills such as rent, utilities, telephone, etc. in case of illness or injury. They also are known to give emergency grants as needed.

INFO FOR ARTISTS ON DISABILITY SUPPORTS: WHERE TO LOOK?

The **Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Arts Grants brochure** (published in 2018) explains the exemption for arts grants received by people on ODSP, discusses other forms of income that artists may receive, and gives tips on dealing with possible problems.

This brochure was initiated by the ODSP Action Coalition with input from members of the ODSP and Arts Grants Coalition. The ODSP and Arts Grants Coalition is made up of individual artists who have disabilities and are on ODSP as well as representatives from several unions, arts organizations and arts councils.

While this resource is from Ontario, it may provide relevant information about reconciling grant and other arts income with your disability case worker, even if you are in a different province.





INTERVIEW WITH GABRIELLE ROSS-MARQUETTE

from the New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice

I asked **Gabrielle Ross-Marquette**, Labour Co-Chair of Common Front NB and Research Representative at the Maritime Regional Office of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) some burning student questions about labour issues that impact them and their community.

How can young workers protect themselves when working for small businesses?

The **Employment Standards Act**, the **Occupational Health & Safety Act**, the **Human Rights Act** and the contract you signed at the beginning of your employment all contain basic conditions and rights that your employer should respect. The three Acts have government resources assigned to them that you can access free of charge. As these resources are scarce, the best way to protect yourself in the workplace is to have a union and shop steward that you can go to.

How can young workers better understand the Employment Standards Act?

To be preventative, try to book an information session from the Employment Standards branch, which can cover several of the main topics you need to know about the ESA. The Common Front hosts **Know Your Rights Webinars** from time to time. If you need semi-immediate assistance, here is the contact information:

- Toll free: 1-888-452-2687
- Visit your nearest Employment Standards office (Fredericton, Dieppe, Bathurst, Edmundston, Saint John)
- Email: EmploymentStandards@gnb.ca.

How can I build support during a union drive?

If you have a dedicated group of workers who are passionate about improving your working conditions, organizing a union drive is one way to balance the scales of power in your workplace.

It's hard work! And every person on your organizing committee has a role to play. Keys to

your success are a detailed membership list, and a plan for talking to every single one of your co-workers. These talks are not just "chats"; they should be structured conversations. Check out **Organizing 4 Power** online for more tips on how to move your colleagues to sign union cards!

<https://www.rosalux.de/en/o4p>

How can young workers and artists act in solidarity with workers in other (precarious) sectors?

The **Common Front for Social Justice** and the **New Brunswick Federation of Labour** are campaigning to improve the Employment Standards Act - like adding paid sick days and improving the minimum wage. You can always get involved as a member of the Common Front to help change the working conditions of all workers!

<https://frontnb.ca>

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Here are some things that folks who came to the Art and Labour Lab brought up about art and work during their visit.

Use these ideas as the starting point for conversations with friends, schoolmates and colleagues, and your own advocacy work!

Galleries and museums should leave room in their schedules for "dreamtime."

Grant applications are unpaid labour. How might this change?

Someone needs to make a Trustpilot that reviews employers.

Arts workers should DO LESS.

How can arts workers fight toxic philanthropy?

Safe Space policies should be more common at work.

Reliance on temporary workers perpetuates scarcity and gets in the way of both workplace and worker stability.

More child care supports and sensitivity and caregiver employees are needed.

The "post-pandemic" shift back to work is bullshit. There's still a pandemic going on!

Legal aid for young workers. Young workers should be aware of legal resources that are at their disposal.

ART does not equal PAIN.

Documents like the Employment Standards Act are too difficult to decode, especially when you are short on time.

Older workers need support to adapt to technological/industrial change.

RESOURCES + INSPIRATION

ARTISTS AND THE LAW

Artists' Legal Aid Services (ALAS), Ontario
www.alasontario.ca

Artists' Legal Outreach, Vancouver/Victoria
www.artistslegaloutreach.com

Legal Info Nova Scotia, Tantallon, NS
www.legalinfo.org

UNIONS

The Power Plant Union Local 535, Toronto
[@thepowerplantunion](https://twitter.com/thepowerplantunion)

S'attaq, Quebec
A chapter of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)
en.sattaq.xyz

VALU-COOP, Vancouver
Unionized arts workers co-op
www.valucoop.ca

Working Artists for the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.)
www.wagesforwork.com

WEBSITES/ONLINE

Art Leaks, International
www.art-leaks.org

Arts Workers Wage Transparency Database
Crowd-sourced databases collecting wages in Canadian art orgs
www.hearthgarage.com

Labor Arts, USA
www.laborarts.org

Pilot Art List, Canada
Bi-monthly email list of paid opportunities for artists
www.nathaliequagliotto.com/pilot-art-list

Working Artist Podcast, Philadelphia, USA
www.laborarts.org

ARTISTS

Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge (Toronto), **Dylan Miner** (East Lansing), **Jessalyn Aaland** (San Francisco), **Joshua Schwebel** (Montreal), **Justseeds Artists Cooperative** (USA/CAN/MEX), **Lisa Vinebaum** (Chicago), **Michael DiRisio** (London, ON), **Tabitha Arnold** (Philadelphia).

MISCELLANEOUS

Al and Malka Green Artists Health Centre, Toronto

Health centre for artists at Toronto Western Hospital
www.artistshealthcentre.ca

Artbooks, Toronto

Financial advice and tax support for artists
www.artbooks.to

Mayworks Festival, Toronto

Annual arts festival of working people
www.mayworks.ca

The Arts and Entertainment Plan, Canada

Insurance plans for artists
www.aeplan.ca

Workers Arts & Heritage Centre, Hamilton, ON

Community museum and multidisciplinary art centre
<http://www.wahc-museum.ca>



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Art and Labour Lab is a project initiated by artist, programmer, and educator **Tara Bursey**.

Tara wishes to thank residency "Unterns" **Daisy Graham, Chloe Lundrigan, Kaya Panthier** and **Shivanya Ra** for ten weeks of amazing conversations, many of which inspired the directions and dialogue of the Art and Labour Lab.

Many thanks to **Paul Henderson, Lucas Morneau** and **Ranz Bontogon** of Struts Gallery for hosting the project, and **Janelle LeBlanc** and **Gabrielle Ross-Marquette** from New Brunswick Common Front For Social Justice.

The Art and Labour Lab was developed through the support of Mount Allison University as part of their 2022 Lassonde Artist-in-Residence program.

The Art and Labour Lab was on view at Struts Gallery from May 1 - 13, 2022.

www.tara-bursey.com