



A Few Words from Down Under And the Winner is Art

by Judith McGrath, first run in our Dec. 2001 issue

A dear friend and ex-student of mine called the other day to share some good news. It seems she's been short-listed for an award; a State Arts Sponsorship Prestige Award to be precise. She was so excited, and totally impressed despite never having heard of the presentation, and could I please explain it all to her. To be honest, I knew less than she did.

After a few e-mails to "my sources" and phone calls to "those who should know" I learned all about the fantastic party; top notch three-course meal served with the best Australian wines, excellent entertainment, wall to wall VIP's, etc. but very little about the State Arts Sponsorship Prestige Award. So I put in a call to a friend in the Ministry for Arts and Culture who enlightened me. He explained how the scheme was set up a number of years ago by the appropriate government department. Its purpose is to acknowledge and reward the private and corporate sector for its support of the arts, to stimulate sponsorship for the arts and advocate art patronage. At a posh annual dinner, awards are presented in a variety of categories ranging from major contributions made by big business to outstanding commitments made by individuals. I passed this information on to the dear lady who was even more excited and delighted.

For my friend to be honored in this way is all well and good, she certainly deserves public acclaim for all she does behind the scenes to support the arts in this town. However, her nomination started me thinking about the need for such awards and the gala evenings at which they are presented. I'm neither looking to bite the hand that pets the patron nor searching for a hidden agenda, I'm just trying to put it all in perspective. Yes there is a problem with securing sponsorship for the arts. Tax incentives do only so much to entice financial backing while paying to have your corporate logo printed on everything from programs to bill boards is reserved for big ticket items. Yes there is a need to encourage a broader range of sponsorship for non-blockbuster events. Unfortunately small business is too busy to get involved with backing art projects and individuals are intimidated by the thought of being A Patron. Considering these facts, one can see how awards that acknowledge a variety of contributions, money, skills, time and energy, would provide a more inclusive approach to support for the arts. After all, people do appreciate a thank you for offering a helping hand.

What I find disconcerting is that we must drag people kicking and screaming toward the concept of supporting the arts. I can't help feeling sad that art patronage has deteriorated to the point where we need a gala event to reward John Q. Public for his unflinching tenacity in the face of Kultcha. It makes me wonder how much the evening will cost and would the money be better spent if it were given directly to a particular dance troupe, theater company, recording or film studio, or artists' co-operative?

The caterers, kitchen hands, waiters, bar staff, cleaners, ushers and photographers at the function will no doubt be paid, I wonder if the performers will. I know of one conference dinner where everyone from the managing coordinator to the parking lot attendants were paid for their expertise, while the entertainers received only a big round of applause. Yes they were still at university; studying dance and drama full time while working

part time to cover their living expenses, no doubt like most of the kitchen hands, waiters, bar staff, ushers and parking attendants. The only difference between the "workers" and the "performers" is the latter doesn't provide a service they only entertain.

For many, any artistic presentation devoid of a Celebrity or a Professional isn't Real Art, so they shouldn't have to pay for it. Be honest, how often have you passed a street busker without dropping a coin in the hat? Or attended a gig at a tavern and not bought the local band's CD? Or avoided a live theater production or art exhibition lacking a Big Name because of the ticket price? If you choose not to pay for these presentations because you consider they have no value you have a problem, one that has nothing to do with finance. It is the inability to recognize art; you think it's play so you won't pay. Yes art is an extension of play and so it should be. Ah but we're all grown up now and don't have time to make up ghost stories in the dark, dance around the back yard with an old curtain tied around the waist, pretend a stick is a light-saber, sing into a hairbrush microphone, strum a plastic guitar, or keep a box of crayons in the desk draw, you'll say. And I'll say, how very sad.

Art's position in society is misunderstood because it is lumped in with sport and entertainment, other forms of play. We understand sport's place in society; it's a vicarious competition that places heroes in a hierarchical ranking so we know who is The Best. We understand the part entertainment plays in society; it provides us with vicarious experiences and celebrities we can envy or emulate so we recognize who is The Best. Yet we can't comprehend the position art holds in society; one of providing a commentary on communal priorities and recording our cultural history. Isn't the news media supposed to comment and record history? Sure, but unlike the media that reports the facts of life and tells us what is, art reflects the spirit of living and shows us what can be. We just don't understand that. Because of this lack of understanding, sponsorship for the arts has waned while support for sports, entertainment and the media grows.

Long gone is the old fashion Patron of the Arts, the philanthropist who supported creative individuals because they felt it was a way of giving something back to society. They've been replaced by government agencies and big corporations that outwardly go into Medici Mode while behind closed doors they keep meticulous records on every request granted and penny presented. It's done for the benefit of business not the love of art. Philanthropy has been replaced by Random Acts of Kindness (a phrase I detest because it places courtesy on the endangered species list) that are so rare they must be celebrated at Gala Award Presentation Nights.

My friend honestly deserves to win an award. Her acts of kindness and support for people in all facets of the arts are hardly random. She is not rich but generous with her time and skills. She is a true patron of the arts who understands the need for art in the community. She appreciates how artists hang their soul out for public scrutiny whenever they paint, play or perform; that true artists are on a life journey and need to pay their way. She also appreciates amateur and professional sport, enjoys a two-tissue-box chick flick, reads the occasional woman's magazine and has her radio dial set to the current affairs channel.

She deserves kudos and recognition because, although she may not be a Re-

continued above on next column to the right



naissance man, she certainly is a daughter of the Medici.

Judith McGrath lives in Kalamunda, Western Australia, 25 minutes east of Perth. She received a BA in Fine Art and History from the University of Western Australia. McGrath lectured in Art History and Visual Literacy at various colleges around the Perth area, and was an art

reviewer for *The Sunday Times* and *The Western Review* both published in the Perth area. McGrath was also a freelance writer and reviewer for various art magazines in Australia. She also co-ordinated the web site *Art Seen in Western Australia* found at (<http://www.artseeninwa.com>). McGrath is currently enjoying retirement.

Bob Jones University in Greenville, SC, Features Russian Art Collection

The Bob Jones University Museum & Gallery is presenting its newest interactive exhibition at its satellite location, M&G at Heritage Green in downtown Greenville, SC, as part of its 60th anniversary celebration this year. As one of the few American museums collecting Russian art in the mid-1900s, M&G reveals six centuries of Russian culture through a beautiful display of art from the Golden Age of Imperial Russia through its exhibition, *Rublev to Fabergé: The Journey of Russian Art and Culture to America*, which will be on view through Jan. 2013.



Christ the Pantocrator (Vserdzhitel), Workshop of Pavel Ovchinnikov, Russian, active late 19th century. From the Bob Jones University Collection.

Of the more than 50 objects on display, 45 are part of M&G's collection with more than 20 of the museum's works once owned by members of the royal Romanov family and formerly displayed in their palaces, private rooms, and chapels. These hand painted, jeweled icons and unusual objects - once gifts to and from the Tsars, gracefully introduce a modern audience to a long lost era of Russian history, simultaneously revealing the unique avenue of how Russian iconography was gradually imported into the American culture of the 1930s.

Highlights of the show include an Imperial Fabergé Egg (a first for the SC Upstate), designed by the "Jeweler to the Tsars," Carl Fabergé, a Fabergé icon and Fabergé frame with a picture of the last Romanov family from the Marjorie Merriweather Post collection at the Hillwood Museum & Gardens, and icons from some of America's earliest collectors of Russian objects found in collections including Allegheny College, Rochester, and St. Louis art museums. The egg, on loan from the Cleveland Museum of Art was on display through January 2012. As M&G curator, John Nolan, notes, "The egg's inclusion in this exhibit was especially appropriate since it is the only Imperial Easter Egg designed with a painted icon inside." Fabergé's Imperial Eggs are famous worldwide for their delicate craftsmanship, and with only 42 of 50 known to exist in the world, visitors to M&G at Heritage Green

continued on Page 14