

## State of the Art Center Friday, January 10th

Good evening everyone and thank you for joining me to celebrate the work of the Center, its teaching artists and students, and for sharing what looks like a beautiful dinner with each other. I really feel very presidential tonight, not because of the coming election season, but because I can say with full confidence the *State of the Art Center is Strong*. We have strong students, strong teaching artists, a strong board, strong partners, and I have amazingly strong colleagues. We are all working together and creating a strong and caring community.

From the financial prospective, we've continued to right the ship and build the underlying capital strength that will serve the community and the Center well into the future. Last year our earned income reached \$880,000 in comparison to in the prior year's \$845,000. We also received more than \$300,000 in contributions and, in spite of a very volatile stock market, ended the year in positive investment territory with modest earnings from our accounts.

On the spending side, we once again reduced annual expenses over the prior year. And although our just concluded annual audit will show a deficit of about \$70,000, we ended the year with positive net cash flow of about \$9,000, meaning on a cash basis, we ended the year with 10K more than we began it with.

### **But a strong community means more than numbers alone can explain.**

As you likely know by now, I believe deeply in the power of art to bring people together, to allow us a safe space to both understand and celebrate our differences, and to create opportunities for people to get what is inside them, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally—and which otherwise might remain hidden— out. It amplifies voices and invigorates dialogue, it reminds us of our shared humanity and offers solace, healing, and joy in a challenging world.

For me, there is no better example of the power of art in our community than the Annual Members' Exhibition. Because I believe so strongly in art's ability to help us come together, I am going to use tonight to illustrate that power by challenging each of you to use the art on these walls as a vehicle to get to know someone you haven't met. Walk up to anyone standing in front of any piece and introduce yourself, start a conversation — about the art, about your practice, about the world— about anything. I promise you, you'll be happy you did. Get to know one another and discover what your life might have been missing in the 5 minutes beforehand, when that person was unknown to you. I mean it, let's all commit to this one simple act before the night is through.

Tonight we come together to celebrate you, to recognize the many contributions you make to our community, to share some highlights of the past 12 months, and some insights into where we are going and what you can expect to see over the course of the next 12.

In the past year, programs at the Center offered just more than 400 classes, more than 300 of which ran. We increased our average student per class ratio, further building our organizational sustainability. We served more than 15,000 individuals. We had more than 4,000 students. Of those, our 11 week summer camp served just slightly less than 1,000

children from 5-15 years old and our Community Partner Programs served more than 500 individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities and from marginalized communities. We were able to provide more than \$10,000 in need based tuition assistance to more than 35 students and families.

Our exhibitions celebrated the creativity of our members, teaching artists, professional artist members, and our students living with disabilities both cognitive and physical. We held both the 15<sup>th</sup> AND 16<sup>th</sup> annual Betsy Meyer Memorial Exhibitions for Contemporary Art, honoring the legacy of long time teaching artist Betsy Meyer. As a result, 6 new and deserving artists each received a \$1,000 prize in recognition of what they contribute to the contemporary art landscape in the region.

Most recently, we celebrated the life and creative legacy of our own long time student, and ceramic sculpture artist, Etta Winograd, with *Playing with Fire*, a retrospective of her more than 5 decade career in art. *Playing with Fire* was significant not only for its universal appeal but also the astounding number of works that sold (more than 70) and which brought in nearly \$35,000 for the Center. It was our single best grossing show in almost a decade.

And if all that wasn't enough, with the help of generous funding from Karen Lotman, who for the last thirty years has been single-handedly funding our weekly programs at the Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Chester, we created a new program at the Overbrook School for the Blind, instantly doubling our creative engagement of folks with visual impairment.

Our latest Community Partner Program has our reach extending all the way into the Philadelphia School District with a three-year mural program at the Joseph W. Catharine School in Southwest Philadelphia. This program, which runs weekly during the school year, serves about 95 fifth graders for whom our program is the only school-time exposure to art learning and art making available to them. On the coldest day of winter so far, about 65 students, teachers, administrators, donors, board members, staff and change-makers gathered for a 9 am ribbon cutting ceremony dedicating the 1<sup>st</sup> of three sections of this beautiful garden mural in what was a very emotional tribute not only to the kids and their creativity, but also to a teacher they all love who recently passed away.

But this was not our only celebration. In March we celebrated the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Betsy Meyer Memorial Exhibition and in November, the 16<sup>th</sup>. This exhibition is so special because it combines two major ingredients of our success: remembering the talents and contributions of a long time teaching artist, and celebrating her legacy. This celebration of Betsy is only possible because of the generous and ongoing support of her family which has endowed this exhibition over the last 15 years and annually provides an additional \$3,000 of support necessary to fund the artist awards.

And as recently as this past Monday, we celebrated another significant contribution to the Center when we dedicated and officially opened the Marjorie Lewis Memorial Library and Conference room. We were fortunate to have Marjorie's only living relative, her daughter Julia, with us to remember her mom and express our gratitude for the amazing gifts she left the Center. Her bequest included not just her entire 1,500 volume art library, but also a significant bequest (more than 6 figures), which was instrumental in helping us return the Center to solid financial footing.

So many of you here turned out to celebrate Marjorie's contributions and the very significant continued contributions of Julia. I thank you for making it a priority in your schedules. And it thrills me to report that on Tuesday, after Monday's dedication, I heard from Julia. She was so moved by the turnout, the dedication and our community's efforts to honor her mother and what she meant to the Center, that she instructed her financial advisor to make another, five figure financial gift to the Center which we gratefully received that same day.

Briefly then, what can you expect to see in the future? We still have some celebrating to do and in the spring we intend to do just that by honoring long time teaching artist and recently retired mentor to many here tonight: Bob Finch. I won't tell you what we're going to do to honor Bob, but I'll remind you that Bob was passionate about the growth and artistic courage of his students, from his most advanced to his 1<sup>st</sup>-day newbies, Bob felt it was important to find any way possible to celebrate our students' work. That's the hint, stay tuned for more info in the spring.

We are going to continue to offer innovative and poignant exhibitions beginning with a celebration, in fall, of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's suffrage, so relevant to this election year.

We are on a quest to build a more inclusive Center which ensures a welcoming creative environment for anyone who wants to participate in our community. You can expect to see a vibrant center with a greater diversity of students, teaching artists and community members, and organizations participating in our programs, holding meetings and sharing ideas.

You should expect to see that more of our creative ideas emanate from within our membership and our community. We want to build an understanding in our students and stakeholders that the Center is yours and it is for you to make what you want it to be. To do that, we need to hear from you. So, please don't hesitate to come to me with your ideas, your desires and your dreams. I'm always happy to make you a cup of tea and listen.

My job and my desire is to create the Center the community wants. Together, with your help, we will get there.

So this is the power of community: to empathize, recognize and honor one another, to share and inspire, and celebrate with each other.

And this is the power of art: to create beauty and make meaning, to build understanding and to open hearts, to connect people and realize our shared humanity.

It takes all of us, board, staff, teaching artists, students, art appreciators and benefactors.

This work does not come without a price however. In order to stay strong and to meet both our mission and our commitment to our community, it takes money. Fully \$400,000 of our annual budget must come from contributions to meet all of the expenses necessary to offer our programs and services at their current cost. To put that in context, it means that for every dollar we earn in class tuition, we must get 35 cents in contributions to cover the cost of running our tuition based classes. That may be surprising to hear, but it is true and has

been true going back more than 15 years. This is the nature of a nonprofit organization. It takes generous support from caring people to keep us going.

In closing then, I want thank a few people who made this celebration happen and to recognize the supporters of tonight's event and awards. Remember? There are awards. Without their generous financial support, tonight - and many nights and days like this - exploring and celebrating our individual and collective creativity would not be possible.

I want to thank my amazing colleagues who work tirelessly to make events like this seem effortless.

A special thank you to our board volunteers who guide the ship, keep their eye on me, and very generously support the Center with their time, talent and, frankly, an amazing amount of money so that we can focus on the work and the mission.

And I want to thank my partner in exhibition-crime, the woman who mostly in solitude makes our exhibitions happen, takes care of all of the details that I don't even know are necessary, supports my crazy ideas, laughs off my misguided whimsy and isn't afraid to tell me when I'm about to make a huge esthetic mistake. Please show the love to Paige Cherrington.

And finally to tonight's event and award sponsors:

- To Nicole Gannon and Brandywine Living at Haverford Estates which have provided a great deal of tonight's spread in addition to one of our awards and year-long support of our programs
- Board member Nathalie Wetzel whose support make the community prize possible
- The Winograd Family in support of the Etta Winograd Ceramic Prize
- The Mosaic Society of Philadelphia
- Merion Art & Repro, Ed Gamburg
- Artist & Craftsman
- The Camera Shop
- The Great Frame Up
- Dick Blick and Flemings Steakhouse

Can we please give them all a round of applause, and please, please remember their support of our community when you have an opportunity to support their establishments.

And finally, I want to remind everyone that we can't have a community award unless the community votes, so vote for your favorite piece in tonight's show. Voting will close at 7pm and we will be back here to announce all of tonight's winners at 7:15.

Thank you for listening, thank you for creating, and thank you for supporting your community, our community, us! Enjoy the evening.