

**2010 Maryland Institute College of Art Commencement
Graduate Student Commencement Speech**

Meyerhoff Symphony Hall
Baltimore, MD

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May 17, 2010

On either side a parallax valley of flowing movement within a wired city of charm and grit, stands a proud institution cultivating visionary authors of uncertain destiny. Producing a future from what we call "art" does not always seem to make sense, but for us the act is undeniable. Transgressive in respects creative and courageous to incomprehensible debt, we walk top-tiered into a faltering economy as undeterred Masters of Fine Art.

As aspiring MFA candidates, we came here a short two years or four summers ago looking for the opportunity to improve upon a life long creative passion in a challenging yet supportive world-renown institution. Somehow a master's degree seemed to suggest a promising future in the worlds of art, design and/or pedagogy. Not too long ago, many of us were also wrapped up in a campaign of hope that our country would soon elect a new leader and embrace a more responsible, sustainable and peaceful existence. Yet for all the energy we put into electing change, the elation of our new president and the expectations we had so earnestly cheered were all but tempered by the realities of unending wars, relentless ecological disasters and a great recession with no end in sight.

As the financial and housing sectors of the economy began to collapse in 2008, so to did the markets of art and design. We had to face a future of scant funding, fewer sales, less patrons and a withered job market. The mirage of capitalism had ruptured, painfully reminding us that all too often creative production is a luxury good funded by the excesses of a vulnerable economic system. The upscale design firms, art galleries, museums, and private schools with which we are so familiar and comfortable, would not exist without the organized crimes of capitalism and its accumulated wealth. While we may not have been the ones

duping homebuyers, exploiting labor, or drilling for oil, we stood to benefit from those who did. So there we were, enrolled in an elite private school pursuing a prestigious degree of higher learning, while millions of Americans lost their jobs, homes and sometimes their very own lives.

And here we are today celebrating our freshly earned degrees in the congratulatory company of family and friends. So I ask, in the face of all that has happened these past few years, does an MFA really seem that important? My answer is a stern "yes". Indeed, we have chosen this path not because it was entirely sensible, but rather because we had no other choice. As artists, designers, and/or educators - the creative force has always been undeniable. We make because we must. We write because we are compelled. We share this community so that we may learn from one another.

While the comparison between our privileged position here and the supposed "real world" at large is easily made, its implied judgment is supremely shallow. That which this comparison does not acknowledge is as follows: the absolutely serious risks we have taken to pursue an MFA, the alternative strategies available for responsible creative production, and the personal and social promise this degree ultimately represents.

The chances we took were many and unique to each and every one of us: for some the risk was following a dream once scorned by family or friends, while for others it was taking on tens of thousands of dollars of debt to cover tuition and living expenses. Pragmatically we know the economic and discursive context of making art still offers that which we cannot afford to refuse: decent jobs doing what we love, willing collaborators and engaged participants, and opportunities to truly affect change in our everyday world.

The extent to which we participate in the established worlds of art, design and education is an individual choice and many of us will choose hybrid paths. Untethered to luxury, funding can still be found through grants, non-profits, foundations and other sources. History has also shown us that the most powerful

creative forces always emerged outside of the institution and the market.

Following in this proud tradition of making art with abandon, we continue to form DIY spaces and organize decentralized media, all while embracing networked sites of interaction, critique and vision.

Creative practice in this day and age affords us the unique opportunity as cultural producers to fluidly move between disciplines in the process of testing and developing our ideas while constructing new and improved experiences within the broader public realm. Through such discursive freedom and creative expanse we have the potential to greatly improve both our own lives and the lives of others. So unlike taking on roles of pre-determined dimension, the practice of art allows us a more flexible framework for what may qualify as success or failure. It's true, we can courageously risk failure in what we make, say, do, and share, as the rubric for success will be written by us.

So today I will leave you with a sustained vision of hope - that through consciously dealing with the privileges and contradictions of our situation we can develop responsible practices through which we may affect change, nurture community, sustain our livelihood and ultimately find happiness. The pursuit of the creative dream is a right to which we are all entitled, and as artists we must always revel through infinite sites of freedom.