



**District of Columbia
Arts Center**

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DCAC Archive: Director's Letter May : June 2009

Twenty years ago, I was working at an international theatrical research institute in the northern Tuscan region of Italy when I heard that the Berlin Wall was coming down. It was unbelievable. When the first rumors hit the street it was considered fiction, a hopeful ruse, at best. But it was true. And as we all sat before the television watching the now historic footage of people beating that wall down with sledgehammers, jack hammers, even household hammers, we all knew that our world had significantly changed. We, who had been raised with the specters of the Iron Curtain, of check point Charlie, of a death defying no-man's land, of David Bowie's experiences leading to his "Low" album, we suddenly found ourselves hearing the words "unification" and "the challenge of the future" repeated to our amazed ears.

That was also the year that Jesse Helms practically single handedly denied the Corcoran's ability to exhibit the work of Robert Mapplethorpe. A huge protest was organized for June 30, 1989 at 9:00 at the Corcoran by the Coalition of Washington Artists with six other organizations, one of them being the newly formed District of Columbia Arts Center. What an auspicious beginning. Most of the organizations who spearheaded that protest are long gone, but it's twenty years later, and DCAC is still here, as I like to say, "fighting the good fight" and "making the world safe for Art."

It is really a great thing for me to be here for this anniversary. I've been the director of DCAC for 15 years now, and if anyone stands in incredulity at its tenacity and life-force, it is me. When I am asked how we have done it, I always say that it is the people who have come through here that have done it, it has been their commitment, their drive, their beliefs and hopes that have driven this place. At our 20th Anniversary Gala we will honor the visionaries of DCAC, that founding board of directors. You'll find some interesting names on that roster, George Hemphill, Sam Gilliam, Jack Rasmussen, Alice Denney, Annie Gawlak, Herb White, Aaron Levine and others who shared a vision as to what a grass-roots arts center could be. And here we are, not too far off from what they dreamed. I hope you revel in our accomplishment as much as I do. And I hope you will be at the Halcyon House on May the 29th to raise a glass to those visionaries of twenty years ago, as well as to the dynamic presences of the present and our aspirations for the future. Here's to twenty years of DC Arts Center, and to many more twenties to come. Thanks everybody.

B. Stanley,
Executive Director