

Inauguration Speech of Cecelia Fitzgibbon

Eighth President of Moore College of Art & Design

September 12, 2012

Thank you John, and thanks to all of the speakers, Mayor Nutter, Art Block and Fran Graham and to all of the members of the Boards of Trustees and Managers. I am particularly thrilled to be welcomed so warmly by the staff, the students, our esteemed faculty and the alumnae. I am grateful to the supporters of the College who are here this evening. Your investment has benefited many of our students who would otherwise not be able to attend Moore. I also want to recognize Drs. Mary Linda Armacost and Happy Fernandez, previous presidents who helped make the institution what it is today.

It is so wonderful to be surrounded by so many dear friends, colleagues and by my family, my sisters Coleen and Elizabeth who have traveled from Boston and Florida and my husband Scott and sons, Stuart and Ross. Because of their love and support, I am able to stand before you today, ready to devote the next phase of my career to leading Moore College of Art & Design. Thank you guys, I love you with all my heart.

Many of you know that my husband is a practicing artist. As I have watched him struggle to enter the world of painting and commerce, I have struggled to understand why the intrinsic social and economic value of artists' contributions are not immediately recognized and honored. For a long time, I have wanted to know why we must work so hard to convince Americans about the importance of the arts. Why artists and their work have such an uphill battle in claiming magnitude as a societal force. This is especially puzzling since artists represent a larger group than the legal profession, medical doctors or agricultural workers. Why do we get such a bad rap?

Let's look at history: Instigated by the Victorian notion of "exotic other," fueled by the industrial revolution and the measure of worth framed only as capital goods and commodities that can be sold in the marketplace, and housed in what has been referred to as "jewel box" museums, artists and their work have been marginalized as unimportant and not contributory to the public good. This has been perpetuated by a media that characterizes artists as kooky, provocative and eccentric, but always as "outsiders." And, to a certain extent, artists have relished this role because it allows them to sit on the periphery, to observe, to criticize and to distance themselves from a world that often rejects their contributions.

In the late 20th century, something began to change. In 1979 and published consistently through 2008, the American philosopher Lewis Hyde wrote his book, *The Gift, Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*. He suggests that we have it all wrong. He defends the value of creativity, by asserting that it brings more to contemporary society than a commodity. In fact, artists through their creative impulse generously provide society “images by which to imagine our lives and once the imagination has awakened, the act becomes procreative: through it we can give more than we were given, say more than we had to say.” He suggests that art, which is a gift to society by its creators, “frees the genius” of our civilization.

We are also hearing and reading much about the need to recognize the “creative economy,” a term coined by economist and author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida. This trend reflects the growing sense that creativity is an economic engine, and that creative people – from designers to artists to entrepreneurs – provide a critical stimulus for economic growth. Most futurists such as Charles Landry, author of *The Creative City*, project that “the industries of the twenty-first century will depend increasingly on the generation of knowledge through creativity and innovation.” There is other public dialogue about the role artists and the arts play in building community, addressing social concerns and enhancing learning. My colleague Ben Cameron, of the Doris Duke Foundation, refers to the role of the arts as “orchestrating the social interaction of individuals.” Marian Godfrey, formerly of the Pew Charitable Trusts, talks about the potential for artists to reinterpret technological advances and points us to the NEA’s recent reference to artists’ contribution to “creative place making.”

Given all of these contributions, why is the creation of art and the role of the artist still not entirely valued? Surely we need all of the creative solutions we can get? Of course every product, be it cars or packages has the creative stamp of a designer, every community enjoys an enhanced and beautified environment, every student benefits from a disciplined and different way of thinking as a result of the inspiration of an originator. So, where is the gap?

Perhaps this disparity lies in the ways in which artists were traditionally trained? Perhaps the model of focusing solely on cultivating creative genius does not sufficiently prepare artists to take their rightful place as an important force in society and economics.

In fact, it is the work that Moore College of Art & Design is doing in addressing this gap which makes it unique among schools of art and a very exciting place to be. Every day, we cultivate the innovative talent of our students by teaching them to be great artists and designers. We give them the tools and skills to yield a brush, a pencil, a powertool and – now- an iPad in the development of their artistry under the instruction of a very fine and internationally recognized faculty. But we also view our job as giving students the capacity to understand the impact of their work. This is the beginning of cultivating leadership, of developing an understanding of the credibility, trust and vision necessary to influence others. The leadership literature talks about special people who have the capacity to gaze across the horizon of time and imagine a better world, and then to inspire others to follow them to achieve remarkable things. A review of the accomplishments of Moore’s alumnae will demonstrate that many of them have accepted this challenge.

Many students (at 18 years old) do not come proclaiming, “I want to be a leader.” They often confuse leadership with positional authority, with a title or a job as a “boss.” But most of them leave energized

by their artistry and positioned to seize their own destiny because we arm them with tools to grow as leaders. We do this by coaching them before they enter the work force in their internships; giving them leadership development experiences; emphasizing written and verbal communication of their artistic intent; calling them “Emerging Leaders” and “Business Scholars”; awarding them leadership fellowships and giving them networking development opportunities. I have seen the students take these opportunities to heart. Consider the story of Devin, Class of 2011, who came in as a self-described quiet, shy student. She decided sometime in her first year that she would be the President of Student Government someday. Through leadership coaching she found her voice, and became the Student Government President as a junior, continuing as President as a senior. She has started her own business - and has her first runway show at Fashion Week in NY, which is going on as we speak.

Or the story of one of our current students who grew up in the foster care system in Philadelphia, but as a talented graphic designer has participated in every leadership opportunity available to her, including her current service on the Student Council. Her talent and determination against all odds have positioned her well for a career and a successful and meaningful life.

There are more stories such as these, there are more students finding their place, creating the bridge between art and leadership, commerce and gift. This is an institution that embraces its role as a force in the community, as a place for education and empowerment, as a cultural center ready to close the gap by seizing an opportune moment for the arts and artists to claim their rightful place as crucial to a thriving society. This is the time to position artists as essential and it is our time to lead this effort of great consequence, which is why I am so honored and excited to take on the role as the 8th President of Moore College of Art & Design. Thank you.