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NASAD President's Address

THE ARENA

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I am not a particular sports fan because I am not much of a spectator. Like many artists, I don't self identify with groups very easily, so I think of sports most often in terms of exercise, or solo activities like cross country skiing or bicycling, both of which I like very much. But I am in Texas now where football is practiced fervently, unavoidably, and at grand scale at all levels. Two recent events made me think of the relation of sports to art and design. The first was the opening of the Cowboys Stadium. Karen and I were invited to a preview tour of the stadium's art collection, which matches the scale and grandeur of the stadium. Seeing the artists and their works previewed on the giant Jumbotron was truly amazing, with their names and the titles of the art going around the LED panels at the stadium like giant Jenny Holzer pieces. Quite a spectacle and quite a celebration of the arts in an arena not previously thought of as a setting for high-end contemporary visual art.

On our campus, as chair of our art in public places program, we installed a sculpture at our wonderful new football stadium this fall for which the donors of the sculpture, members of a sports fraternity, had raised the funds to commission a sculpture of an eagle, our mascot. We unveiled the sculpture, a human sized bust of an eagle at the beginning of the first home game. The eagle is positioned at the home team's entrance to the field. The artist, Kent Ullberg, a great sculptor of wildlife forms, was there for the unveiling. Kent was amazed. Kent said he had had over 100 public commissions, had attended many unveilings at which there were sometimes crowds and were generally affairs where someone, even a king once, said something, the sculpture is unveiled, there is applause, and on you go. But this time 30,000 people cheered, a cannon was fired, and a whole football team, the coaches and trainers, more than 300 members of a marching band, and the cheerleading squad all rushed out and crowded around to touch the sculpture on their way to the field. It was sculpture with a ceremonial purpose and a very public role.

So I started thinking that while we don't have the budgets of athletic programs, there are some commonalities among the arenas in which we operate that might help us to consider from time to time.

First and foremost, our job, like that of a coach, is to train young students to be professionals on one hand and to help them become better people on the other. Some of them will become quite wealthy, maybe right out of school even, but the great majority of our art and design students will, like college athletes, go on to fulfilling lives in which their major art or design activity during school may or may not be the most significant issue or their primary source of income, though they may always value their experience and certainly will remember some favorite or hated teachers. The fall off rate in the arts and design fields is quite high, especially after five to fifteen years; less so in some fields than others, but nevertheless staggeringly significant. We have to remember the time we have with the students is about

their development as well as expertise at a particular practice. Life values and decision-making skills have to be a good part of what we teach.

Second, like college sport teams, some art and design programs strive particularly hard to develop the highest caliber professionals while others strive first and foremost to develop the whole person through their programs. College athletic programs can be ferociously competitive and so can art and design programs. National rankings matter deeply to some institutions and no one wants to be thought of badly. To be ranked in a field, there have to be enough others doing the same thing for the rating to mean something and no matter how well or poorly you do it, you have to play in the same arenas or you can't be ranked.

There are as many nuanced ways of teaching art and design as there are people teaching it, and, in our fields, we honor and strive for that individual vision and accomplishment, whether played out in the classroom or studio, at the program or institutional level, and as our faculty and alumni practice in their professional arenas.

From time to time, a particularly brilliant player or coach comes along and the field is revolutionized, often controversially. I think of Bill Koch, the cross country skier, who started skating on the uphills, or I think it was Greg LeMond possibly who first stood up and pedaled in the Tour de France. Indomitable coaches like Vince Lombardi define the game for a time, and new stadiums shine like diamonds until someone builds a bigger and better one. From time to time, someone develops a new sport and if enough people play it, leagues are formed and other people rank their performances. Olympic level innovation arises in extreme sports and new technologies, yet we still maintain competitive events based on ancient or outmoded military skills of lesser contemporary value, and worry about the eligibility of professionals to play in amateur settings; or vice versa.

To make sure there are standards and common practices, the schools form organizations, have meetings, establish guidelines, compete and learn from each other. When the league is in disarray, the sport suffers and everyone waits for clear direction.

Thinking about that, and thinking about all the schools in the National Collegiate Athletic Association, all the divisions and all the sports, I thought again about our organization. NASAD is an organization that has grown from 22 schools to 321 in the course of its 64 years of existence, with nearly 60 more schools currently seeking to join. Our fields have transformed during this time, many of them in ways perhaps unimaginable when the organization was founded. Because of that proliferation and transformation, there are peer groups and alignments within our schools that are important for their evolution and for the competition that drives our fields as it drives the sports fields and really, much of our culture. The great thing about the field is its evolution and the way overall participation brings out the best in everyone while we discern and appreciate the accomplishment of the truly great individuals and individual programs. The success of the system as well as the success of individuals and programs depends on the engagement of each school. I encourage all schools to participate. I encourage all representatives to help serve as evaluators to other schools, because not only individually but collectively we all gain from the understanding, appreciation, and elevation of the field, and all need the collective energy and authority of a national voice for standards and practice in art and design.