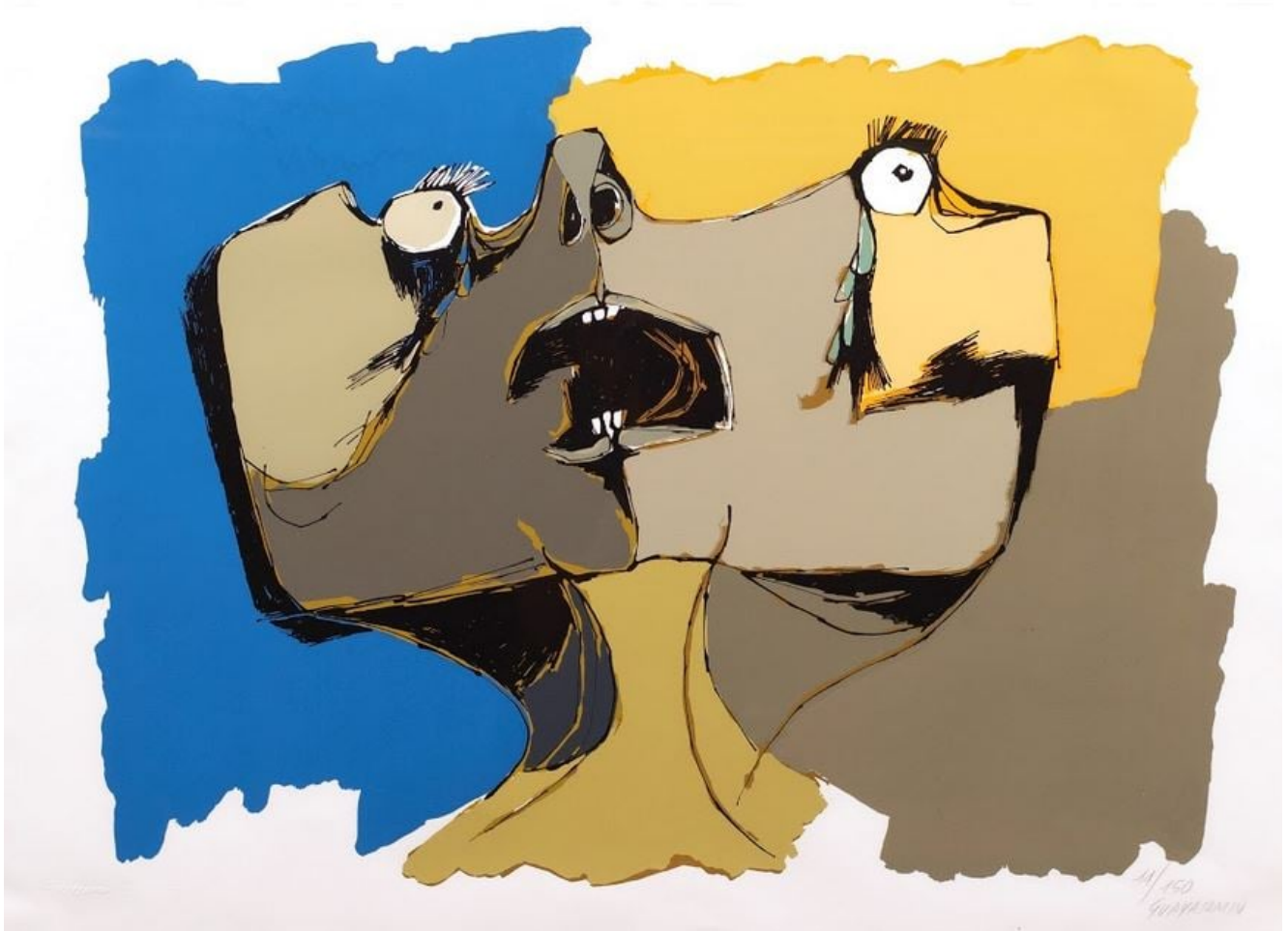


Letter to an Angry Artist

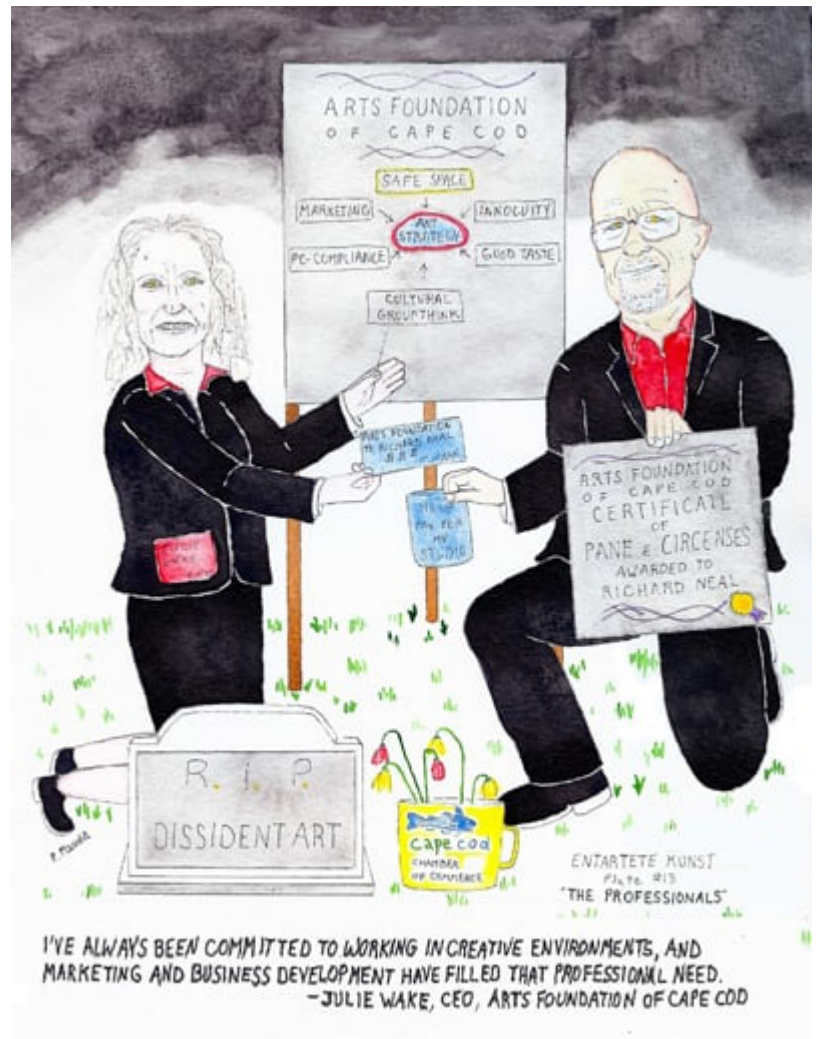
by [G. Tod Slone](#) (July 2024)



El Grito (The Scream), Oswaldo Guayasamín (1978)

An Open Letter to an Angry Artist [\[*\]](#)

Well, it was interesting to meet you yesterday evening at the Chalkboard Studios open house. Later, at home, to refresh my mind, I looked up the aquarelle, which had irritated you to the point of evoking it to me somewhat angrily. And so, I'd created it in 2016, depicting you taking a knee, while receiving money from the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod. So, I thought I ought to respond now to your assertion that artists should be funded. Contrary to your position, I'd rather work at a McDonalds, than play the turn-a-blind-eye game in an effort to get funded.



Your nonresponse to that critical aquarelle eight years ago mirrors the typical modus operandi of artists, poets, journalists, editors, and professors when criticized. Three decades of openly criticizing such people have led me to that conclusion. In any event, today, I came up with the following thought, likely provoked at least in part by our brief conversation at the open house: Artists ought to be fully in favor of freedom of expression, and yet clearly the large majority of them are not. For if they were, they'd stand up for those whose expression is cancelled, censored, banned, and/or ostracized into oblivion ... and risk the very ire of the cultural apparatchiks—foundation directors, museum curator censors, arts magazine editors, etc.—in charge. The hands that

feed.

As an example, both you and the director [\[1\]](#) of the Arts Foundation proved to be entirely indifferent to the ostracizing of my “work” on Cape Cod, where it has become egregiously obvious that real critical art is prohibited. When the Chamber of Commerce supports art that it likes, but not art that it doesn’t like, then its grip on the arts must be overtly questioned and challenged.

As for the government (and private-foundation) handouts accorded to some artists, what is the real purpose of such handout funding, if not to promote safe art, which does not upset the arts apparatchiks and the arts money machine, nor the political and academic hacks at the helm? Thoreau had written: “let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine.” Well, that encapsulates the essential purpose of most of my art and writing. And I certainly have tested the very murky waters of democracy (e.g., freedom of expression) here on the Cape over the years. Because I dare criticize, I simply do not exist for the artists, poets, and cultural apparatchiks hereabouts and elsewhere. Now, I’m certainly not complaining. Rather speak rude truth, than be part of the arts herd. Just the same, why are the doors hermetically closed to critical art? Why not open them, even just a little? That’s all I’m asking. Why does the *Cape Cod Times* (Gannett Corporation) not open its doors, even just a little? It is dumbfounding to me that it refuses to do so. Hell, I’ve been publishing a literary journal since 1998 and not only brook criticism aimed at me and the journal itself, but request such criticism and publish the harshest received in each and every issue. And never would I “punish” a person via ostracizing for submitting harsh criticism. Instead, I’d simply engage in vigorous debate with the person in question. Why is that a strict taboo for the bulk of other such journals, including *Provincetown Arts* and *Cape Cod Poetry Review*?

By the way, what of course spurred me to create that aquarelle in 2016 was not you, but rather the director's statement: "I've always been committed to working in creative environments, and marketing and business development have filled that professional need." When business interests control art via funding et al, they clearly encourage the castration, cooptation, and corralling of artists. How can you possibly favor that?



For me, art ought to be something else, certainly not controlled by "marketing and business." I tend to be somewhat rare in the world of artists because I do NOT follow their general *l'art pour l'art* modus operandi. *Le fond* (the message) for me is far more important than *la forme* (technique). For the bulk of artists, the opposite is obviously true. Artists ought to contemplate what Thoreau had written, as well as what his friend Emerson had stated: "I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions. Every decent and well-spoken individual affects and sway me more than is right. I ought to go upright and vital, and speak the rude truth in all ways."

But if artists heeded the crucial advice of those two writers, they would not be getting handout funding, as well as "badges and names" (prizes, fellowships, laureate designations, etc.)

from government cultural councils and private arts foundations. Anyhow, I was actually glad that you still remembered the aquarelle, even if it still viscerally angered you eight years later. Evidently, if it were devoid of any rude truths, it would not have had that lasting effect. How sad indeed that Cape Cod arts apparatchiks cannot seem to bear an iota of criticism. Their scorn for freedom of expression and critical debate needs to be openly decried. Why did not even one of the arts apparatchiks, depicted in a more recent critical aquarelle I created and disseminated, deign to respond? Can I really be the only artist on the Cape, who dares criticize the reigning arts apparatchiks, veritable arm of the tourist industry? Well, I guess I'll never know. Please feel free to disseminate this open letter to your colleagues at Chalkboard Studios...

[*] Richard Neal, Chalkboard Studios, Barnstable, MA, who chose not to respond.

[†] Julie Wake is its director.

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G. Tod Slone, PhD, lives on Cape Cod, where he was permanently banned in 2012 without warning or due process from Sturgis Library, one of the very oldest in the country. His civil rights were being denied because he was not permitted to attend any cultural or political events held at his neighborhood library. The only stated reason for the banning was "for the safety of the staff and public," yet he has no criminal record and has never made a threat. His real crime was that he challenged, in writing, the library's "collection development" mission that stated "libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view." His point of view was somehow not part of "all points of view." In

November 2022, he requested the library [rescind its banning decree](#), which it finally did. He is a dissident poet/writer/cartoonist and editor of [The American Dissident](#).

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