



## **DCAC Archive : Director's Letters January : February 2011**

When I was a freshman in undergraduate school as an aspiring actor, our instructor one day asked all of us, "Why do you want to be an actor?" The responses varied, as you might imagine, from things like, "I love applause," to "I like to pretend that I am other people," to "I feel a sense of obligation to reflect society back to itself." (None of those was mine, by the way.) After we had all spouted off as best we could muster, he looked at the entire freshman class, which numbered about thirty people, and said that he could guarantee that by the time graduation came around there would only be four to eight of us left. We were shocked by that, and of course all of us decried that observation and swore that we all would still be there. However, upon further investigation I found his assertion was probably right, as our university typically graduated about ten BFAs in acting each year. Almost every freshman class started out about the same size as mine, but without fail it dwindled to a fraction of its original size within four years. And it didn't take long before I saw it happening to my very own class. People by the end of the first semester had transferred to Communications, Business, English Literature, or just out and out disillusionment with the idea of a life in the theater and quickly exited stage right. I often think of that day, even though now I am many years away from it and still perusing an artistic life. And truthfully, I've wondered why he even brought it up. I mean, people jumped that ship quickly enough without his trying to read their future. But I think it had something to do with his own struggle. He was a graduate student, so he had already passed that four-year commitment mark, and probably had to live each and every day with that same question. "Why? Why do I do this? Why do I want to do this? Why don't I want to do something else? Should I do something else?" He wasn't a particularly gifted actor, so I daresay he did think of something else to do.

One of the real joys of working at DCAC is that I meet people almost every day who have faced, and I imagine still face, that question each time they look in the mirror or start their next artistic project. But they don't throw in the towel; they keep working away at their artistic process, one painting, one play, one poem at a time. I heard recently that the way one becomes an artistic legend is to show up for work every day and do your absolute best to achieve your vision. It may sound simplistic, and I personally doubt that it always leads to legendary stature, but I like the gist of the statement: you show up, you work, you try your best. And then do that again the next day, and the next, and the next. Eventually you stop asking: "Why am I doing this?" or "Should I be doing this?" and you replace that mode of thought with: "How can I do this better?" or "What can I do to make this better?" It is at that moment, in my opinion, that you pass over into the "artistic life," and you don't have time to question your place in art, you are

too busy making it. Or perhaps it's a bit like Stanislavski said, "There are people who see themselves in art, and then there are people who see the art in themselves." You keep thinking like that and keep working like that, and after twenty or thirty years you realize that for you, it never was a question about why, or should, or if. You are an artist, it's what you do. Or for another obscure quote, as the Jesuits would say, "What you think about is what you do, and what you do is what you are." (Actually, I don't know if Jesuits really say that, I heard it on G. Gordon Liddy's radio program once.) At a certain point you have created so much work, and spent so much time agonizing over it, that the decision to start seems moot, and there is no finishing in sight.

Washington may not get much play as a great art town, but I have to tell you that it is a great town in which to find true artists. I am lucky to know so many of them, and again, that's one of the truly great things about being here at DCAC, this place is a magnet for artists. I wish I could name them all, but I hate to be a name-dropper. Fortunately, I have the great privilege of introducing one such artist to you in person this month: Richard Siegman. Richard is someone I have known for many years, and he is not only a prolific artist, but he regularly turns his studio into a public gallery in order to give exposure to other hard-working artists. I have been urging him to submit a proposal for an exhibition here for years, and I am so happy that he finally did so last year. I know that running the PASS Gallery (check them out on Facebook) takes up an enormous amount of his time, yet every time I go there he has somehow had the time to create more of his extraordinary work. And since he won't use his own gallery to let the public see what he has been working on, I feel it is an artistic coup to have his work at DCAC. And as if it isn't enough to have Richard's work here, his show is being co-curated by two more artists for whom I have great respect, Joanne Kent and Stuart Greenwell. I hope that you will take the opportunity to come to the opening of Richard's exhibition on January 14 and meet these people. The following week we will be hosting them again at our monthly DCAC Happy Hour at Sutra Lounge, just a few doors down from DCAC. That will be a great chance to chat with the artist and curators; go to the gallery and check the art; then return to Sutra for even more discussion (and drinks).

So whether you are still wondering about being an artist, have been working as an artist your whole life, or realized that the artistic life was best left to someone else, you have tremendous opportunities to meet artists and discuss art at every level here at DCAC. Chances are really good that you will find someone with common experience and insight. Artists are generous with their opinion, and it is a huge part of any presentation of work to get feedback from viewers, so I heartily recommend getting over here and jumping in the fray. Art is a vibrant part of the life of our society, and it's always great to meet someone for whom art is a vibrant part of their life. See you soon.

**B Stanley,**  
Executive Director