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New RISCA Head Elected

by Kathryn Keller

Citiartnews recently spoke with three new RISCA appointees and prominent members of the community; Daniel Lecht, RISCA's new chairperson, Henry Kates, and George Bass. We were interested in learning more about their views of the Council and what they would like to see it accomplish. Their commitment to the arts and contributions they feel they have made to the arts in Rhode Island were also discussed.

Daniel Lecht

“I like all art,” proclaims the newly elected Council Chairman Daniel Lecht. Lecht, President of the Rhode Island Lithograph Corp., in Pawtucket and a former member of the board of Artists International, hopes for a liberal arts budget so that the Council can “work towards making sure everybody gets what they need and deserve.” He added that the Council “must look at who serves the people the most benefitally” in appropriating funds, that individuals as well as groups should be supported in all areas of the arts.

Since March, Lecht has been a member of the advisory committee of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. He referred to discussions of that group regarding the various ways individual states can raise money for the arts. He cited the “lottery for the arts,” held in Massachusetts and Sydney, Australia, as one method of raising money, though not necessarily the most viable one for Rhode Island.

“What's good for art is good for the community and for business... Arts support is not a one way street.” —Daniel Lecht

In order to increase support for the arts, Lecht feels the business community must be made to understand the “ripple effect” of art on the economy. “I’m a business man, obviously I’m interested in business. What’s good for art is good for the community and for business. I believe that for each dollar you give to the arts, you get back a dollar and ten cents...” He stressed community support for the arts throughout the state because the arts give in return; “arts support is not a one way street.”

Lecht described his own contribution in terms of personal patronage extended into his business. A collector of contemporary art by local as well as foreign artists, he says he is personally interested in the work his company prints. He arranges for the printing of a work because he likes it, or in aid to a struggling artist. He believes individuals should be recognized in their own day and rewarded in a fashion commensurate with their talents.

“Artists should be paid equally to industrialists. Why should a president or a chairman of the board make more money than an artist that has achieved comparable capability?”

George Bass

Newly elected Council Vice Chairman George Bass, a playwright and artistic director of Rites and Reason, Brown University's Afro-American theatre group, would like the Council to create a climate of improved resources for the arts which would reach "ordinary folk." He describes his presence on the Council as that of "an artist, a black artist, and a person committed to the realization of substantive support for arts experiences for a broad-based sector of the community." "The recognition of arts experiences as an essential part of the intelligent living" is the goal he is working towards.

"Although I am university trained and therefore influenced by the classical tradition, I would say that my work is directed towards community arts." Bass believes that artists themselves can learn and find new inspiration from a "dynamic interplay" with "folk coming to the arts anew, with no learned expectations." "Artists in our state are no different from anybody else. They’re concerned with their own needs, and sometimes have a tendency to be excessive in their commitment to elitist postures. Excellence has very little to do with the tradition that informs one’s aesthetic sensibility. Excellence has to do with skill, talent, and discipline, not form or mode of expression. Sometimes there are attitudes which tend to alienate a significant portion of our population rather than inspire them to more meaningful participation in the arts." As an artist, does Bass find civic leaders and businessmen sympathetic to the needs of artists, and effective administrators of an arts budget? "It depends on the individuals involved, on their skills, expertise, and level of commitment. Ideally, yes," he continued, because "ideally, the arts should be supported, enjoyed, and experienced at a deeply personal level by all sectors of society; ideally, the arts should be an essential part of everybody's life." Bass added that for most adults, the influence of art upon their lives depends on their early exposure to it as children. He calls this exposure the "crayon and paper plate" variety. And "that's not art..." Thus the "corporate mind" is often brought to bear in arts management. Says Bass, "It's fine for merchandising but it may not be appropriate for defining and building a structure for the advancement of the artist." When queried about his position on Mayor Clarke's "Art in City Life" he continued on page 3.