**ALBERTA MEDIA ARTS
ALLIANCE SOCIETY**
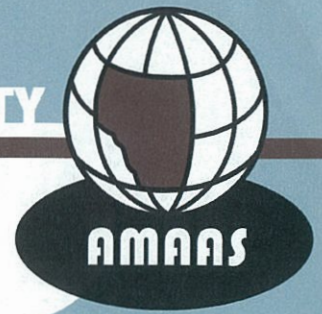
AMAAS

Media Arts Galleries Research Study

By: **Kevin Allen**

For: **AMAAS Board of Directors**

Date: **October 21, 2010**

Executive Summary

The Alberta Media Arts Alliance Society (AMAAS) is exploring the creation and feasibility of permanent media arts gallery spaces initially in the Province.

A survey of the media arts landscape for presentation across Alberta found that there are several opportunities for screening of local media art. However, our concept of a "microcinema" as a media arts gallery space could be a permanent destination venue for single channel, short-form Alberta work. In Calgary, an institutional partner was found in the EPCOR CENTRE for the Performing Arts.

AMAAS and the EPCOR CENTRE are working towards the creation of the first full-time microcinema in Alberta, whose working title is GAMA (the Gallery of Alberta Media Art). Through juries, GAMA will program 24 Alberta media artists annually in four packages, running 3 months in duration, beginning in Spring 2011. The initial annual budget for GAMA is $13,500 and requires further resource development to make it sustainable over the long term. A marketing plan coordinated between the GAMA partners will yield information needed to build audiences and replicate GAMA in Edmonton, and possibly other provincial centres.

When executed, GAMA promises to achieve several goals including: increasing the visibility of Alberta media artists and their work; adding a new cultural amenity to the community; expanding the reputation of AMAAS and the EPCOR CENTRE as cultural programmers; and reinforcing the status of the EPCOR CENTRE as a cultural hub.
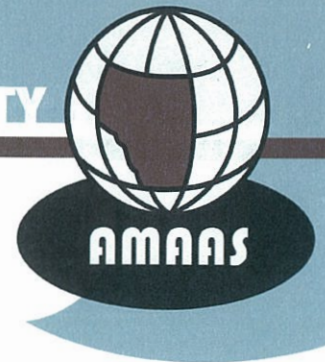
Acknowledgments

AMAAS would like to thank the 25 or so members of the provincial media arts community who provided input and feedback for this report. Of special note is the AMAAS board of directors who took the skeleton concept of a media arts gallery and fleshed it out at their strategic planning retreat in November 2009.

In addition and in particular, AMAAS would like to thank Tammy McGrath, Visual and Media Arts Programmer at the EPCOR CENTRE for the Performing Arts, who helped shape the vision of the microcinema, and brought her organization's resources to the table to help move the project forward. She has been a source of inspiration as well as a heavy lifter in the Calgary arts community for many years.

AMAAS would also like to thank The Canada Council for the Arts and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts whose support in the form of an Alberta Creative Development Initiative (ACDI) grant made it possible for this report to be written.

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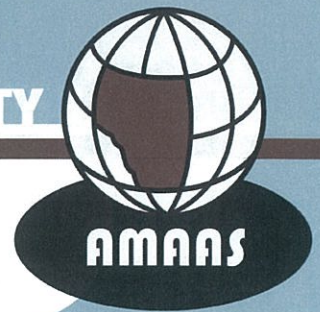
Alberta Foundation for the Arts

Media Arts Gallery Research & Proposal

ALBERTA MEDIA ARTS ALLIANCE SOCIETY

AMAAS

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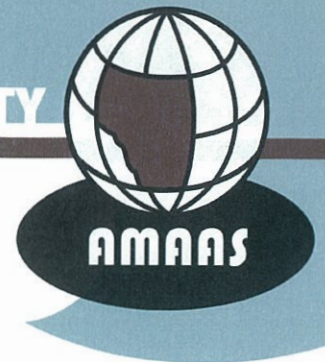
In general, there are many artist and curator-run alternative spaces emerging recently, and they are actively communicating with other spaces. Many interactions both in real and virtual spaces activate the scene, and I would like to connect them with the official cultural institutes, research centers and organisations, museums and art centers.

Yukiko Shikata, Media Arts Curator, Tokyo[1]

Introduction

The Alberta Media Arts Alliance Society (AMAAS) is exploring the potential of creating permanent media arts gallery spaces in Calgary and Edmonton to showcase the Province's excellent media artists. The concept being explored is the construction of a "microcinema" consisting of a large flat screen video with seating for two to three persons appropriate to a public building context.

The "microcinema" idea was inspired by the many +15 window galleries at the EPCOR CENTRE for the Performing Arts, where several artist run centre galleries have modest programming spaces, which interact directly with the public by virtue of their location in a public pedway. In conversation with EPCOR CENTRE staff about the lack of a media art space, they invited us to come up with a proposal as well as secured a location in the +15 pedway system for us.

We envision this media arts gallery space to be programmed year round with Alberta media art. We would endeavour to synchronize our "openings" with other +15 gallery organizations adding to the critical mass of art happenings in the building. In addition we would like to create a mirror site in

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[1] Excerpt of a 2010 interview from www.crumbweb.org, CRUMB is an acronym for: Curatorial Resource for Upstart Media Bliss, and is a networking and professional development resource for new media and media arts curators.
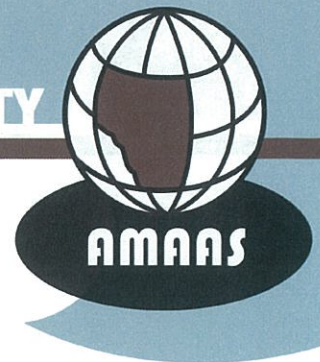
Edmonton with identical programming where art openings would happen on sequential weeks between the two cities.

Background

One of the goals of this project is to increase the visibility of Alberta media artists and their work. By creating public exhibition spaces that are accessible and in the public domain we feel we can attract attention to our community's work. The "microcinema" concept is innovative, creative, replicable, and inserts art into spaces that are potentially underutilized or dull. In the case of the EPCOR CENTRE, the AMAAS gallery would interact with other gallery spaces, increasing audiences for everyone, as well as reinforcing the notion of the EPCOR CENTRE as a cultural hub.

The EPCOR CENTRE has been very supportive of AMAAS and this idea, and we have secured a space, in a public corridor, which has hitherto not been animated. The intent of this document is to act as a research phase to this process that will result in a better gallery design and execution. In addition we need to ensure we can secure sufficient financial resources through public and private sponsorship, to allow for year round media art programming, in both paying artist fees and marketing the work programmed. This project has the potential to have a great impact on the community, by physically staking out spaces in the Province that are devoted to showcasing contemporary single channel Alberta media art.

The creation of microcinemas will increase the profile of AMAAS in the province as both a champion and programmer of Alberta Media Art. Prairie Tales, and annual touring package of Alberta media arts shorts has been an ongoing project of Metro Cinema in partnership with AMAAS.[2] From 1999-

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[2] Prairie Tales offers a juried selection of some of the best recent short films and videos made by Albertan media artists in the form of a feature-length movie. This anthology showcasing work from the Alberta media arts scene is distributed and screened across Alberta and beyond provincial borders for a 16-month period. www.**prairietales**.org
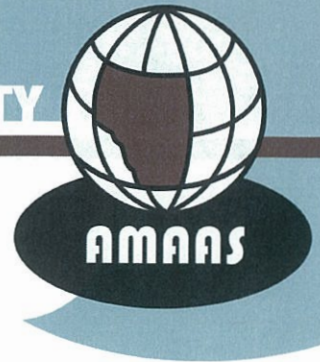
2010 the managing partner of Prairie Tales has been Metro Cinema, however in spring 2011 the management of the project will transition to AMAAS. Consequently there are synergies between microcinema and Prairie Tales programming that AMAAS could exploit, such as joint calls for submission, advertising, sponsorship, etc.

Findings

The Current Landscape for Presentation

Currently there is no permanent home for short-form media art presentation in the Province. That said there are numerous venues, which showcase media art in a gallery context on an occasional or infrequent basis. Although there are loci for media arts programming all across the province, this report is limited to Calgary and Edmonton in this phase. The microcinema concept is a fusion of both visual arts gallery conventions and more traditional cinematic sensibilities. Consequently these findings will look at both types of media arts presentation.

Calgary

In Calgary, the production artist run centres are the most regular programmers of short-form media artwork. This includes the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers (CSIF), EMMEDIA and the Quickdraw Animation Society, and to a lesser extent NUTV, the University of Calgary television station.

The CSIF has a programming space they control called "Sofa Cinema" which features several programming streams including member screening nights, classic cinema screenings and one-off programming events. Quickdraw and
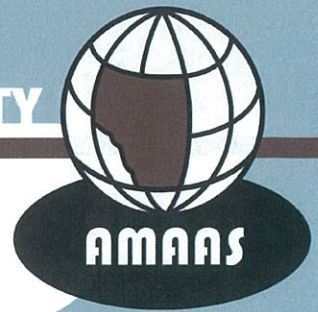
EMMEDIA share a theatre/gallery space, the QAS/EM Theatre, which they manage as well as program according to their annual programming schedules. A recent development is the programming of drop in "crit nights" where by local media artists can screen early versions of their work for critical feedback from their peers. NUTV, in contrast, controls their own television channel at the University of Calgary, a program on SHAW Cable, which is broadcast citywide. In addition, NUTV has become a seasoned Internet video provider, streaming media pieces and live streaming events. Although some of NUTV's output is member driven media art, a large part of its output is campus/community based journalistic work.

In addition there are a number of film festivals in Calgary who often feature short film programs. Local artists tend to be highlighted in the festivals. By and large, these festival screen work at larger cinemas and in a classic theatrical context. Sometimes festivals will program work at the QAS/EM Theatre for more intimate screenings. Occasionally festivals will program short film programs in alternative spaces such as in bars or nightclubs.

Calgary art galleries and museums perhaps offer a more compelling model for the microcinema concept. Calgary's visual arts artist run centres have all, on occasion, set up gallery installations with video components.[3] Often these pieces are more sculptural in their presentation and not always single channel work. In contrast, the Art Gallery of Calgary has a permanent black box room designed for video projections called "The Media Gallery."[4] Although not always programmed, the room shows video in a gallery setting that is immersive and can be projected on three sides. Finally one of the
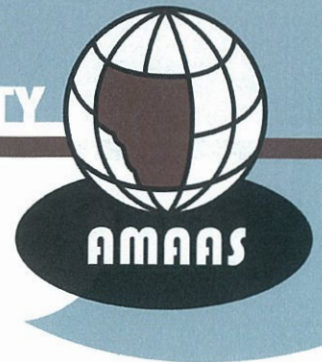
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[3]For example: *Grand Theft Bicycle* was an interactive media art installation at Calgary's Stride Gallery in 2009.
www.stride.ab.ca/arc/archive_2009/gibson_olson_love_main/gibson_olson_love.html
[4] Until January 2011, Dan Hudson's *NEWS, WEATHER & SPORTS* is a year-long time lapse media arts installation that explores the linear and cyclical qualities of time.
http://www.artgallerycalgary.org/exhibit/current.htm

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largest arts organizations in the City, The Glenbow Museum, occasionally exhibits media art in their gallery spaces in both contexts – the sculptural installation, or the projected single channel work.[5]

Calgary has many opportunities for media arts presentation, even short-form work by Alberta media artists. However, the unique quality of our media arts gallery proposal is its permanence and reliability. Over time, the microcinema has the potential to develop a reputation for programming engaging, high quality media art and be a destination in itself.
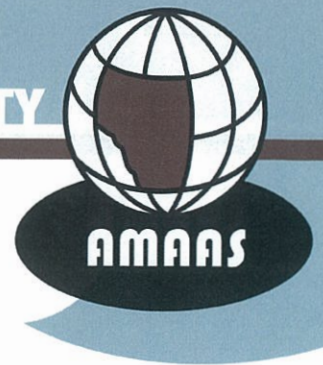
The EPCOR CENTRE

The EPCOR CENTRE for the Performing Arts defines itself as one of three major performing art centres in Canada and the heart of Calgary's downtown cultural district.[6] It occupies one full city block and maintains several performing arts spaces and is home to eight resident arts organizations.

In addition to its resident companies the EPCOR CENTRE has five small gallery spaces in the public +15 pedway system: an interior corridor, which connects buildings in the downtown core without having to venture outside. These gallery spaces are let out, at no cost, to non-profit visual arts programming organizations. Currently the tenants of these +15 window galleries are: Truck Gallery, Stride Gallery, The New Gallery, Untitled Art Society, and the Marion Nicoll Gallery.

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[5] Media Artist Paul Wong created new video for the Glenbow Museum's "Connections to Collections Program" in early 2010.
http://www.xtra.ca/public/National/Artist_Paul_Wong_puts_a_gay_spin_on_macho_cowboys-8146.aspx
[6] http://www.epcorcentre.org/en/AboutUs.aspx

In the last four years the EPCOR CENTRE has also created a staff position for visual and media arts programming, which in addition to liaising with the tenants of the +15 window gallery spaces, selects and curates public art exhibitions throughout the building as well as maintains and exhibits the EPCOR CENTRE's own collection of visual art.

It is through this staff position, as well as an interest in greater community engagement, that the EPCOR CENTRE has begun to program media art and has installed several television monitors throughout the building in a closed circuit loop. The EPCOR CENTRE's interest in having a +15 media arts gallery space, in partnership with AMAAS, was one of the driving forces behind this report.

Edmonton

In many ways, Edmonton has a similar media arts programming profile as Calgary. They are similar sized cities with analogous public institutions, however there is some difference in the details.

Metro Cinema is the only full time media arts programming organization in the province and screens in Zeidler Hall in the Citadel Theatre. The Citadel Theatre is a multi-theatre performing arts venue somewhat analogous to the EPCOR CENTRE in Calgary. As a result of its organizational infrastructure Metro Cinema is the host venue for several of the city's film festivals and media arts programming events. Another media arts anchor organization in the city is Film and Video Arts – Alberta (FAVA), the local production film and video co-op. Often, but not exclusively, FAVA will program works at Metro Cinema.

Edmonton also has film festivals that will play short film packages, such as Alberta's oldest film festival, Global Visions. Again, local artists tend to be highlighted in the festivals, and again these festivals screen work at larger cinemas and in a classic theatrical context.
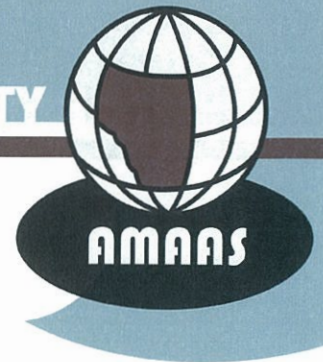
Edmonton's visual arts community also provides clues as to how media art in gallery spaces can be exhibited. Latitude 53, the Artery occasionally feature media art and media artists. The newly minted Art Gallery of Alberta is developing their media arts collecting mandate, and has featured installation work as well as single channel media art. Finally, Edmonton has a number of cultural festivals that will incorporate media arts aspects. The Works Festival, titled features temporary exhibitions of both visual and media art in selected locations in the downtown core. Winterlight, a multi-disciplinary cultural festival celebrating winter also incorporates media arts into its programming. Finally, there are community initiatives such as Storefront Cinema, presented by the Stony Plain Road and Area Business Revitalization Zone, where cinema is presented as part of an annual street closure festival.

Creating a microcinema in Edmonton is a long-term goal of this project. However, the test for AMAAS will be how it executes the microcinema in Calgary, and a careful evaluation of the success of the project. If it is a positive development for AMAAS, the will to replicate it will be large. Finding the right location and/or a supportive partnering organization would be key to the creation of a second microcinema. Currently many of the Edmonton media arts organizations are speculating about a capital building project to re-house the centres. This could be a wonderful opportunity for creating a microcinema space in a shared media arts building.

Alberta

The lion's share of media art production and work of the province's media arts organizations occurs in it its two largest cities: Calgary and Edmonton. However, there are other media arts loci, which might benefit and/or be interested in the microcinema concept. Likely candidates include, Banff, Lethbridge, and Red Deer. Finding supportive partnering organizations, again, would be key in implementing future microcinema projects. There may be efficiencies in scale, however, if AMAAS' microcinema programming

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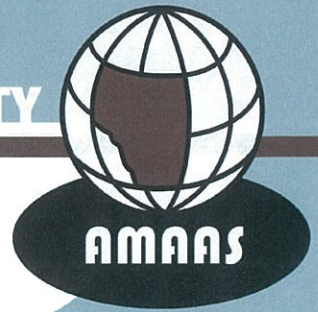
could replicate itself in multiple venues: i.e. one annual programming call that plays seasonally in all of the province's AMAAS microcinemas. The pilot microcinema in Calgary will be the test for the future development of this concept.

GAMA Proposal

GAMA is the working title/acronym for the programming partnership between the Alberta Media Arts Alliance and the EPCOR CENTRE for the Performing Arts. GAMA stands for Gallery of Alberta Media Art.

GAMA Description

GAMA will be a "microcinema" as previously defined, consisting of a large flat screen video monitor with industrial seating for two or three people. To date the EPCOR CENTRE has installed the microcinema screen and designated space for seating to be eventually installed.

GAMA will be programmed year round with a selection of contemporary, single-channel, predominantly Albertan, media art. AMAAS defines media art as: independent artist initiated and controlled use of film, video, new media, audio art and related media. There will be four programs/year each with a program of 4-10 short-form pieces. The programs will be selected by jury. GAMA will strategically time "openings" to take advantage other art happenings in the building.

GAMA Goals

As referenced in this report's background section, GAMA has several goals. The primary goal of this project from AMAAS' perspective is to increase the

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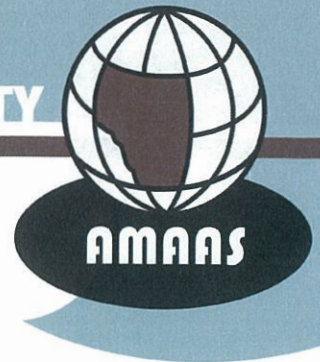
visibility of Alberta media artists and their work. Although the EPCOR CENTRE shares this goal, their overarching aim is to more fully energize and activate the building through increased arts programming, particularly in under animated spaces. In addition, the EPCOR CENTRE has explicitly approached this partnership project with the explicit goal of outreaching to the media arts community.

The public nature of GAMA allows it to become a site for media art interaction between artists and the public. GAMA would also interact with the other gallery spaces, increasing audiences for everyone, as well as reinforcing the reputation of the EPCOR CENTRE as a cultural hub.

GAMA Programming Process

A call for submissions will go out annually to the provincial media arts community, through AMAAS and EPCOR CENTRE networks. In addition AMAAS, through its partnership with Metro Cinema, programs Prairie Tales. Prairie Tales received over 80 new Alberta media art submissions in 2010. The Prairie Tales submission form can be modified to also ask for artist permission to be considered for GAMA programming.

A programming jury consisting of three artists: one representing AMAAS, one representing the EPCOR CENTRE, and one independent media artist, will be constituted. Selection criteria will need to be refined, however some preliminary criteria include:

- Artistic Merit
- Length
- Completion Date
- Diversity of genre
- Contextual considerations – appropriate work for GAMA space
- Additional programming themes (as developed)

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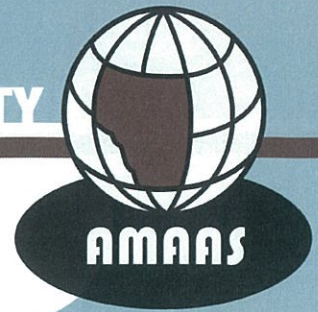
The jury will compose four programs that are between 45-60 minutes in duration. Each program will run on GAMA for approximately 3 months. Each program will have its own opening and be launched, much in the same way visual art galleries present work. GAMA programming will be looped on the EPCOR CENTRE's closed circuit system. Consequently the program will repeat for 16 hours/day or as long as the facility's plus-15 walkway system is open.

GAMA Marketing

GAMA programs will be marketed through the same networks as the call for submissions. In addition, the EPCOR CENTRE will include GAMA openings in its annual programming calendar.

GAMA Budget

AMAAS and the EPCOR CENTRE have committed to an initial investment of $3500 in cash and in kind support for GAMA programming to begin in Spring 2011. As part of the proposal we have developed a budget that would seek additional public or private support through grants and/or sponsorship, primarily to cover artist fees for GAMA programming.

### GAMA Annual Programming Budget - 2011

Revenue

AMAAS (cash)	$2,500
AMAAS (in kind)[A]	$1,000
EPCOR CENTRE (cash)	$2,500
EPCOR CENTRE (in kind)[A]	$1,000
Sponsorship[B]	$1,500

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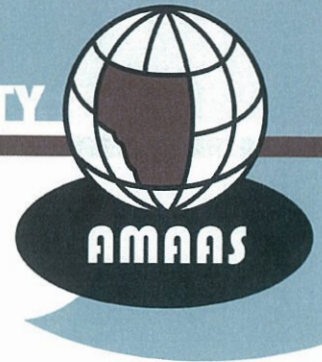
Grants[C]	$5,000
Total	$13,500

Expenses

Jury Fees	$1,500
Artist Fees - Program 1[D]	$2,400
Artist Fees - Program 2	$2,400
Artist Fees - Program 3	$2,400
Artist Fees - Program 4	$2,400
(Based on 6 artists @400/artist)	
Administration	$1,000
Marketing	$1,000
Miscellaneous	$400
Total	$13,500

Notes about the budget:

A. In-kind contribution includes staff time associated with marketing GAMA as well as organizing and supporting the jury process and art openings.

B. The EPCOR CENTRE has in-house expertise in fund development and potentially locate a GAMA sponsor in exchange for sponsor recognition at openings, etc.

C. AMAAS is willing to research and write grants in support of the GAMA project. In addition, the AMAAS Board has approved staff to proceed with a

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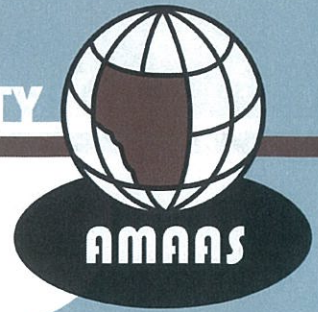
casino license application. If successful, future AMAAS derived casino revenues could be directed to GAMA as soon as 2013.

D. Artist Fees determined using Canadian Artists' Representation / Le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC) minimum fee schedule as a base. GAMA artist fees as proposed are slightly above CARFAC minimums.

Analysis

The analysis section is divided into two parts. The first, a SWOT analysis explores the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the GAMA project. The second is a more nuanced look at the financial and administrative consequences of initiating the GAMA project and a discussion of GAMA limitations.

GAMA SWOT Analysis

Strengths
1. Expose public to engaging media art.
2. Creates exposure for Alberta media artists.
3. Good location.
4. Crossover traffic from other arts programming.
5. Free art (for the public).
6. A resting spot/public amenity.
7. Well-maintained, relatively secure, facility.
8. AMAAS/EPCOR CENTRE programming experience.
9. Artist fees supporting media artists.
10. Unique.
11. Self-contained, no staff resources needed to maintain screenings.

Weaknesses
1. Not cinematic enough for some.
2. Currently seating not determined.

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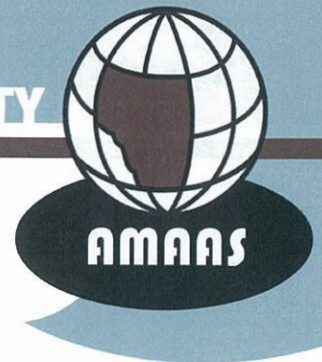
3. Sound issues – low volume, noise interference.
4. Not a private viewing experience.

Opportunities
1. Affordable low-cost venue
2. Developing partnership between EPCOR CENTRE and AMAAS
3. Venue facelift
4. Raising the profile of AMAAS and Alberta media artists in the community
5. Media art openings create social and celebratory opportunities for artists.
6. Sponsorship
7. Connections to the Olympic Plaza Cultural District
8. Developing new programming partnerships.
9. Replicating a successful project in Edmonton.

Threats
1. Deterioration of the AMAAS/EPCOR CENTRE relationship
2. Securing ongoing funding for the project
3. Crime /security at location.
4. Potential for GAMA to become background noise/ignored.

Although the SWOT analysis is overwhelmingly positive, there needs to be further elaboration on some of the points raised. Much of the positive aspects of GAMA come from the innovative relationship between AMAAS and the EPCOR CENTRE and the impacts its will have on media artists and the media arts community. To make GAMA truly successful, however, some thought needs to be put into the physical execution of the space itself.

GAMA would benefit from some kind of visible identity that separates itself from the larger space of the +15 pedway. Signage could help here as well as the design of the viewing area. For example, a floor treatment in a different colour and/or paint on the framing pillars surrounding the video monitor.

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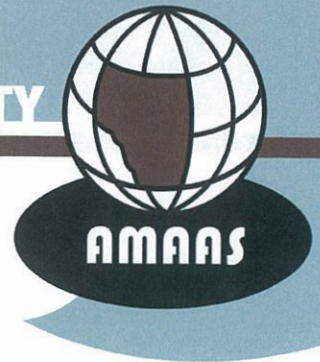
Initially seating was conceived to be two, bucket seat style chairs wired for sound in the headrest to acoustically separate GAMA from the public corridor. However, sound can be supplied from the monitor speakers, and where GAMA is situated, there is currently little to no sound competition from the surrounding environment. The newest concept is to install a bench, which could accommodate 2-4 individuals depending on their proximity to each other. A bench is a gallery convention, particularly for media arts presentations, which suggests both a temporary stop and that there is something worth seeing at this location. A bench has the virtue of instant recognition, it allows for different numbers of viewers, and as well is less vulnerable to damage when compared to high-tech chairs, and is easily replaced.

Financial Considerations

The creation of the microcinema will have ongoing operation costs that are the largest hurdle to overcome. Initial capital acquisitions are a one-time expense. The EPCOR CENTRE has already spent approximately $1000 plus staff time in setting up the monitor at the GAMA location. Further capital expenses involve purchasing and installing seating, signage, and any further treatments to the space necessary to give it an individual look.

Artist fees are the primary operation cost and for GAMA to be successful over the long run, it has to be programmed for many years in a sustainable manner. 2010 has been a year of provincial arts funding cuts and indeed future funding stability is in doubt at the moment. Sharing financial risk, through the EPCOR CENTRE/AMAAS partnership helps however. Also a strategy of securing sponsorships and other sources of revenue adds robustness to the project. Sponsorships and other sources of revenue must, as in every art project, be thoughtfully and responsibly executed.
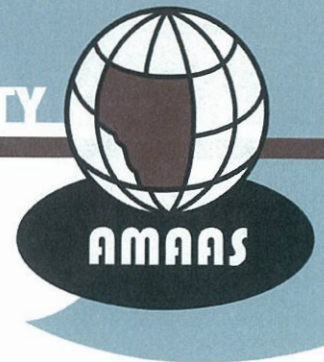
If successive microcinemas are established, for example a second GAMA in Edmonton, costs will go up. It is important to note however that artist fees may not double necessarily: it depends on how programming proceeds and whether or not GAMA could benefit from efficiencies of scale.

Marketing Considerations

GAMA would have the fortune to be the project of two organizations, AMAAS and the EPCOR CENTRE, and would benefit from both of those organizations' communication networks. However, marketing initiatives would also need to be conceived of and executed in harmony by both partners.

The EPCOR CENTRE has an in-house marketing department and already plans and profiles communications for their visual arts programming. GAMA would likely benefit from this marketing approach as well as tie into other arts programming initiatives in the building.

AMAAS also has its own communications network and acts as a clearinghouse for information relevant to the provincial media arts community. This is clearly one of the most targeted audiences for GAMA programming, and any GAMA marketing would use AMAAS' communication platforms to get maximum reach.

The GAMA partners should develop a marketing plan for GAMA, which would include some measurable outcomes: for example, the number of people coming to openings, the awareness in the community that GAMA exists, and audience number estimates. As well the GAMA partners would be wise to create a feedback mechanism for both artists and audiences to comment on the GAMA experience (surveys, comment cards, or email solicitations are possibilities), to gather qualitative information.

Documentation is another consideration for the GAMA partners. Artist bios and statements should be posted near the GAMA monitor to add critical
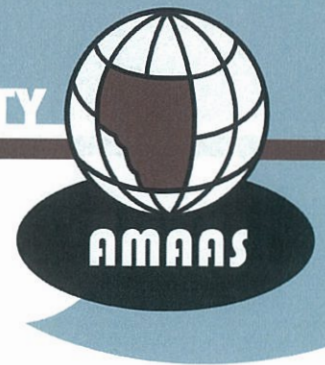
information to the artwork, as well as information on the partnering organizations. Take away programs are a future possibility and/or virtual documentation published on both the AMAAS and EPCOR CENTRE's websites.

Programming Limitations

It is important to note that the microcinema concept is limited to single channel media artwork and unlike gallery spaces does not lend itself to multi-channel presentations or easily have the ability to add sculptural elements to a piece, such as a media arts installation might.

The +15 pedway is a public space, accessed by all ages of individuals. Consequently, programming has to remain suitable to what Alberta Film Classification would consider a general audience. Programming decisions could be made to take film classification into account through the jury process of GAMA.

In addition, programming should feature short form media art exclusively. The human transiting nature of the space does not lend itself to feature length presentations. Moreover, audience turnover is a desired outcome of the project.

Beta-Testing

The EPCOR CENTRE recently held a call for submission for Alberta media art called Vision Verbatum Television (VVTV). The program will run from November 2010 – February 2011. AMAAS was invited to be part of the jury process and VVTV has proven useful as a trial run of processes for GAMA.
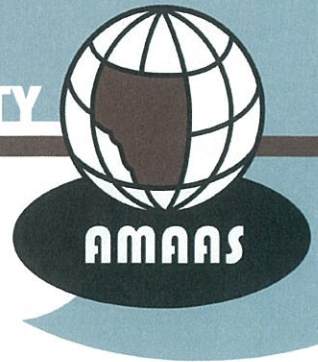
Conclusion

It is important that citizens see the work of local artists. The reflection of our lives through art is partly how we come to know ourselves. Media artists need exhibition opportunities. When artists see their work in the public domain, it meets the marketplace of ideas and critique, stimulating further production and creating a virtuous circle.

The Gallery of Alberta Media Art (GAMA) is an exciting development for the media arts community of Alberta. Not only will it raise the profile of independent media artists in the province, it will also create a new cultural amenity in downtown Calgary at the EPCOR CENTRE for the Performing Arts.

There is strength in collaborating. The Alberta Media Arts Alliance Society (AMAAS) looks forward to working with its new partner, the EPCOR CENTRE, in the creation of GAMA, and hope that it will be a template for future collaborations across the province. The combined talents and resources of both arts organizations will make for a more engaging and well-managed microcinema.

As the partnership develops, it is important that steps are taken to document successes and failures in GAMA's execution. This valuable information will be used to launch a second microcinema in Edmonton and perhaps others throughout Alberta. However, before expansion, it is critical to attract and maintain sufficient resources to make GAMA the permanent and cherished media arts gallery it needs to be.