



THE

GREAT Auk Word

G A Z E T T E

Volume 1 No. 1

Editors Note: *The great auk was a flightless bird that became extinct in the mid-19th century due to the thoughtless actions of mankind. This bird was an important part of many Native American cultures, both as a food source and as a symbolic entity. Ogden Nash's poem, "A Caution to Everybody," warned that humans could suffer the same fate as the great auk. Let us take heed. We must honor and preserve our life, culture, heritage and institutions.*

Written and Designed by Paul Perlow

The sun rises and the sun sets. Global warming embraces the great city that never sleeps. It's cold outside one day, warm the next. People snuffle, cough, sneeze and wonder which season is really here. Confusion fills the air. It is subtle and pervasive.

Yet we students still shuffle in and out of the doors of the Art Students League on West 57 Street in NYC. We have walked and talked to the cadence of the jackhammer and cement mixers next door. Yes, the highrise that will cast a quarter mile long shadow across Central Park is being built. I wonder: How many of us will be lost in the shadow?

Nevertheless as we ramble through the doors that first opened in 1875, we continue our artistic journeys. Some of us are younger. Some of us are older. Yet most of us remain children in our hearts. Some are novices. Others have passed lifetimes within the hallowed halls of this venerable institution.

Today is another day and the newly elected administration is at the helm of the League. Things have been changing. Attendance is down though, fees are rising, honored teachers are having their classes canceled and new classes are being added. Evening class hours have changed. Open sketch time was shortened. Important programs are being shut down.

I have spoken with Sal, our president, as well as Ira, our director, along with other board members to voice my concerns. Change is inevitable. I understand this. It's the way of all Life. But to my way of thinking, this present rite of passage that might as easily be called the "wrong of passage."

I wonder: How many students, how many members, just how many people currently understand what is really going on at this institution? How many have cared enough to attend our most recent members meeting? And of those who did, how many spoke up in the forum that has offered our membership a unique opportunity to participate in its governance and well-being.

I was there and can answer this question. Unfor-

tunately not many of us set aside the time to attend. Of those who did, only a few spoke. Why? Why? Why? In triplicate. This really matters. We matter. The League matters. At this stage in our lives can we really afford to be passive? I feel saddened.

Having been a former philosophy major who moved on to graphics design, posing questions and seeking answers remains an integral part of my life process. I usually start with the primary questions.

the entire world through the uncertainty of life during a moderne dark night of the soul. I have no doubt that each and every individual who has ever attended the League could and would add more to this description.

Presently, we are at a crossroads. To my way of thinking and feeling, we cannot just take the fork in the road as the venerable Yogi Berra once quipped.

The success or failure of the Art Students League as an artistic and

meeting I pointedly asked how and why teachers who have been integral to the spirit and well-being of the League are having their classes cut or threatened with closure... Martha Bloome, Richard Barnet, Doug Safranek, Henry Finkelstein and Jack Fargasso to name a few. And why was Sherry Camhy's class been moved to 6PM with the loss of half her students who could not make the earlier time while Rhoda Sherbell's class was allowed to return to 7PM?

speak up during the meeting regarding this matter. (To my recollection, only one did.)

Do we the members really need to witness more and more League money spent to hire specialists when the salary of the office staff supersedes that of the entire faculty? What is the role of the director?

Quite frankly, I like Ira. But we need greater understanding from the director and sounder logic must be exercised.

I have spoken with so many (faculty and students) who have had their enthusiasm quashed after having presented excellent suggestions to rejuvenate the League. Having Drawathons on a regular basis would attract a younger community. Having a pot luck Thanksgiving dinner at the League as Minerva has done at Spring Street Studio would promote goodwill. How about Demos from accomplished artists of renown as Jerry's Artarama has done? Cleaning the filthy rooms on a regular basis would help as well. Treating the models with greater respect by providing better chairs, etc. and a cleaner environment would raise morale. Treating students with greater respect by disavowing archaic classroom regulations would also raise goodwill and attendance. (By the way, this is my particular peeve. I have been in classes that do not allow one to go to the bathroom and return without waiting for a break.)

Subway promotional posters as the School of Visual Arts has done would be an excellent venue to lift public awareness. Giving talks at Parsons, Pratt and the School of Visual Arts would help. Promoting the sale of student art at Christmas time citywide would also help place the League back on the map. Honoring individual faculty members on a more regular basis would also make a difference.

I am deeply concerned. Many individuals are also wary of the future of the League. Are you? We need more wisdom with a deeper understanding. We need to save the classes and protect our League.

It's your turn now. This is the time: As individuals and in unison: Speak up!



In this case I might ask:

What is the Art Students League?

For me it is an address, an edifice, a place of spirit and a home for all who value and treasure the artistic life and experience. It is a place to explore and express creativity. It is a place of learning, an opportunity to practice and further draftsmanship. It is a home away from home, a place for our hearts to seek solace and find truth during the ongoing artistic evolution and revolution taking place within each and every individual seeker of Truth in the visual arts. It is a place to share, an environment to engage with others, to agree or disagree, to dialogue on matters of life and art. It is an oasis in the midst of an intellectual desert and an island offering peace and security within the ocean of emotion that abides within each and every one of us. It is the core heartbeat of mankind, a place of inspiration. It is a national treasure, a heartfelt presence surrounded by seemingly mile high buildings housing the multitude of people amidst an infinite sea of materialism. This precious gift of liberty and freedom is a lighthouse shining and guiding for

spiritual treasure has been dependent upon a leadership that fostered financial well-being and nurtured the students and faculty with progressive thinking while acknowledging and maintaining the classical traditions. Enlightened leadership recognized the true nature of the League and had the ability to attract artistic visionaries, people willing to engage in the furthering of the spirit, the institution and the students. For many years membership and attendance flourished. That is not the case anymore. Attendance in the evenings and weekends is significantly down. A year and a half ago, Ira had proudly proclaimed the League was 81 million dollars in the black. The leadership and Board, after winning a very contentious election finally did admit that the financial future of the League was not so bright. This admission was done in a whisper after the mumble, grumble, shouts and sighs from concerned members. Over 3 years ago I saw the handwriting on the wall and proposed to the powers that be at a Members meeting that much more needed to be done to promote the League. My pleas and advice have been ignored. At the past Members

Why make decisions that cut 25 students from Sherry's class while saying it is necessary to cut classes who underperformed? Who is making these decisions? Is it based on the advice of the newly appointed chief financial officer, Jennifer Solomon? Is it Ira?

Why isn't more being done to promote the League and save the classes of individuals who represent the true spirit of the institution. Why has Ira ignored serious alternative suggestions from wise individuals that could surely save these classes? Is this a case of a "Father knows Best" when "Father" rarely ventures beyond the doorways of his office to mingle with students or to visit the classes of the students he represents? Is "Father" really aware of what the true heartbeat of the League is? If so, why is this present situation a seeming exercise in numbers crunching when Spirit is what built and maintained the League for over a hundred years? Why is leadership of the League acting more and more like a corporate body when it is truly a spiritual being needing to exercise fiscal responsibility? And I wonder: Why didn't more of the elected Board members