



Dear Academy Community,

In the last couple weeks, two events at the school that have touched me deeply. The first was our online, virtual graduation. I want to thank Noelle Timmons, our Director of Student Services, for putting together such a memorable celebration.

It started with a five minute reel of photos featuring the Class of 2020, a vibrant visual record of spirit and community. We saw students in their studios, in classes, at events and shows, gathering on the front stairs of the building, chatting, eating, sleeping, and, of course, working, working, working.

Then we listened for over an hour as each graduate shared memorable moments and things they would miss most. It sounds like a cliché but it made me laugh and cry as they recounted a range of experiences, from helping each other get paint out of their hair to helping each other through family loss. It was a story of problem solving, overcoming self-doubt, shared triumphs, making art, and, of course, learning, learning, learning.

I didn't want the celebration to end. And hopefully it won't. Though they are graduating, the Class of 2020 are also becoming members of an ever-growing community of Academy artists they can go to for resources, feedback, connections and community. Our doors will always be open to them and, as far as I'm concerned, the more they walk back through them, the better.

The second event was our first online, virtual Thesis Critiques. Normally, these critiques happen in a classroom with a panel of faculty and visiting critics and an audience of 50 or 60 students. This year, the audience exceeded 150 as people far and wide signed in to watch. We saw seven presentations, each the result of a unique vision and a voice acquired through the last two years of persistence and hard work. All of them had at least one piece done on lockdown and some were entirely so. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, here is a link to one piece from each presentation.

There's a lot happening this week, as always. Visiting Critics include Bernard Lumpkin, Natalie Frank, and Tula Telfair; Will Cotton is giving follow-up master class critiques; and Melanie Vote will be doing a painting demo. But I can't close this letter without commenting on the state of unrest and agitation in our country.

It's hard to fathom the senseless violence of George Floyd's murder, or the killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others. Words fail us but it goes without saying that Black Lives Matter and the Academy stands in solidarity with all those denouncing racism.

In times of political and social unrest throughout history, art has helped us process a seemingly senseless world. Whether it's Delacroix's "Liberty Leading the People", Hannah Wilke's feminist photographs or the late Larry Kramer's "The Normal Heart", art has found ways over and over again to turn horror and pain into positive action.

As a community, the New York Academy of Art encourages all artists to look deeply within themselves to bring forth creative expression that counteracts hostility, aggression, intimidation or injustice wherever they see it. This is our shared vocation and our call to action.

Signed,

David Kratz and Peter Drake