

To the Board of Directors

Capilano University

May 14, 2014

As an art historian, I will restrict my comments to art. As far as I know, works of art (as objects) are not generally accused of harassment. I take issue with Jane Shackell's rationale for confiscating George Rammell's sculpture. I teach students about art and censorship. The general context for such a discussion is to first talk about the role of art in society. One of the roles of art is to question and challenge the status quo. Art does not avoid controversial or difficult issues. Salman Rushdie suggests that if you hold an anti-censorship position in a democracy, you must be prepared to defend the opinions of others even if they are diametrically opposed to your own. If you censor someone else's voice, you must be prepared to have your own voice silenced. Perhaps Henry Louis Gates put it best: "Censorship is to art as lynching is to justice."

Quoting Ms. Shackell's bulletin: "Our University is committed to the open and vigorous discourse that is essential in an academic community, the inherent value of artistic expression, and the rights to free speech and protest that all Canadians enjoy. No one wants Capilano to be a place where art is arbitrarily removed or censored."

Capilano University has just become that place, disturbingly resembling countries in which such rights are *not* enjoyed.

The action authorized by the Chair of the Board, the rationale in paragraph three of Jane Shackell's University bulletin, and the commentary around the Senate table in support of her illegal action provides further proof that the people who suspended the Studio Arts and Textile Arts programs have a minimal understanding of the role of art in our society and no understanding of what is at stake in an anti-censorship position. The very principles of a democracy that permits freedom of expression and free speech have been disregarded as an inconvenient obstacle to the machinations of governance.

Sincerely,

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