

WE ARE TRANSMITTERS

As a species, humans are distinct from other animals, as we are able to transmit love, thoughts and emotions—we communicate. Artistic expression expands our capacity even further. Artists are distinct from other people in that they have their own language: one of color, light, form, medium, and message. Some artists readily assume the mantle, while others struggle with this responsibility; the very inquiry becomes their dialogue with the greater culture. At the beginning of the Twenty-First Century, my intention is to create new contexts for art, as opposed to the once very satisfying endeavor of art-object making.

At a professional peak in 2003, my art practice came abruptly to a halt. Through the generosity of the Heinz Endowments and Pittsburgh Filmmakers, I had fulfilled a long-standing vision to create a healing environment. *Sight of Stillness* took form in a film, a series of workshops and a two-day art-science conference. Close to a thousand people engaged in its creation. With the enormity of this completion, I didn't see more art in my future—I saw politics. In a prior decade of political and social conservatism, I had seen the Mapplethorpe/Serano battles decimate the arts in this country. In 2003, political leadership in the U.S. threatened the existence of what I loved most about and identified as being American. Over the course of three years I took every political and leadership training I could. In 2004, 2006, and 2008, I mobilized my neighborhood and the greater Pittsburgh community to vote.

Some people believe that the purpose of an artist is to be her community's soothsayer. In his plays, Shakespeare had the truth told by a fool in the guise of a court comedian. Likewise, the role of the artist is to bring the unspoken to the surface. At the scale of community interaction, my work is further reaching than one's individual experience. In the Arts, we call this *social sculpture*. My activist friends tell me that I am a *community organizer*. I say: it's the job of artists to create new contexts for human transmission. That's the role I have taken.

Carolyn Speranza
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