

Harry Teague's Art Base acceptance speech:

I can't tell you how honored I am to help celebrate the Art Base at this annual gala event, easily the most fun celebration of the year, don't you think. (Are we having fun?) And how wonderful for me to have all of you, dear friends here to share the fun with.

I have to admit to being a little surprised at being singled out to join the likes of James Surls, Charmaine Locke, and Isa Catto, for the Melva Bucksbaum Dedication to the Arts Award. I'm especially honored here in the valley, where there are so many extraordinary artists, and so many devoted supporters of the arts. But I am comfortable receiving the award on behalf of all those who understand and support the essential role of the arts in a healthy community, and the role that institutions such as the Art Base play in integrating them into all of our lives.

I am thinking of the generous financial support from all of you of course, but also of those who have led us to where we are now. This would include the art pioneers who laid the foundations upon which our marvelous Art Base is based: like the founders of the Aspen Center for the Arts that preceded the Aspen art Museum. (Dick Carter, Missy Thorne, Laura Donnelly, Dede Brinkman, David Floria and I am sure a bunch more, and the first director, Philip Yenowine who went on to be the educational director at MOMA).

I think of Robert Harth who moved the music festival to be more accessible. Then there are the influential directors of the Anderson Ranch, Brad Miller, Jim Baker, Betsy Chaffin, Doug Casebeer and others who turned that almost defunct organization into the thriving nationally recognized arts organization it is today. And of course, there is our own beloved Deb Jones who started the Wyly at the Aspen Community School that moved to Basalt and has evolved into this fantastic Art Base as it grows and moves to a new glorious location under the strong leadership of Genna Moe and her great staff.

In a world where art has been commandeered, coopted, and commodified, in a world where art is sold for unaffordable prices, displayed in inaccessible locales, or sometimes intimidating locations, and smothered with pretention, it is so important that the Art Base is here to remind us with its diversity and accessibility that art is actually "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Look at the democracy of the wonderful 10x10 show here now where the work of internationally known artists mixed in with our own.

My personal commitment to this idea and to Art Base has been shaped pretty much by luck and good fortune. I was fortunate to have grown up in a family where art was taken seriously, a family of artists and designers, surrounded by art of all sorts, and parents who encouraged my own artistic endeavors with an enthusiasm that no doubt exceeded the merit of my work. Yes, support those kids—every one of them is an artist. The smell of turpentine still gives me goose bumps, and reminds me of my uncle's painting studio in Vermont and the reverence I felt when I entered that special sanctuary.

So why this special reverence for art? Why all this effort to support and display local artists, to educate new artists young and old, to have community events like this? Well there are no doubt many reasons, but I would like to submit the one most compelling to me in these disturbing times. When all seems black or white, art is ambiguous and invites interpretation and discussion; what an important lesson for our increasingly polarized world. Art offers a voice to those who are unable to speak, a medium to express ideas and feelings that are not quantifiable when there are so many among us deprived of the opportunity.

In a time when it is difficult to listen to the news, art becomes the sanctuary, art reveals truth, art reflects who we are, art can heal divisions within our community. This I believe. I here paraphrase the writer, Toni Morrison, "This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We [paint], we [make], we do language. That is how civilizations heal." Thank you Art Base for this award I treasure.