



Office of the Secretary-at-Large

US Department of Art & Technology

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May 23, 2005

Mr. Davide Croff
President, la Biennale
Ca' Giustinian
San Marco 1364
30124 Venice

Dear Mr. Croff:

As Secretary-at-Large of the US Department of Art & Technology, I congratulate you on your effort to ensure that this edition of the Biennale is not merely a container of artistic activity. Rather, it is an opportunity to reflect on the state of art midway through an apocalyptic decade of extraordinary crisis marked by uncertainty, deception, religious extremism and global terrorism – which propels us ever forward into the darkness so that we might seek a way out.

I am proud to congratulate a President who has shown such spirit, determination, and leadership in the cause of defending Artistic Freedom. And I am proud to have this opportunity to thank the artists gathering in Venice, underground and established, transmitting an etherliquary of ideas that won't burn; who continue to draw back the veil on the convoluted and the ideology of Now.

Looking back to 1910, when the artists gathered in the Piazza San Marco for the Biennale nearly 100 years ago, the Futurists fiercely demanded their independence, hurling their now famous leaflets:

“We repudiate ancient Venice, exhausted and ravaged by centuries of voluptuousness... We want to heal this rotting city, magnificent sore of the past... Let us fill the stinking little canals with the rubble of the tottering infected old palaces. Let us burn the gondolas, rocking chairs for idiots, and raise to the sky the majestic geometry of metal bridges and smoke crowned factories, abolishing the drooping curves of ancient buildings. Let the reign of Electric Light come at last, to free Venice from her venal hotel-room moonlight.”

The Biennale dismissed that day of protest, but they could not dismiss the spirit of the Artist!

Years later, activist artists returned to Venice and brought down the 1968 Biennale, an attempt to modernize its still fascist statute. And in 1974, the artists declared to the world an end to political oppression – responding to dramatic events in Chile – a protest against the dictatorship of Pinochet. The Biennale as an active interlocutor, an international act of artistic mediation, was at last born! In that historic year, the artists reclaimed their sovereignty, but the hopeful start they made was not yet fulfilled. By 1980 the Biennale had sunk from its 1968 *crise de conscience* and the liberating hopes – so yearned by the avant-garde – would need to be expressed in new terms. Now, 25 years later, artists and curators return to Venice to complete the task begun in 1910. They gather armed with nothing more than the desire to discover the zones of light and dark in our convulsed world through the introduction of fragmentation, dissolution and even death – and



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they claim liberty! And because they have acted, the Biennale is today a beacon of hope for the artists, Italy, and the World.

The path of freedom that you have chosen is not easy, but you will not travel it alone. America honors your courageous choice for liberty. And as you transform the Biennale into a poetic, experimental, and visionary forum for new modes of artistic expression, the US Department of Art & Technology will stand with you. For we intend to act upon the mandate set forth by the founder of the American Pavilion, Walter L. Clark, President of Central Art Galleries of New York, who stated in 1930 at the opening:

“It is proposed that, if the United States government ever creates a Department of Art, the building will be turned over to the supervision of such a governmental department... We believe that friendly interchange in the arts can but have an important influence in drawing the various nations of the world together in amity... that art itself may be vastly stimulated by an interchange between nations.”

As we have built a free, artist-driven Department of Art & Technology here at home in the US, the ties that bind artists of all countries must now grow deeper as well. We respect your desire to join the nations of the world through the Venice Biennale. And so, we encourage your close cooperation with our new initiative to reclaim the American Pavilion as requested by Walter L. Clark, and transform it as the “Virtual Pavilion” – a borderless Pavilion – for the 2007 Venice Biennale. US DAT Deputy Secretary Jeff Gates has added:

“We intend to honor Mr. Clark’s 20th century dream at the dawn of the new millennium. We take full responsibility for the American Pavilion in order to benefit the global art community – not to dictate American ideals – but to offer open and equal exchanges among artists throughout the world.”

World leaders will come to know that the peaceful resolution of cultural conflict is dependent upon the integration of artistic practice at the broadest tier of the world community. Without walls or borders we will march towards a universal humanity: beyond those arbitrary national and geographic boundaries. Peace will never be achieved unless freedom and the universality of art and the artist is experienced by people of all nations.

Together we will build a future that allows generations of artists to speak freely in political and social arenas, to build personal aesthetic worlds, to shape a new reality; and as a result we are helping the nations of the world to do the same. As people grow to understand that the Venice Biennale is an international arena for artists’ vision, we will be there to support you. And last year, when you rediscovered your active role to engage and to provoke by making bold and trend-setting selections, you showed your courage to rebuild an identity and a rethinking for the Biennale by launching an ambitious project to document the state of contemporary art – its codes and languages, its new and old paradigms. We at the US Department of Art & Technology look forward to working with you, and so is the art world everywhere, which knows that international festivals of contemporary art are all about challenge, bravery and being absolutely cutting-edge.



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In reviewing the 2005 program, I see you are making important strides in your contribution to freedom's cause, including the artistic projects commissioned – from the Arsenale to the Giardini. In recent months, as press materials have circulated, as talk has spread, the world has marveled at the hopeful changes taking place from Austria to New Zealand. Before there was a Purple Revolution in Iraq, or an Orange Revolution in Ukraine, or a Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, or the Rose Revolution in Georgia, there was New Zealand's et al, "the art of keeping the mind in that state wherein there is neither inhibition of nor reaction to thoughts." There was the Austrian Hans Schabus, who understands the Pavilion as "a singular space, not as the site of an exhibition, an object for artistic intervention." And there was Britain's Gilbert & George, developing new ways of showing "taboo-grating images of the social world," and, most notably, "bodily fluids and waste." Your courage to present these artists is inspiring citizens everywhere and sending a powerful message that echoes across the art world: Artistic Freedom is on the march, transforming the future of every nation and every people on Earth!

Building a free society is the work of generations. It took nearly 100 years of struggle since the Futurists before freedom fully took hold of the Biennale. Many of the artists who gather in Venice this year are too young to remember the protests of 1974, but they take up freedom's cause and finish the work that their predecessors had begun.

Now, across Europe, the Middle East and beyond, we see the same desire for social and political transformation burning in the hearts of young activist artists. They are demanding their freedom – and they will have it.

As free nations, the United States and Italy have great responsibilities, and together, we will do our duty. Free societies are engaged societies. And by extending freedom to artists who have not known it, we will advance the cause of art, and so we will advance the cause of liberty.

In this global struggle for liberty, our duties begin at home. While peaceful revolutions can bring down repressive regimes, the real changes and the real challenge is to build free institutions in their place. This is difficult work, and through the US Department of Art & Technology, we are undertaking it with dignity and determination. We have taken tough steps to transform our Administration, (which, incidentally, recently named Edward Ruscha as the new Secretary of US DAT) and to crack down on anachronistic tendencies. We are building a new society where the artist is respected, where government information is freely appropriated, where a vigorous opposition to the status quo is welcome, and where new models are achieved through the power of virtualization and the suspension of disbelief. Here at the Department, we have a new vision of a new America in which the ruling power will be dematerialized by the artist, and where freedom and social anarchy will be the birthright of every citizen.

This was a dream of the late Marshall McLuhan who once said, " To prevent undue wreckage in society, the artist tends now to move from the ivory to the control tower of society." Today, we pay tribute to our Canadian patriot who became a great leader of the global media revolution. In building a free society, we honor his memory and we carry on his legacy by facilitating the artist's need to extend aesthetic inquiry into the social sphere where ideas become real action.



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We live in historic times: freedom is advancing from Washington, DC to the Piazza San Marco. With the “Virtual Pavilion,” we will transcend our physical reality, entering the medial space in the dream of an aesthetic hyperculture and its unlimited possibilities – to inhabit this space with a polymorphic and long-lived presence. And yes, we will prevail!

As artists gather in Venice from around the world, producing multiple operations of redefinition and appropriation, you can take pride in this fact: they have been inspired by the Biennale and they take action with your success.

You must know that the seeds of liberty you are planting in Venetian soil are flowering across the globe. With my visit to the Biennale for the opening ceremonies, I will come to thank you for your courage, and to deliver my reportage freely, quickly, and ubiquitously across the globe. I deeply value your friendship, and admire your determination. On behalf of all artists in America, thank you.

Gloria alla Biennale! Gloria agli artisti!

Yours truly,

Randall M. Packer
Secretary-at-Large, US Department of Art & Technology

Cc: Under Secretary for Art Ned Rifkin, Deputy Secretary Jeff Gates, Under Secretary for the Bureau of Cultural Transformation David Ross, Chief of Protocol Alice Denney, Under Secretary of Homeland Insecurity Jonah Brucker-Cohen, Director of the Office of Freedom of Speech Mark Amerika, Envoy Plenipotentiary to the European Union and Latin America William Gilcher, Under Secretary for Domestic Affairs Phyllis Hecht, Acting Assistant Deputy Under Secretary Steve Dietz, Rosa Martinez, Maria de Corral, Robert Storr, Alessandra Santerini, Leanne Mella