



**District of Columbia  
Arts Center**

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DCAC Archive : Director's Letters  
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As a long-time Washingtonian one often finds oneself explaining why one stays here. I have with me today the sixteen-year-old daughter of old and dear friends who once lived here. She was actually born here, but since has lived in New York, Arizona and San Francisco, and has on this trip just returned from France. She has moved around a lot and attended eleven schools in her life. "DC looks nice," she says as I drive her around, "I can see why my parents liked living here." In a conversation about the pluses and minuses of living anywhere I find that I can't tell her in just a few words that no, in fact you cannot see why your parents liked living here, because what makes people like DC is not something you can see.

Washington has long abounded with intelligent, dedicated, hardworking artists. When I became active as an artist here, I quickly found an array of fellow creative types with which to work, brainstorm and drink. We were a mix of painters, actors, writers, musicians, dancers and anything else considered creative. Of course, we were a much smaller group in those days. We didn't have cell phones, internet or answering machines. We saw each other all the time. Our interactions were personal; if we wanted to see what someone was up to, we went to their studio, or met them at dc space, or Food for Thought, or Millie and Al's. People would come by our place unannounced to see what we were doing. If we were working, they waited, then we hung out and talked art until the wee hours. It was as much about the people as it was about what they created. It didn't matter what we did, people were always interested in how and why we did it. All the better if they liked the result. Quite a few of those people are still around, and when we encounter one another the conversation often turns to those days and how alive everything seemed. I meet young artists all the time who lament that they don't have that chance; that the scene today is not the same. And no, it is not.

But saying that the scene is not the same is not saying that it is worse. If that were true, we wouldn't be seeing the proliferation of artists and arts organizations that now crowd Washington. I can't open my email without a dozen invitations and announcements popping up to some pretty interesting stuff. Despite the change in the way we interact, the fact is that the main attraction to DC for creative types is the people who are here, because whatever the scene may be, it is the people who make it happen. I hear great things about peer support and encouragement; I hear about people with a couple years more experience helping out newer arrivals. I see the participants in our Sparkplug program, which is primarily about peer critique and support, continuing their relationships and relating to the next generation of participants with a common experience of the program. I have seen enough openings and projects to know

that the sheer number of people interested in art in our area is overwhelming, and it is a diverse crowd of people. And yes, there are still quite a few of us old-timers here, maintaining that old-school approach.

I am wondering about my sixteen-year-old friend with me in the car. As she begins to look around for a place to live, study and become involved with a community, will she say that it was the way the place looked that made her go there, or will it be the people she met? I think about the new people moving to DC. Some are just looking for a scene of any sort in which to participate, but the artists are different, they need to be stimulated and encouraged. It seems that they catch on to the great vibe that is the heart of this city's art world. They may move on to live and work elsewhere, but what they gain by being a part of this group of people will always be a part of them. And they a part of us.

So as far as this one is concerned, when I talk about why I stay here or what has been good about being here, I always come around to the people; to you. You are what makes DCAC and every other arts space ion town possible and necessary. You make the scene and you make the art or support the artists. I thank you; I thank you for making DC what it is today, and I thank you in 20 years for having been part of the fabric of this community. And I thank you for making this a great art place 25 years ago, you know who you are.

**B Stanley,**  
Executive Director