

“Political Art and Artful Politics: ArtsWeek 2009”

ArtsWeek 2009 Closing Reception

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

Indiana University

Wells House

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5:15 (speaking program at 5:45)

1. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My wife Laurie and I are delighted to be here as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of ArtsWeek, which has become one of the many traditions that binds the IU campus to the city of Bloomington.

This collaboration between Indiana University and the city of Bloomington plays a vital role in strengthening the bond between the university and the community in celebration of the arts.

Several people deserve our special thanks for their dedicated efforts in organizing and carrying out the many activities and projects that ArtsWeek highlights.

I understand that a number of people on the ArtsWeek Coordinating Council are here this evening. Would you mind raising your hands so that we can recognize your tremendous efforts? Would everyone also join me in thanking the chair of the ArtsWeek Coordinating Council, Sherry Knighton-Schwandt, Director of Communication and Special Projects in the Office of the Vice Provost for Research. Sherry's tireless efforts

on behalf of the arts in this community are becoming legendary. Congratulations to all the artists who had projects funded, and special thanks to Doug Booher.

2. THE INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE OF POLITICS AND ART

On January 20, 1993, at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, poet Maya Angelou said,

“Do not be wedded forever
to fear, yoked eternally
To brutishness.

The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new steps of change.”¹

I am sorry that Dr. Angelou could not join us this evening, but we look forward to her visit next week. Her words of inspiration and hope still resonate today as we stand on the cusp of a new era in American history. That day in 1993, Dr. Angelou became only the second poet in American history to deliver a poem at a presidential inauguration. From Robert Frost’s “A Gift Outright” in 1961 to Elizabeth Alexander’s “Praise Song for the Day” delivered just over a month ago at President Obama’s inauguration, which Laurie and I had the honor to be there to hear, each inaugural poet has conveyed a sense of gripping challenge as well as optimism that comes with new beginnings. Of course, these inaugural poems exist within a particular historical moment. Each is immersed within the political realm and represents one of the many intersections of art and politics. For the second year, ArtsWeek explores such intersections.

¹ Angelou, Maya. “On the Pulse of Morning.” Inaugural Poem for President Bill Clinton. Washington, D.C. 20 Jan. 1993.

These intersections are certainly not new, and they are by no means an exclusively American phenomena. The Medicis during the Renaissance, Social Realism as an international artistic movement, *The Goddess of Democracy*, sculpted by Beijing art students and displayed in Tiananmen Square: Each of these offers a perspective on international artistic expression that inextricably links art and politics.

These first weeks of President Obama's tenure as the 44th President of the United States reinforce the sense that political art and artful politics are two international languages.

3. ARTSWEEK AND NEW FRONTIERS IN THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

ArtsWeek 2009 continues that tradition with features such as the IU Art Museum's exhibition of Chinese Socialist Realist Prints; a workshop exploring the links between Darwin's *Origin of the Species* and visual, poetic, and performing arts; and a preview of the documentary *The People Speak*, inspired by Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* and *Voices of a People's History*. Of course, these are only a few of ArtsWeek's signature and spotlight events that include ice sculpture, music, theater, visual art, and more.

Over the course of the last five years, ArtsWeek has been enhanced by the New Frontiers Program in the Arts and Humanities. This grant program was designed to foster path breaking research, scholarship and creative activity in the arts and humanities, and was originally funded by a five-year grant from the Lilly Endowment of \$1,000,000 per year.

New Frontiers has provided over \$3.4 million in support on the Bloomington campus during its first five years and over \$4.7 million to all eight campuses. In those five years, it has supported 230 projects from departments and schools at IUB, and 367 projects

from departments and schools on all eight campuses. It has led to publications, presentations, performances, and national and international exhibitions.

We are deeply grateful to the Lilly Endowment for its original support of this important initiative, and I was immensely pleased to announce last October that the university would be extending New Frontiers' funding for another five years to support IU's outstanding faculty.

4. CONCLUSION: ART DISTILLED AND CONCENTRATED

That faculty has been—and remains—vital to extending and enriching IU's glorious tradition in the arts and humanities, one of the treasures of Indiana University and of the Bloomington community as a whole.

With thousands of events taking place throughout the year, IU and Bloomington more generally are at the heart of a vibrant arts community whose essence is distilled and concentrated during this special week. I understand that Maya Angelou will be coming to the Bloomington campus next Thursday, thus extending our celebration of the arts for just a little while longer. Of course, every day of the year is a celebration of the arts in Bloomington. This week and all year long, let us heed her words and, like the horizon,

“lean forward
as we place our own
new steps of change.”

Thank you.