

Greenlining Institute's Statement on the Seed Corn Gallery

This is the transcript of the speech by christian gonzález-rivera at the August 14, 2008 opening of the Summer Exhibition

I would like to start our brief comments by thanking those who made this event possible. First and foremost I would like to thank all the artists who submitted work for our exhibition. Many of them were able to attend tonight, so please raise your hands, artists, so you can be recognized. Let's have a round of applause for them.

Hopefully you have had the chance to look around at all the really great and varied pieces all around this space.

I would also like to recognize the staff that worked with me over the past few months to put this all together. Elaine Braithwaite, Banking Fellow. Sasha Werblin, our Sustainable Development Fellow. Braelan Murray, our Director of the Multimedia Academy. And Steven Lima, our Gallery Intern, could not be here to join us. I'm christian gonzález-rivera, coordinator of research here at greenlining.

There are also our artist advisors, all of whom are well-recognized artists: Ray Patlán, who has been here since the Gallery started four years ago? He is also our muralist whose work you see on our walls. Joaquin Newman. Eduardo Pineda. Patricia Rodríguez.

Thank you also to Trius Fernsler, who is both an artist whose work is exhibited here, and the person who did such an outstanding job hanging all the artwork and creating the presentation you see here.

Last but not least, thank you to the outgoing executive director and co-founder of the Greenlining Institute, John Gamboa. Though he will be passing the mantle of the big ED job to Orson Aguilar starting next year, his legacy is inscribed in the lives of the many young people like myself who have been given a tremendous opportunity to work for social justice, and sit at the same tables with community, business, and political leaders alike; showing us that it is not necessarily the people with the most expertise who make an impact on the world, it's the people who are most committed to doing good in the world. It is also John's vision of creating a community art space that brought this Gallery into existence.

We are gathered here to celebrate the talent present among our neighbors. All of the artists whose work is exhibited here live and work in the Bay Area, and contribute to the diverse and dynamic cultural capital we are all so fortunate to have in our backyards.

The Greenlining Institute is very proud to have as one of its programs the Community Arts Initiative, which produces the Seed Corn Gallery. We do this as our way of recognizing the fact that art has both inspired and been inspired by social movements all around the world, and especially here in the United States and in California.

Art is a medium of expression that transcends the boundaries of language, culture, and time, and is the most powerful chronicle we have of human history. At Greenlining we focus on empowerment of underserved populations by giving them a place at the tables of public policy. We believe this is a worthy cause because despite the fact that we claim to have a representative democracy here in the United States of America, neither the leaders of our country nor those of our state fully represent the diversity of ideas and ethnicities present in the American people. History is written by the powerful and victorious, as they say, and the only way to get our story codified in the annals of history is to stand up and make our voices heard.

Similarly, our country's elite art institutions have taken upon themselves the task of preserving human expression throughout time. Do the works in their archives and on their walls fully represent all of our stories? Do the values of the people choosing what gets preserved under their care and what does not match the diverse values in our nation? These are questions that those of us who make art or value art should ask ourselves. At Greenlining we have begun to take action on these questions by providing a space for our creative neighbors to show their work, and to express their take on history.

Some artists in this exhibition have never shown their work. Others have done so only a few times. Still others are veteran artists, well known both locally and widely. Yet all these artists share a common space tonight.

We hope you will all take this opportunity to get to know one another and learn some different points of view.

We are also here to recognize a fallen community member, who though he may have become a victim to the injustices of poverty and bigotry, his story lives on

through his work and the people he has inspired. We have some members of Casper's family here with us tonight: Akili Banjo is Casper's niece.

With that, I will give way to Ray and Joaquin to speak about Casper's life.

Thank you.