



**District of Columbia
Arts Center**

2438 18th Street, NW
Washington DC, 20009
202-462-7833 | info@dcartscenter.org
www.dcartscenter.com

DCAC Archive : Director's Letters January : February 2012

“Where there is no vision the people perish.”

In 1996 this quote was on the back of the DCAC t-shirt. We attributed it to James Hampton even though we knew it was a biblical passage because he had it posted on his garage wall while he created The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly, his only artwork. If you know about The Throne you know that it is not actually a piece of art, it was created with the full intention that it be used on the Day of Judgment by Jesus Christ. Only after Hampton's death was The Throne found in his garage and it eventually ended up at the Smithsonian Museum of American Art where it resides on exhibit today. If you don't know about it, it is well worth the visit.

I have long admired this “sculpture” not because of its religious context (although I must confess that if indeed there ever is any Day of Judgment I so hope that it happens on The Throne) but because of the commitment (it took years to make this thing) and yes, the vision of Hampton. Not only did he see a future where there would be a judgment on all mankind, he also saw the need for furniture and some kind of extraordinary locale at which this whole thing would happen. This sits really well with me because it ties vision to action. It's one thing to envision how things will or should be but it is an entirely different matter to take things into your own hands and take actions that affect it (or effect it, if you like).

DCAC is a result of vision and action. Unlike many non-profit arts organizations, DCAC was not created by its first director. It was not the result of an individual who thought they should have a gallery and theater and then created a board of directors and a non-profit organization around it. It was conceptualized by a group of people who began to meet together to talk about the arts situation in Washington in the late 1980's. They had no notion when they started talking that they were going to start an arts center, they were venting their frustration and concern at the state of the artistic community. Those discussions changed from dismay at what was to dreams of what should be. Soon they were energized with all kinds of ideas about the kind of things they wanted to see happen in Washington. They dreamed big, and in short order they were deep in the planning stage for a new arts center. I have notes from those meetings entitled: Arts Project – Washington.

Interestingly, those founders did not have a financial plan in mind. They supposed that grants and other public support would be forthcoming. Okay, so they couldn't really see into the future

when the bottom would repeatedly fall out from beneath the funding community. They didn't know that there would be the Americans with Disabilities Act which would exclude a space with more stairs than an Escher print from getting government money. But none of that has stopped DCAC from its mission, we did not perish. So here my whole rap about vision and action expands; you see, the vision and the action doesn't need to come from the same people. In our case the founders had the vision, but the artists and audiences who agree with their vision make it possible by their concrete actions; their financial and physical support.

And now, thanks to these actions by our members, foundations are beginning to realize that the original vision of this Arts Project is very much a vibrant and committed entity that resonates in our community. The last part of 2011 saw three foundations partner with DCAC in support of our vision. It's because of you The Cafritz Foundation, The Bernstein Family Foundation and The Clark Foundation have all come forward and decided to give us grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000. Thanks for believing in what we do at DCAC and being a part of it. With your continued support we may gain yet more funding, and believe me, we are working on it. As we head into 2012, I hope that the vision of DCAC will continue to inspire you to action and that together we can create an organization that will be as inspirational to future generations as James Hampton is to us.

B Stanley,
Executive Director