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## **DCAC Archive : Director's Letters January : February 2010**

I have been reading a lot lately about rights. The right to marriage, the right to die, the right to live, the right to express one's self, the right to protest, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and, well you can probably continue that list for yourself. But it's a funny thing, rights, because we live in a society that has labeled some of them as inalienable. Now, you are probably saying to yourself about now, "Oh my God, why is this guy suddenly getting so political on me?" But it's okay, I am not going to wax on and on politically in the DCAC newsletter. (I am, however, happy to do so at the bar, if you care to meet me there.) But I am going to try and connect the idea of rights, inalienability and art, so I hope you'll stay with me.

I accept the idea that because you are a human being with a soul and a brain that you do have certain rights; and primary in those rights is the right to think for yourself. One has the right to see things as one sees things, to opine and argue freely without fear of retribution (including burning in Hell), no matter whether it's to yourself in your own mind or expressed to others. This right of observation is the means whereby we grow our mind and our conceptual construct of the world around us. And this is where art and the creation of art comes into play. No one can take away your right to create something or see something, construct an opinion about it, and share it with others. They may not be so interested, and there you have to make a choice between being perceived as a thoughtful and reflective soul or a streetwalking babbling nut, but none the less, it's your right, and it's inalienable.

Now connected to all of that is your obligation to exercise this right, which is where things get dicey for some folks. Why should they be obliged to think about or opine about things that they can just as easily let slide? I mean, it's no skin off of their nose, right? But we owe it to the society in which we live to reflect and opine. The world doesn't get any better if we don't. And I for one am not totally content with the world in which I live. I believe it can be better; I want it to be better for my kids, my nieces and nephews, your kids, other people's nieces and nephews. So of course, that means we need places where we are free to posit our thoughts and opinions freely on based on common experiences, and ART is the perfect place for that! No one will live or die based on our disagreements about whether or not a play speaks to modern issues or if a photograph actually conveys the depression of the downtrodden. It's fodder for our mind and spirit to expand and entertain new and possibly forbidden thoughts. ART is where we can imagine that fairies can give a human the head of a donkey, or that doors can open and shut themselves, or that we were the ones chained together in the hold of a ship. We can see paintings and feel joy, sadness, anger, nostalgia and everything in between without justification because it's our right to do so.

I think that by practicing this liberation of our thoughts that we can embrace hope, we can dream, aspire to greater things. That's why I got into art in the first place, to provide that place of introspection and reflection. I call it the "Sanctuary of Art." I always imagined that when people are listening to music, watching a play, seeing a dance piece, or looking at a piece of art of any type that they were deep in their minds, experiencing the wildest stuff, cracking open their subconscious and just riding that tiger. As I matured as an artist, I realized that not everybody does that. Some people are worried that they don't have the right to make up their own minds about art, that they need someone else to tell them if it's good, or if they should buy it, or go to that performance. Or that they aren't educated enough to "get it." But it's not true, the only thing that needs to be "got" is that you see it and wherever it takes you is perfectly valid. If I am describing you, I hope you will take my word for it and exercise this right. Go ahead and hate what everyone says is great, like what everyone else says is crap, it's your inalienable right to do so. And I'll bet that once you're into this groove you'll like it, and maybe find that ART is a real friend, a confidant of sorts that wants to unleash the deepest parts of your soul and let it intertwine with your logic, your politics and your passion.

A better speechwriter than I put part of this idea forward in a speech in Oslo lately. He said, "... we do not have to think that human nature is perfect for us to still believe that the human condition can be perfected. We do not have to live in an idealized world to still reach for those ideals that will make it a better place." I am down with that, but key to that is thinking, believing, and reaching; all things that are fully within our rights as human beings. If you will consider that ART really can be a key to opening the door to those things, then I hope you will join me fighting the good fight to keep the artistic blood flowing in our community. I'll be looking for you at a gallery opening or performance at DCAC real soon, and yes, I will be wondering if you're riding that tiger.

**B Stanley,**  
Executive Director