

I will say that to be placed among a group of educators of liberal openness is for me, an honor to the point that it is among a number of distinctions I have received being involved in the making of art and teaching of art for nearly forty years. This honor is now on my c.v. to make special point of.

I believe that when a challenge appears, or an attack as this has been, the best reaction is to greet it head on. I choose to embrace it. I, with a liberal mind and heart, proudly wear the mantel on my sleeve or elsewhere to claim it proudly. I will give you a little personal history surrounding this and where the distortions of truth came from. My place is partly based upon a lie.

In Spring semester of last year I had assigned for my classes a textbook, my most recent book at the time called, *Afraid of the Dark: A Venetian Story*. It is a work of creative non-fiction as I told my students and was intended to act as a model for them in their own journal projects. It is a book of many of my photographs and illustrations, along with stories written in the 3rd person. Upon covering partially the 2nd story in the book called, *A Drink for Two*, I mentioned to the students that they should continue to read for themselves and mentioned there was a brief sexual encounter to come, no big deal. It was intended that we would return to the book at a later date with the next story.

That evening I received an email from someone unknown from a group called campusreview.org saying that they had received some complaints from students about upsetting material and could they interview me. At first I thought it was a student from our campus newspaper or a group at Roger Williams University and I agreed. But thinking about it, I called my Dean who quickly said that this was an outside right wing group and recommended it best not to speak with them. Realizing this, my feeling then was this group has no standing on our campus and I would not address them sensing they would only distort the work to their liking. This is exactly what occurred.

The next day I received a call that the Provost at our school wanted to see me. I was met with another Dean and Provost who had the book and announced that he had no problem with any of my writing as he handed me a print out from the internet which read, "University Professor requires his students to read to about his sexual fantasies," while showing a generic photo of a young man with a horrified look on his face. The text that accompanied this claimed my book had drawings of nude women (there is a small crude one on the page mentioned and shown). The text went further to quote from a published editorial that I wrote which addressed the the excesses of capitalism, labeling me an anti-capitalist.

When confronted with this piece, I at first became angry because of the distortions and lies. I had no fear of my job as I immediately received the support of the Administration, who simply recommended that my textbook be not required, rather placed upon the reserve shelf. The issue was more about the affordability of the book, rather than its content. I reported that half my students got the book, or E version and the others had not. They were clearly sharing the book when we used it in class. My anger subsided to become more a lament that one or several of my students failed to understand the free exchange between two characters in the story, and seized on the sexual action deeming it unsavory.

I later learned that none of my students were responsible for connecting me to campusreview.org. It was another student, not a member of my class, but the head of the

college republicans on campus who took it upon himself to report me to the right wing. Upon learning this, I challenged him to meet me for a sit down coffee to hash out whatever might come. He never did have the nerve to meet me, but reported on another Professor from our school, and he himself has since transferred.

Aside from a few comments from colleagues, favorable for the most part, little more came until my son called me post-election last fall to tell me his own Prof at UCAL San Diego had asked him about this Professor on a Watchlist with the same name as his. That's how I learned about this dubious honor. It is well known on our campus that I am on this list, but it is not really any issue at all. As I said earlier, though it is based upon a lie and distorted truth, I am proud to be in the company of open-hearted and open-minded colleagues.

I did write a response, a kind of redundant poem reaction which I have done nothing with. I will attach it here for you. This piece that is called Why, simply asks the obvious question- Why do you that think differently, need to attack and impose upon us? Why can you not accept we who think differently? Why can you not live and let live?

So Dan, that is the simple story, mine anyway. What does surprise me is that I see students increasingly becoming more conservative, timid in ways of speaking out. My Aesthetics class is all about free expression as we look upon a range of examples, but more especially to encourage and support the students in their own free expressions and explorations. Some take to it and others do not- their free choice which is really the point.

I have been honest with you. I would appreciate seeing how and what you might take from me as you incorporate it into your own art piece which I am happy to be considered for. And I wish you the best with your own creations, your art and offense of liberalism. I don't really believe in any defense in this matter, as I persist in doing what I do, letting others live as I choose to live- freely.

My regards to you,
Stephan

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Why

Why must we live in a place that is so divisive rather than complementary with all its many rich and vast attributes?

Why can't we reach out in agreement about our different tastes and desires with simple acknowledgement?

Why do we bicker about knowing what we think is best for each other and wanting to change the other?

Why can't we simply co-exist with respect and understanding of our diversity?

Why do we insist that the other must conform to our own ways and believe that we know better?

Why is it so hard to accept each other and not seek to impose our way upon the other?

Why can't we simply choose to allow our neighbor that free choice which is already theirs as it is our own?

Why not decide to find this better way, which can be made so effortlessly?

Why not try to go with the love and release the fear that separates us?

Why not accept the challenge of knowing that this better way is at our fingertips, and move toward it- waiting no more to be stuck by seeing differences.

Why not live and breathe more freely with the simplicity of these wishes?

Why not begin today by talking and listening to each other?

Stephan Brigidi