McKinley Carpenter

Dedication Speech

Good morning and thank you for joining me here today.

Ten years ago, I was a worn out Junior here at App State. It was the middle of exam week, and I was just trying to make it to winter break. I loved the work I was doing, but three years of my peers and family asking me “how are you going to support yourself with an art degree? Hobbies are fun but you need a career plan too” wore me down. I knew that at the end of the month I was going home to visit my family for the holidays, and I would be asked these questions once again without an adequate answer.

So, I had been thinking about changing my major to something that “translated” better to finding success after college. I was ready to be finished with pursuing an art degree. I finished the semester, turned in all my final projects and exams, and I was ready to go to my advisor to see if I could change my schedule for the next semester so I wasn’t further behind when I changed my major.

The day before I was scheduled to have a meeting with my advisor to change my schedule, I got an email from the Turchin Center Art Coordinator. During the previous semester, one of my professors had us create an exhibit proposal and submit it to the Turchin Center. The assignment was less about actually trying to get the exhibit, but more so about learning the process of submitting a comprehensive exhibit.

But my submission was accepted. There I was, ready to give up on my craft, not because I didn’t love art anymore, but because I was so burnt out that I forgot why I loved art so much. I forgot that I believed in myself as an artist and as an individual capable of making life decisions despite my peer’s and family’s fears for my future. And don’t get my wrong, I had these fears too, but I had passion that made me face those fears.

And I had an exhibit in the Turchin Center. It wasn’t huge, just a couple pieces that I was really proud of, but it changed the course of my career. It showed me that I could make it after college. I could graduate with an art degree and do what I loved. It changed my mindset. It changed the way I talked about my work.

Ten years later, I’ve accomplished things I never dared to dream of doing. And still, that little exhibit in the Turchin Center is one I’m most proud of.

So today I would like to dedicate the new Turchin Center wing to all the artists who are burnt out, who don’t know if they’ll ever “make it”, who are ready to give up and pursue something more “responsible”. I hope this is a place where you can come and be inspired. I hope it reminds you why you chose your craft; why you love it so much. Why it is so important and necessary.

Thank you.