



Alliance's Vision of Interculturality

Cultures are composite; they are characterized by processes of hybridization, transformation, pollination and borrowing. At MAI, we are careful not to reify cultures or to think of them as fixed systems that exist outside of persons and communities.

Working from this perspective, Alliance supports intercultural artistic approaches, the ones that unfold **across** cultures, practices, ways of inhabiting the world, currents and influences. The ones that call upon knowledge and processes other than those that characterize the dominant culture in Quebec and Canada. We are also interested in creative processes that interweave artistic fields and/or question and redraw the arbitrary categories of gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, race, sexual orientation, etc. And in artistic projects that emerge at the very core of relations, encounters and dialogues between people and communities.

Inspired by the Martinican poet, philosopher and writer Édouard Glissant, we at MAI acknowledge and support rhizome identities that “extend in relation to others”*.

At the heart of these approaches, above all else, is an ethic of responsibility and care, as well as an attitude of questioning, experimentation and risk taking.

We are open to your interpretation of the notion of interculturality. The assessment of applications for Alliance will therefore be made on a case-by-case basis. At MAI we are convinced that artists should freely choose the processes, traditions and forms that they wish to maintain, abandon, hybridize, transform or develop. We believe that the protection of cultural diversity and of Indigeneity should not involve locking people into identities, practices and categories that they have not shaped themselves.

At MAI, we support among others First Nations, Inuit and Métis artists, including those who adopt or are inspired by Indigenous cosmologies, philosophies, systems of knowing and/or methodologies in their creative process. Half of the members of a collective or company working with such elements and applying to Alliance should be part of Indigenous communities. Drawing on the writings of Métis researcher and artist Zoe Todd, we consider that the appropriation of Indigenous visions and practices without the presence of Indigenous interlocutors to hold the use of Indigenous cosmologies and methodologies to account contributes to (1) erasing Indigenous peoples, their knowledge, their laws, their realities and their ways of doing and (2) eliminating, distorting and/or homogenizing the various and distinctive Indigenous voices. Following Zoe Todd, we also consider that cherry-picking bits of Indigenous thought without recognizing and discussing the colonial, political, legal and cultural context in which these thoughts have developed and continue to develop leads to complicity in colonial violence.



In this sense, we invite artists who apply to Alliance to stay vigilant about the possible use of cultural appropriation mechanisms in their creative processes. Cultural appropriation happens when a person borrows elements (knowledge, symbols, artifacts...) from a group or a community of which they are not part and this borrowing falls into a dominance and power relationship. According to Trinidadian author Richard Fung, “the critique of cultural appropriation is first and foremost a strategy to redress historically established inequities by raising questions about who controls and benefits from cultural resources”.

Other characteristics can suggest a mechanism of cultural appropriation in an artistic context: for example when the artist objectifies, exoticizes or caricatures members of the community or populations they’re borrowing from without knowing or trying to understand the realities and experiences of these people. By erasing their voices and their experiences, the artist extracts and separates ideas, discourses and artistic forms from the sociopolitical and aesthetic context in which they were created.

To quote Thomas Talawa Prestø, choreographer and artistic director of Tabanka African & Caribbean Peoples Dance Ensemble: “Using our cultures to silence our voices and superimpose your own is old, it has been done, and has nothing to do with contemporaneity.”

Resisting cultural appropriation

A citation policy “is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before”, writes independent feminist scholar and writer Sara Ahmed.

To resist cultural appropriation, researcher, dramaturg and performer Karmenlara Ely recommends integrating self-reflection, critical dialogue and citation into the creative process: “If I find myself faced with material from an archive outside my experience, it’s a call to put myself in question with a living expert from the tradition, and to risk finding out I have nothing to give”.

Text written by Nayla Naoufal.

To contribute to the discussion or ask for more information, please contact:

Nicole A. Lee (engagement@m-a-i.qc.ca)

References (the quote marked by an asterisk was translated by the author of this text):

Sarah Ahmed. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press, 2017.

Karmenlara Ely. [Against Cultural Appropriation](#). Publication Black Box. 2019.



Richard Fung. [Working Through Appropriation](#). Fuse, 1993.

Édouard Glissant. Une poétique de la relation. 1990.

Zoe Todd. [An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word For Colonialism](#). Journal of Historical Sociology, 2016.