

REFLECTIONS ON MASSART

DR. BETH BALLIRO '99
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ART EDUCATION

ELISA HAMILTON '07
MULTIMEDIA ARTIST
MASSART TRUSTEE

Elisa Hamilton: We are honored to speak to you today, at this critical moment for our public art college, alma mater, and the institution to which we, alongside many of you, have committed our careers, The Massachusetts College of Art & Design.

In these troubling political times, we are forced to grapple with dark complexities that have always existed in our country and in our world, but which some of us have not had to confront until this moment in our history. Our current world asks us to be brave. Just getting up each morning and facing the world takes courage, but here, today, we are asking you to be even more courageous. We all have the capacity to create meaningful change, at MassArt and in our world, but that change needs to begin within each of us.

Beth Balliro: These are times when one cannot help but take a stand. When we are forced repeatedly to take inventory of what it is we stand for, how we prove our beliefs through action, and how we work across differences to safeguard and advance that which we hold dear. It is a time when what we say and do affirms our purpose.

So what is the purpose of a public art college in these times? Why do we matter?

As you know, we have a mandate to provide an art education to citizens of the commonwealth and beyond, and as such we hail from the margins of what is traditionally deemed worthy for a public and civic education.

If we believe that an electorate has spoken, then we certainly are in the brackets - outliers... even dissenters... in relation to national, and yes even state, policies which emphasize privatization over investment in public education, standardization over nuance, compliance over invention. We represent the margins, the brackets, the lesser-sung.

In the margins, we are in good company. For ideas which generate from the margins have often sparked change, and persons who are marginalized continue to take the lead in asserting other truths, and cracking open that which is unjust. The resilience and integrity of the margins is indeed noble.

However, we can't rest in the margins. We won't. The stakes are too high.

Elisa Hamilton: We know that Mass Art's mission is in fact at the center of our collective health and vitality.

Our work is at the center...for the legacies of those who laid the foundation, sometimes against the grain, to create this institution and keep it thriving for these past 144 years.

Beth Balliro: We are at the center ... for the elementary student who sits in the back of the class, engrossed in his sketchbook's world, who, despite never having been afforded an art class, knows his calling and finds his way here

Elisa Hamilton: We are at the center for the non-traditional-age student who has always dreamed of an art education, and now, after another career, after a family, is finally able to realize the dreams he or she has always had.

Beth Balliro: We are at the center for the parents towed along at our new students days- with incredulous yet knowing smiles, that at last their artist child has found home.

Elisa Hamilton: We are at the center for the artists and designers that will find the answers to questions we struggle with, and the questions we didn't even know we had.

Beth Balliro: We can't rest as outliers. We must draw from the margins, but assert our place at the center. It is time for Mass Art to emerge at the center as a cultural and creative sanctuary where all bodies are safe and all minds are free. A place where the public knows that art can live.

Elisa Hamilton: So what is your role here in our community? Today, as President Nelson takes his pledge to lead MassArt in reaching its greatest potential, we ask each of you to consider your own pledge; to envision a positive change at MassArt and to devote yourself to making it a reality. At this time, we ask all of those who are seated and are willing and able to please stand and link arms with your neighbors.

Beth Balliro: Now that we have perhaps pushed you out of your comfort zone...We ask you to consider... what is your role to advance Mass Art's mission for an accessible public art education? What do YOU pledge?

Though this may be uncomfortable - we can draw strength from each other and those across our nation who are making brave choices to affirm our humanity and rally in our togetherness.

Please reflect on your pledge ...

[Moment of silence]

Elisa Hamilton: Beth, have you chosen your pledge?

Beth Balliro: Yes I have, Elisa, have you?

Elisa Hamilton: Yes I have - and we hope you have too. Thank you. Please be seated.