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15 March 2013

Ms Alice Leung  
Clerk to Panel  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central  
Hong Kong

Dear Ms Leung,

**Panel on Home Affairs**

**Matters relating to ADC Critic's Prize organized by  
the Hong Kong Arts Development Council ("HKADC")**

Thank you for your letter of 1 March 2013 to the Secretary for Home Affairs, I am authorised to reply on his behalf.

In response to Members' questions on matters relating to the ADC Critic's Prize organised by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), I attach HKADC's reply for Members' reference.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Elaine Mak'.

( Elaine Mak )

for Secretary for Home Affairs

## **Response from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council on Matters relating to ADC Critic's Prize**

The Hong Kong Arts Development Council ("ADC") would like to respond as follows to the recent enquiries from different parties concerning the ADC Critic's Prize ("the Project") : -

### **1. Details of the Project**

- (a) In October 2011, the ADC's Arts Criticism Group proposed the establishment of a prize for arts criticism based on a writing competition. Not only as a form of recognition and commendation to encourage better critical reviews, the proposed scheme would also help raise the reading standards of the public through a selection of well written reviews. The Arts Criticism Group also intended to foster a milieu conducive to arts criticism by offering higher prize money as an incentive for arts critics.
- (b) After consolidating the views of the Arts Criticism Group members, the ADC's Administration Office submitted a proposal in a December 2011 meeting for detailed discussion among the members of the content and terms and conditions of the proposed project. These included, among others, the Project's objectives, the eligibility of participants, prizes and prize money, requirements of entry, application methods and budget. Following the discussion, the Administration Office consulted the Group again in January 2012 after revising the proposal.
- (c) Subsequently, in February 2012, the Administration Office submitted the final proposal to the Arts Support Committee for approval. The proposal was circulated and approved by the Committee on 20 February 2012, and \$200,000 was set aside from the 2011/12 Arts Support budget for the Arts Criticism Group to proceed with the Project.
- (d) The purpose of the Project is to scout for talented arts critics and at the same time achieve the following: (1) enhance the status of arts critics and the quality of their works; (2) recognise outstanding works of arts criticism; (3) encourage more outstanding arts critics to write reviews; and (4) promote public understanding of and interest in arts criticism.
- (e) Participants must submit a previously unpublished arts review, and there is no limitation on the art form being reviewed (e.g. drama, dance, music, xiqu, visual arts, film and media arts, literary arts, and so on). For this year's event, entries must target an arts and cultural event that took place or a publication that was published in Hong Kong in 2012. Reviews must be written in Chinese each of no more than 3,500 characters. Participants must be Hong Kong residents aged between 18 and 40.

- (f) An entry must be accompanied by an application form containing the participant's basic personal data (including full name, date of birth and contact details), information on the target of the review (including the title of the work, date of performance/exhibition/publication, organiser and art form), and the title and word-count of the entry.
- (g) Three prizes are offered: Gold, Silver and Bronze, carrying cash awards of HK\$50,000, HK\$30,000 and HK\$10,000 respectively. The aim of the attractive prize money is to give due respect to arts criticism, and to demonstrate that the critique of art is as important as its creation.

## 2. Judging Panel and Assessment Criteria

- (a) Recognising that arts criticism has long been neglected in Hong Kong, the ADC intends to promote arts criticism to the general public as one of the objectives of the Project. We hope to see entries that can provide analyses of the arts in an accessible, yet in-depth and insightful way, to make the arts more relevant to the everyday lives of the public. They are not meant to be professionally written academic essays. In view of this aim, members of the judging panel are not chosen for their specialisation in any particular art form. Instead, the panel is formed by six professionals from different fields, including arts criticism, publishing, journalism, academia, and so on. The judging panel comprises the following members: -
  - Mr Perry Lam, Chairman of the ADC's Arts Criticism Group
  - Prof Leung Ping-kwan (Ye Si), Chair Professor of Comparative Literature at Lingnan University and acclaimed writer (deceased)
  - Mr Yau Lo-poon, Chief Editor of *Yazhou Zhoukan*
  - Mr Mak Shing-fai, Managing Director of Crown Publishing (HK) Ltd.
  - Dr Wong Chi-ching, columnist and former Assistant Professor of the Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University
  - Ms Carmen Poon, Editor-in-Chief of Joyful Books Co. Ltd.
- (b) To encourage popular analyses of the arts by promoting general arts criticism, entries received this year were not assessed according to the art form chosen for review. They were judged on the quality and standard of the writing itself.
- (c) The members of the judging panel and assessment criteria were announced at the same time as applications were openly invited.

## 3. Assessment Process

- (a) For this year's event, the ADC received 60 entries in total. All contestants met the eligibility requirements for entry.
- (b) The judging panel assessed the entries individually in the first round of assessment and determined a short list of contestants for the second round. In the second round of assessment, the judging panel met and discussed the



selected entries, after which the winning entries for the Gold, Silver and Bronze Prizes were chosen, again by giving marks on an individual basis. Finally, the judging panel unanimously agreed on the results.

- (c) To ensure fairness and impartiality, all entries were printed and did not carry any names. Throughout the assessment process, the members of the judging panel had no means of identifying the contestants, and based their judgment solely on the quality and standard of the works themselves. Neither did the members of the judging panel know the scores given to each entry by their fellow panellists. Given the ADC's practice not to disclose marks scored by individual entries, only comments made by the judging panel on the winning entries were made public.
- (d) The ADC only required participants to provide their name, age and contact details with a copy of their Hong Kong Identity Card for verification purposes when submitting their works. No personal curriculum vitae was required to be submitted. During the entire assessment process, the ADC did not transfer any of the personal data to the judging panel. Therefore, the members of the judging panel could treat all entries with impartiality, without any favour or prejudices based on the background of the participants.
- (e) Given the nature of the Project as a writing competition, the ADC's review procedures are not applicable. The ADC has also stated in the terms and conditions of the Project that the decision of the judging panel is final. As for enquiries or complaints made by the media or members of the public in connection with the Project, the ADC will respond in accordance with the usual procedures.

#### 4. Comments and Responses Made by the ADC

- (a) In response to the views on the ADC Critic's Prize from different parties, the ADC issued a public statement on 27 February (see Appendix 1). Questions subsequently received were clarified and responded to by the Chairman of the ADC on 6 March in the *Hong Kong Economic Journal*. The Chairman of the ADC's Art Criticism Group Mr Perry Lam also issued a statement through the ADC on 7 March (see Appendix 2). The ADC always values the importance of the freedom of artistic expression. It is also committed to promoting the overall development of the arts and creating a diverse milieu for the arts. The ADC understands the community concerns about the Project and we welcome opinions from all parties concerned. The ADC will conduct an evaluation to work out an arrangement for the future.

**ADC Critic's Prize  
Statement by ADC**

27.02.2013

In view of the various comments on the ADC Critic's Prize, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (ADC) would like to make the following points :

The purpose of the ADC Critic's Prize is to discover arts critics with potentials, and at the same time to achieve the following objectives: (a) enhance the status of arts critics and quality of their works; (b) recognise outstanding works of arts criticism; (c) encourage more outstanding arts critics to write reviews; (d) promote the understanding and interest of the general public on arts criticism.

Only Hong Kong residents aged between 18 and 40 are eligible to enrol in this competition. A total of 60 qualified entries were received.

The judging panel comprises professionals from different organisations and different sectors ranging from arts criticism, publishing and media to academia. They include:

- Mr Perry Lam, Chairman of the Arts Criticism Group of the ADC
- Prof Leung Ping-kwan (Ye Si), Chair Professor of Comparative Literature at Lingnan University and acclaimed writer (deceased)
- Mr Yau Lop-poon, Chief Editor of Yazhou Zhoukan
- Mr Mak Shing-fai, Managing Director of Crown Publishing (HK) Ltd
- Dr Wong Chi-ching, columnist and former Assistant Professor of the Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University
- Ms Carmen Poon, Editor-in-Chief of Joyful Books Co. Ltd

Details including the list of judging panel, awards and prizes were announced at the launch of the competition. Besides the work, all participants only need to submit their name, age and a copy of the HK Identity Card for verification. There is no need to provide curriculum vitae. By this way, the judging panel treats all participants fairly and equally with no prejudices.

To ensure fairness and impartiality, blind assessment method is adopted. All entries will be in printed version and do not carry any names. Throughout the assessment process, members of the judging panel make their judgment according to the quality and standard of the work itself without making any reference to the participants. After two rounds of assessment (individual assessment followed by group discussion), the judging panel with unanimous views selected winners of the Gold, Silver and Bronze Prizes. In general, the ADC will not disclose scores of the entrants. Only comments of the winning entrants will be published.

With relatively attractive prizes, the writing of arts criticism can be treated with the respect it deserves. This is to demonstrate that arts criticism is just as important as artistic creation.

The ADC Critic's Prize hopes to widen the readership of arts criticism. Therefore, it is expected that the entry works should be targeted to the general public, inspiring them to develop a new perspective of local arts and culture. At the same time, we hope the writing of arts criticism in a lively and interesting way can help nurture readers to explore their relationship with arts and culture, and their social value to a greater extent.



**ADC Critic's Prize**

**Statement by Perry Lam, Chairman of Arts Criticism Group**

07.03.2013

Given that arts criticism has long been neglected and given the cold shoulder, the media attention and buzz following the announcement of the results of the first ADC Critic's Prize came as a surprise. It can even be considered as a windfall. This "sudden" and "special" attention given to arts criticism, however, is partly based on an incomplete understanding of the work of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (ADC), the assessment method of the ADC Critic's Prize and the function of arts criticism. Apart from the credibility of the ADC, the fairness of the ADC Critic's Prize and the reputations of the jury members, also at stake here is Hong Kong's core value as an open, inclusive, rational and knowledgeable society. As the Chairman of the ADC's Arts Criticism Group, it is necessary for me to clarify matters and draw on facts to set the record straight.

Each year the ADC provides grants to various types of arts criticism-related projects, and the ADC Critic's Prize, with a budget of HK\$200,000, is only one of the smaller scale activities. Last year, for example, the Hong Kong Film Critics Society was given a grant of HK\$690,000 for the whole year, and the International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong) a grant of \$800,000. The Arts Criticism Induction Scheme, which included an arts criticism certificate course, writing workshop, online publication platform and award scheme, received a grant of \$860,000. The ADC receives many grant applications for publication projects each year, and the amounts given to successful applicants differ. On average, it is around HK\$40,000.

The aim of the ADC Critic's Prize is to raise the status of local arts critics. Therefore, we decided to give more substantial monetary awards to the winners of the gold, silver and bronze prizes. We hope that in doing so, we can help change the prevalent bean counter mentality, where the value of arts criticism is measured by the narrow criterion of fees paid according to the number of words written. Participants had to be Hong Kong residents between the ages of 18 and 40. All three prize winners met this basic requirement.

The most misunderstood aspect of the ADC Critic's Prize is the assessment method. To manage the large number of grants applications received every day, the ADC uses the peer assessment method, where professional members of same arts genre are invited to be assessors. Given that they are peers, the assessors and applicants inevitably know one another. Some are even friends. For this reason, ADC requires assessors to make declarations of conflict of interest, to prevent any such conflicts of interest during the application approval process.

However, the key concern here is not the approval process of grant applications, but the assessment of the ADC Critic's Prize. How were the winning entries chosen from among those submitted by qualified participants? To ensure fairness and impartiality, all entries given to the jury panel were not identified by name and were printed out. In the entire process, the jury panellists had no way of finding out the identities of the contestants; the works were judged solely by their quality. Given that the ADC Critic's Prize used this blind assessment method, it was unnecessary for jury panellists to declare any conflict of interest. The jury would not practice favouritism because they did not know the identities of the contestants. Therefore, even if a qualified person whom the jury knew had taken part or won a prize, it does not constitute and should not be seen as an undeclared conflict of interest.

Of course, this system is not perfect. Even in the most perfect systems, the persons involved will always have personal preferences and prejudices. For this reason, ADC set up a panel of six individuals to choose the winning works. Points given by each panellist had the same weighting vis-à-vis the total points, which ensured that there would not be "one voice dominating the rest and one person's preferences deciding between good and bad".

The following are some prejudices I have regarding arts criticism. Art must be critiqued, but criticism should not support art by being its cheerleader. Art's greatest enemy is not criticism but indifference; the critic's greatest insult to art is not by tearing it to pieces but by ignoring its existence. Art does not exist in a social vacuum. When discussing art, therefore, there is no turning a blind eye to the social values and power relations it reflects.



Controversy is the life force of arts criticism. Its point of view may not be right but so long as it can stimulate thought and bring about reflection, it has served its function. This is why controversial critics like Susan Sontag and Lung Ying-tai are more interesting and inspiring, even when they are wrong, than those commentators who are politically correct and parrot what everyone else is saying.

Arts criticism is the cling film of art. That Shakespeare's works remain fresh and relevant to our lives today is because they can subject themselves to all manners of often contradicting interpretations. Conservatives, radicals, liberals, feminists and even racial supremacists can mine his works for their own ends.

How should a piece of art criticism be written? We should keep mulling over this question, but under no circumstances should we give it a model answer. There are as many ways of creating art as writing about it. Freedom is a prerequisite of art; the same holds for arts criticism. The top three winning entries are very different in terms of the subject chosen, style and perspective. The discussions so far are overwhelmingly focused on the film criticism by the gold prize winner, which is not fair to the other two prize winners.

We can of course debate whether the point of view of a piece of criticism is commendable, but the basic standards of behaviour of a civilised society must be observed under all circumstances. As a rational and open society, Hong Kong must never lose its ability, confidence and open-mindedness for dialogue and communication with people holding different viewpoints and beliefs.

Perry Lam  
Chairman  
Arts Criticism Group