

2009 State of the Arts Address

Delivered November 18, 2009 by Craig Watson, Executive Director, Arts Council for Long Beach, at the Art Theatre

Good evening and welcome to the 2009 State of the Arts and Distinguished Arts Awards. Tonight we gather to reflect, but mostly to celebrate. To celebrate the accomplishments of three great arts leaders and one special institution....and in doing so, celebrate the Long Beach arts community for all its history and all its potential.

And what better place to do it than in this beautifully restored theater, itself a tribute to the creativity and artistry of its original designers and to the current day developers Jan van Dijs and Mark Vitter who saw its beauty and chose to bring it back in all its glory.

Isn't this a metaphor of all that is possible when we set our minds to something and we commit to high quality and we commit to see it through? The result is testimony to what is possible when we have the right people and the determination to accomplish a great task.

In a few minutes you will hear testimony from a cross section of our community leadership extolling the importance and quality of our honorees. In each case, behind the words, we must remember, is the **ART**. The art that inspires us...the art that pulls us out of our daily moments and transforms us, sometimes subtly...sometimes dramatically. You each have had such moments. A moment when you said...I want MORE of this feeling, more of this experience.

This past year, our arts landscape continued to evolve, to deepen and even expand....let me count just a few ways (and forgive me for leaving out countless other examples!):

-Long Beach's own Sophiline Cheam Shapiro was named a National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment for the Arts. Sophiline and her husband John run the acclaimed and internationally recognized Khmer Arts Academy and this honor, the highest in our country for a traditional artist, puts Sophiline into the company of B.B. King, Mavis Staples and John Lee Hooker.

-Our marvelous and singular Museum of Latin American Art has hired a new Director, Richard Townsend, and the promise of his leadership, coupled with the beautiful Museum expansion and visionary support of the Gumbiner family means we will continue to experience the community-wide glow from this very important institution.

-The California State University at Long Beach continued to train and graduate the largest group of art, film, music and theatre students in the Western United states. This population represents much of the energy that fuels our Creative Economy...

-A rash of remarkable anniversaries...the 75th year for our outstanding Symphony...the 80th anniversary of the LB Playhouse....the 100th for our Municipal Band....the 25th for ICT ...the 35th for the Found Theatre...

-If you were anywhere near downtown or the waterfront this summer, you could see with your own eyes and hear with your own ears, the role that the arts and specifically, music played during the Summer and Music series, bringing new crowds to the area, including the restaurants, shops

and attractions there. The same would be true if you participated in any of the First Friday events in Bixby Knolls or events here on 4th Street Retro Row. Each of these areas led by innovative executives and supported in part by our forward thinking Long Beach Redevelopment Agency. The RDA understands that the arts can and should be central to our economic vitality.

-And even in our poor economy and with the cutbacks in funding, the Arts Council announces this week annual grants to the groups, large and small, as well as individual artist fellowships, that you see listed on the screen. Each of these organizations or artists is an integral part of what makes Long Beach distinctive!

PROFESSIONAL ARTIIST FELLOWSHIP

Lara Odell
Pamela K. Johnson
Sunny Nash
McLean Fahnestock

OPERATING GRANTS, LEVEL I (\$250K-\$1M budgets)

Khmer Arts Academy
Long Beach Opera
Long Beach Playhouse

OPERATING GRANTS, LEVEL II (budgets >\$1M)

International City Theatre
Musical Theatre West
Museum of Latin American Art
Long Beach Symphony Orchestra

COMMUNITY PROJECT GRANTS

Partners of Parks
University Art Museum
Carpenter Performing Arts Center
South Coast Dance Arts Alliance
Historical Society of Long Beach
Hmong Association of Long Beach, Inc.
Camerata Singers of Long Beach
The Found Theatre
Arts and Services for Disabled
The Garage Theatre
The Second City Council
Jazz Angels

NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT GRANTS

Bethune Theatredanse
Primetime Players
Rogue Artistic Ensemble
Khmer Girls in Action
Long Beach Museum of Art
Deborah Wallin

Kenneth Walker Dance Project
The Living Love Foundation
Long Beach Shakespeare Co.

Lastly, we just completed our first celebration of GLOBAL, the Arts Council's new initiative to transform October from Arts and Humanities month, into something more unique...with greater potential. We know with certainty that we are on to something that taps a deep well of interest. GLOBAL, an acronym also meaning Greater Long Beach Arts Lab, is meant to hold all the best of the arts to be found or developed in Long Beach. In the end, the GLOBAL events calendar helped to promote over 350 events in October, many existing and long standing, but also several new or expanded events.

GLOBAL 2009 was an appetizer, but 2010 and beyond will move us closer to our vision...the creation of a month-long celebration of the arts that attracts local, regional and international guests to stay in our hotels and shop in our neighborhoods....to sample our multi-cultural feast and for those from out of town to say to their friends... "have you been to Long Beach lately?"

All of these accomplishments spell big results for our entire community. Because the truth is, the arts are a powerful economic engine that can drive tourism, create jobs, and build healthy communities.

Last week, Otis College of Art and Design published the latest in their annual study of the "Creative Economy" in LA and Orange Counties. By creative economy they mean those fields and industries that rely at their core on the creative talent of artists, musicians, filmmakers and designers. What we know from this, is that one in six jobs in these communities is connected to the creative economy. It is one of the largest job creating sectors in the Southern California economy, generating over \$139 Billion in revenue and \$5.1 Billion in local tax receipts to State and local government.

In a much tighter definition of economic impact, we know that just 22 Long Beach arts groups generated \$46 million in expenditure and economic activity in 2008. And we know those dollars had a further rippling effect in our local economy.

I don't have to tell anyone in this room that this has been and will continue to be a very tough, extended period of difficulty for non-profits in general and the arts in particular. And yet if the arts are an economic engine for our region and increasingly our community, how do we keep this engine going?

As with anything really important...We invest in it.

We scrape and fight and advocate for things we care about. We invest our time, our tears, our talents and ...dare I say it...our tax dollars! We do this, because a job in the arts is every bit as real a job as one in any industry or any endeavor we want to hold on to and build up in community.

Just last week, the Long Beach Community Foundation hosted a new Digital Media Arts Summit to bring together – many for the first time – digital media artists and organizers from across Long Beach. John Tarnoff, one of the guest speakers, discussed what it would take for Long Beach to fully realize its own digital media arts community. He said the national digital media industry is consolidating – we can't rely on outside forces to make it happen. Instead, we must invest

locally. That message applies just as much to our entire arts community. And it starts with you – with me - by adopting full responsibility for our community. I am fully responsible for the arts in Long Beach. And so are you. Each of us is. When you think about it, this philosophy is both empowering and freeing. If we all have responsibility, we know we can always count on one another. But perhaps most importantly, we know that if WE don't act, no one will.

If we are to continue celebrating anniversaries and fostering the Sopheline's of tomorrow, we...both personally and collectively... must take responsibility. We all can do more.

More to help the Long Beach Symphony survive one of its most challenging periods;

More to extol the world-class opera we are blessed to call our own;

More to heal the wounds with our historic and critically important Long Beach Museum of Art;

More to keep the arts alive in our public schools even as the parcel tax fails;

More to ensure that our artists have viable places to exhibit, perform and create their art...they are magicians in our midst...

More to support the arts that are found in neighborhoods, churches and community centers.

And just how do we do this “**MORE**” in a time of **LESS**?

We can renew our season subscriptions to our favorite organizations and upgrade our membership level. We can invite a friend to come with us to an exhibit, a concert, a performance. We can follow through and make that end-of-year contribution we were contemplating and add a few more zero's to the end of that number! If asked to serve on a, Blue Ribbon committee looking at new and continuing models for municipal support of the arts...you can say, “Count me in”! And when asked to come out to support this Mayor and this City Council as they struggle to find new sources of support or even continue the old ones...you can say, “what time should I get there?”!

So tonight, after we have honored some of the most creative among us, accept the challenge of ensuring that Long Beach becomes nothing less than an acclaimed, international destination for all the best the arts have to offer.

We do this because we are committed to the simple and powerful belief that the arts have the ability to transform lives, transform communities, transform nations.

Thank you!

(Slide on screen ends with Margaret Mead quote)

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

-Margaret Mead