

Editorial COMMENTARY

by Tom Starland, Editor and Publisher

A Few Things the Arts Could Learn from Sports

The other day I was doing some channel surfing on the TV and I came across an old event which included a bunch of senior golfers. These were guys from the golden days of golf - at least of people my age. It got me thinking about the visual art community.

In most sectors of sports there is a natural progression for climbing up the ranks. There are pee wee leagues, school leagues, college leagues, pro leagues and then senior leagues. In the arts, except for the distinction of "in school" all artists are competing together for exhibit space, grants, and media coverage.

I wish at times there was a more structured division - after school - such as emerging artists, professional, and then senior artists. I'm sure other folks could think of other division like academic educator, mid-career artist, or even commercial artist.

I'm more interested in seeing the competition between the emerging, pro, and senior artists separated by well defined lines.

Let's say that an artist is an emerging artist once they leave school for a period of ten years. After that point they can no longer be considered an emerging artist. Under this distinction they should be able to compete with other emerging artists for grants and exhibit opportunities - just for emerging artists. During this period they should not be permitted to win major awards meant to go to artists who have produced at a high level for a number of decades.

It might seem limiting but at least the artists competing would be at a comparable level - although all artists are not equal in talent, business, social, and media skills.

I have known tenured university professors that have applied for opportunities designed for emerging artists and I have seen

young artists, although very talented, receive awards designed for lifetime achievements.

If you decided to become an artist after you finish high school - you have ten years, if you go to college or university for four years - you have ten years once you're out, if you stay to get your masters or PHD - you have ten years - after that point, and if you're a person who one day had a vision that God told you to paint on cardboard - you have ten years to call yourself an emerging artist.

There should be special programs for these artists to prepare them for becoming professionals.

The point is - you can't be an emerging artist forever. And, emerging artists shouldn't be given the same opportunities and accolades as artists who have been doing their thing for 20 - 40 years.

On the other end of the spectrum, I think like the PGA, where once a golfer turns 50 he can go on the Senior Tour and compete, I think there should be an age cutoff for artists where at that point they can go on a Senior Tour - of sorts. In the arts that age might be 65 or whatever retirement age will be in the future. It should be a time for less competition and more rewards.

I know artists who have had a successful 40 year career but see themselves as a failure because they didn't receive a certain award - while some of their peers did. They have a resume like most would cut an ear off for, but they didn't get that one award.

For these folks the most important thing can mean exhibition opportunities. I remember one of William Halsey's biggest complaints was that he lived too long and kept producing work on a daily basis. He explained that after you've had your second or third retrospective - the art world tends to forget about you or wishes they could - unless you're one of the few super stars in the art world. And what a shame. In some

cases, the older you get you tend to stop worrying about what your peers are doing and you start producing your best work. Halsey felt he was just getting good at the age of 75 - working again with the eyes and mind of a child.

There should be special opportunities for these folks without having to compete with the entire art community.

Now when it comes to the folks in between emerging and senior artists - I feel all's fair in love and war.

And, when it comes to the part-time or Sunday artists - they have their place too. Many professionals wouldn't be able to call themselves pros without the army of folks they give lessons to in making a living. But, they just can't be considered for the same things full-time artists are competing for.

Unfortunately, many people go to a college or university and graduate with a degree in art, but somewhere along the way, a spouse, family, or career take priority and they don't get to re-start their art making until many years later.

Maybe it's all too complicated to sort out, but it seems stupid to throw everyone in the same barrel and see what or who rises to the top - no matter how they get there.

If there is one thing I've learned throughout my years of dealing with the visual arts - getting to the top is not always based on talent and hard work. Many times it's how clever you are and how well connected you can be.

And, let's don't forget about the agenda of the powers that be who want to shape what the public sees and decide who gets all the opportunities and rewards. They take a heavy toll on the overall esteem of the artists in any art community by saying who is in and who will be left out.

Maybe clearly defined divisions would help prevent a few artists who have the ear of the powers that be - from taking up all the opportunities - whether they fit the opportunity or not. Like jobs in this country, we need more opportunities for a larger pool of artists.

Now here's a radical idea. How about a program where arts organizations subsidize exhibits for emerging and senior artists in

commercial galleries. An opportunity to see if they can make it in the real world - become a self-supporting artist instead of always looking for a "special" opportunity from one source or another of government funds.

If there is one thing commercial gallery owners are always looking for - it's new artists whose work sells.

A Report of Our Demise is Greatly Exaggerated

We received a package in the mail the other day with no name on it. That's always a sign of something interesting. It was a catalog for the exhibit, *David Yaghjian: Everyman Turns Six*, on view at Vista Studios in Columbia, SC, through Sept. 6, 2011. Go see it if you haven't already.

The catalog was turned to Page 34 where a circle was around a paragraph stating that Yaghjian had five black-and-white images on the cover of *Carolina Arts* - "a monthly tabloid now defunct?"

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