

Statement of the Public Art Selection Committee for the Halifax Central Library

The Committee commends the Halifax Public Library and Halifax Regional Municipality for setting a new standard within Nova Scotia for public art commissions: by planning for public art from an early stage in the development of the new Library, by allocating substantial resources to the commission in keeping with HRM's policy of percent for public art, and by instituting a credible, independent review process to select the recommended candidates. This echoes the integrity of the selection process for the Library's architects, resulting, we feel, in a design for a landmark building that will be a superb location for art.

The Library, as a cultural hub for the city, is a particularly appropriate place for a significant new art commission. Aspiring to provide Halifax with a shared "living room", the new Library will be accessible to all Haligonians. It serves to document, preserve, interpret, present and disseminate widely diverse forms of cultural expression. We recognize the need for the artwork to be accessible on some level to a broad public while presenting a degree of intellectual challenge and delight appropriate to a library as a centre of knowledge. Art in this environment will be an active part of a broader intellectual conversation. We are confident that this art commission will raise the level of community engagement with contemporary visual art and encourage visual literacy.

The Committee was very pleased with the strong response to the Request for Qualifications, which generated nearly one hundred entries, many of them international in origin and many of them of a very high quality. This made the selection process highly competitive and many strongly qualified candidates could not be included in the short list.

The selection criteria were weighted primarily to reflect the professional standing of the candidates, including their demonstrated experience in executing projects of this scale, and secondarily to recognize the quality of the statement of approach.

At this first stage, the Committee views the statements of approach less as fixed parameters than as indications of creative intent. The next stage of the competition will allow candidates to grow and adapt their initial ideas to a more developed stage. We look forward to working with them and the project architects to achieve a final selection.

The Committee was particularly pleased that the short list of candidates – selected purely on the basis of the excellence of their qualifications and statements of approach – includes local, Canadian and international artists. We know that Nova Scotia contains artists of world stature; it is our conviction that Halifax is part of a world cultural conversation in which our artists and those of other countries can only benefit from mutual exposure.

The Committee members enjoyed a very collegial, generous and respectful exchange. The resulting selection reflects our consensus decision.