

Speaker Milliken,
Minister Oda,
Honourable Senators,
Members of the House of Commons,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honour to welcome you to this reception in honour of the Canada Council of the Arts 50th Anniversary. As parliamentarians, we are grateful for this opportunity to express our on-going support for the Canada Council and to salute the importance of the arts in making this country great.

There is no more poignant mark of human dignity than the creative expressions and manifestations of personal and collective imagination. In Canada, we must always ensure that creativity and imagination never be subjugated by any pseudo aristocracy of utilitarianism.

Given that we meet to-day in these hallowed precincts of the Canadian Parliament, perhaps it might be understood why the words of Romain Rolland, author of “Some Musicians of Former Days”, come to mind:

“The political life of a nation is only a superficial part of its being; in order to learn its inner life – the source of its actions – we must penetrate to its very soul by way of its literature, its philosophy, and its art, where the ideas, the passions and the dreams of its people are reflected.”

Thanks to the Canada Council, Canadian artists such as Leonard Cohen, Margaret Atwood, and Robert Lepage are household names. Canadians flock to the Stratford and Shaw Festivals, to the dances of les Grands Ballets Canadiens, and to the hundreds of theatre companies across the country. Canadians read books by Canadian writers put out by Canadian publishing houses.

In addition to supporting the production of art, the Canada Council celebrates exceptional artists through its prizes and awards.

Canadian parliamentarians have the very pleasant duty of approving the funding for the Canada Council. Quite properly, we do not interfere in its work. This evening, though, I hope I am not transgressing this arms-length relationship when I say that the art and the artists the Canada Council has supported over the years have transformed this country for the better.

From time to time, of course, some of these works of art are controversial, but that is part of the process of developing a country that thinks about art, that responds to the questions that artists challenge us to reflect upon.

In closing, I would like to take this occasion to thank all those who work to make the Canada Council of the Arts such a success and to thank the artists for their dedication to portraying Canada's rich diversity. Here's wishing the Canada Council another 50 years.