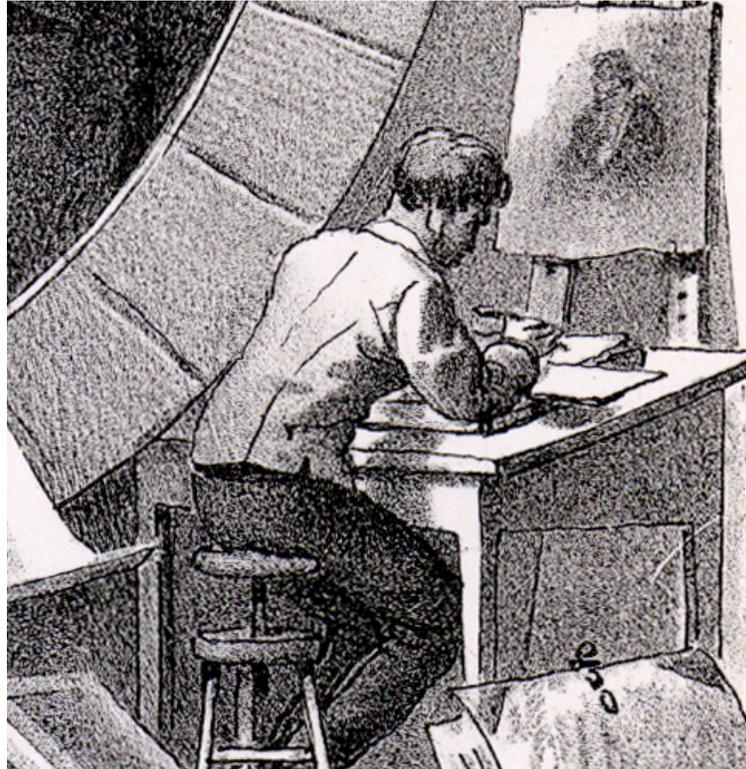


ON ARTISTIC VOCATION



2007 CSLUB College of the Arts Commencement

Address by Gregorio Luke

Let me begin by saying that there is something wonderful about someone who decides to become an artist. It takes courage to be a dancer, a filmmaker, an actor, a designer, a visual artist, a musician or an art historian.

How many young people choose professions they don't really like simply because they will provide them with a comfortable living? How many people never dare to follow their dreams and choose instead lives of conformity and boredom?

Nothing of this exists in the graduating class of CSLUB College of the Arts. All of you are here because you have a dream, because you have a passion, because you have discovered something that you love to do and you would be willing to do it no matter what. That thing, that hidden passion is called vocation.

Your vocation is your treasure, your greatest gift, protect it. Never forget that you are artists, and because of that you are immensely rich even if at times you experience poverty. You

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belong to the aristocracy of the spirit. Do not allow anybody to talk you into conforming to the status quo. Continue developing your vocation no matter how difficult the circumstances. Have faith in your talent.

I asked Dean Don Para what was the common characteristic he found in successful graduates? He responded: "Perseverance and patience. Those who succeed are the ones that keep on going, those who do not back down."

You must also remember that art as a vocation is a way of living that must be constantly nourished. You can do this in two ways: through discipline, the daily practice that allows your body, your voice or your hand to become the instrument of your will.

The second way to nourish your vocation is through life itself. This is why it is so important that you travel and if possible live abroad for some time. Read as much as you can, see as much art as you can, live and love as much and as intensely as you can.

My mother Gloria Contreras is a choreographer. She worked many years with George Balanchine. I asked her, what was the best advice Balanchine had given her? Two things, she said, first: "Don't work to sell, create and throw" don't worry about selling, if you sell, see it as a bonus but never allow it to become the driving force of your artistic production. The second thing is "Don't listen to the applause or the insults. The critics have to eat, but you don't have to read them." Do not follow trends or fads; listen instead to your inner voice. You must work to please yourself and the people you respect, the rest is noise.

We have talked about the artist as an individual but we must never forget that art is also a social entity. The power of art derives from its capacity to unify and inspire.

Ernst Fischer in his essay, *The Necessity of Art*, explains the origins of art. According to Fischer, primitive man gained power over nature when he discovered tools. With a bow and arrow for example, he can

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hunt a fast running gazelle; with a spear he can confront a bear. But as soon as he discovered this new power, he also realized his enormous limitations. He cannot summon rain, or stimulate the fertility of the land, or determine the abundance of the hunt. However, in his attempt to do so he performs rituals, he dances, he paints in caves.

Art originates as a magical tool with which primitive societies intend to modify events beyond their control. The wonderful thing is that these artistic rituals work, because of the effect they have on the people who perform them. By dancing or singing together, people do become more powerful because they strengthen the communication between themselves. By painting animals in caves, people gain power over their prey because by drawing them they have to observe and understand animals in greater detail.

Art brings people together. It inspires them to do great things. It increases their awareness and understanding of other people and the world around

them. Unfortunately, in the mechanized world we live in, art has lost its place. We can see this in the diminishing social status of the artist, the dwindling government support and the reduced media attention. We are witnessing the disturbing spectacle of an artless society, where millions of people have no access to artistic creations. This is why, in addition to your own artistic work, a new militancy will be required of you.

The example of the Mexican muralists is useful. During the long dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, artists played a marginal role in society, always dependant on the favor of the powerful and the wealthy. After the 1910 revolution everything changed. Artists such as Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros became public figures; they demanded public space to create murals and participated in politics. Their words became front-page news. Artists became the conscience of the nation. You should aspire to play a similar role to the Mexican muralists today. You must not be content to be marginal. You must



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to gain central stage in society. The world will be better for it.

It is clear to me that the skills you possess are crucial to the revitalization of our country. How many lives could be touched and improved if they came in contact with the arts? How many kids could be saved from violence and drugs if they danced or played an instrument? But remember nothing will happen unless we make it happen. The challenge of our generation will be to reweave art back into the fabric of society. That is our task for the future.

Don Quijote, the central character of the greatest novel ever written, becomes mad and in his madness believes he is a knight in defense of justice and the weak. As long as Don Quijote believes in his dream, he is invulnerable and can overcome every obstacle. What is even more amazing is that he gradually transforms the world around him by the sheer power of his imagination. The saddest part of Don Quijote, and for me of all literature, is when he is finally convinced that he is not a knight. The moment he loses his madness, he has no alternative but to retire and die.

My dear friends may you never lose your madness, may you never forget your dreams. May creativity guide you! May fantasy always be with you!

For further reading:

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