

Carrying on

"You can't do everything . . . at least not all at once."

David Mendoza – The past half-century

MAY 29, 2017 / ANNE FOCKE / LEAVE A COMMENT

This story starts at the University of Washington, heads off to Europe, comes back to the Seattle art world, then moves on to New York City, the fierce battles of the Culture Wars, and his life in Bali today, while reminding us of our continuing need for vigilance, activism, and courage.

Fifty years ago, David Mendoza and I graduated in the same year from the same university with undergraduate degrees in the same subject, art history.¹ As the official "Alum in Residence" at the University of Washington's School of Art + Art History + Design for the 2016-2017 academic year, I invited David, who has remained a friend, to come back to the school and join me in a conversation about what he's done with the years since we graduated.

So, on November 21, 2016, he and I sat in the school's Jacob Lawrence Gallery with an assembled group of students, faculty, staff, and community members. My opening question to David was, "So, what have you done with your art history degree?" As he told us the story that follows, it was clear that he'd given the question a lot of thought in advance. And no one wanted him to stop once he got started.

A resume can tell you that David has been director of the Foster/White Gallery, executive assistant to the chair of the New York State Council on the Arts, the first director of Artist Trust, the first executive director of the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression, and a long-time board member of Art Matters foundation. He has lived on Bali since 1998, where he produces a line of clothing and home goods with a focus on natural dyes, handmade batik, and preserving traditional craft techniques of Southeast Asia.

But the real story can't be captured in a resume. It's full of twists and turns that affect a life forever, of people and events encountered unexpectedly, and of the power of following both your dreams and your intuition and fighting for what you believe in.

You can read his story below or download it here.

Anne Focke



David Mendoza in conversation with Anne Focke at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery, November 21, 2016. Photo by Nadia Ahmed.

What did you do with your art history degree? – a memoir

David Mendoza

November 21, 2016

Fifty-three years ago today, November 21, was a Wednesday. The next day about noon, and late as usual, I was running across the Quad to a class in Parrington Hall when I ran into one of my pals running in the opposite direction. He said, “JFK has been shot,” and kept running. That was 1963.

DEGREE

I graduated in 1967 during a tumultuous time in our nation and on campus. I started at the UW as a Business major, switched to Architecture, then to Interior Design, and, after being called to a meeting with Professor Warren Hill, switched one more time to Art History. Warren – we became friends later – was a professor in Interior Design, and he, shall we say, urged me to switch majors. I couldn’t draft – same problem in architecture. So I surveyed my accumulated credits. Not only did I have quite a few credits in Art History – including architecture and design history – but I’d earned good grades and loved the subject. So, here I am, all these years later, talking to you as an ancient

alum.

I was trying to finish my art history thesis for our brilliant professor, Lawrence D. Steefel, while experimenting with pot and listening to Sgt. Pepper. The topic of my paper was Dada, and in retrospect it was a very Dada time with the Vietnam War (or American War as the Vietnamese call it) and the cultural revolution (the eve of the “Summer of Love”). Studying the Dada artists, their performances, and their anti-war positions all tossed together with the world around me meant that, in early May 1967, I found myself unable to fashion a coherent thesis paper. As the month rolled by and the deadline for turning it in approached, I had pretty much decided that after five years of university and lots of credits, I was not going to graduate and get a degree. My focus turned to how I would explain all this to my parents who had struggled to help pay college costs for me – the first in our family to attend.

*The topic of my paper was Dada, and in retrospect
it was a very Dada time.*

Probably through a combination of wine, pot, angst, and itchiness to get out of school and into the “real world,” I decided to make an appointment with Professor Steefel. I still can remember clearly that day – nervous, resigned to reality, and eager to get it over with. I actually prepared some notes to try to explain what had happened to me. These included references to lyrics on Sgt. Pepper as well as Dada history. It was a long meeting, maybe two hours. He asked me questions, and we had a very expanded discussion. I thanked him and left, feeling relieved that the meeting and my college career and degree were over.

About a week later, grades were distributed. When I opened mine, I found that Professor Steefel had given me an A and the five credits I needed for my degree. I was in shock. In just a moment, my whole life turned a new corner.

EUROPE

After working as a waiter to make money, I left for my grand tour of Europe in the fall of 1967. It was time to see all the paintings, sculpture, and cathedrals I had only seen projected from slides on a screen. Being the romantic that I realized much later I was, I decided to go to Europe by ship. So I took a train across the U.S. to New York City and Grand Central Station, never having been before. Once there, I immediately got off the train and into a taxi that took me to the 40th Street piers to board the *S.S. France*. Nowadays, the only place you see the scene I encountered is in old movies – crowds of people, some boarding and some saying good bye to departing loved ones. Like in the movies, the *France* departed in the late afternoon and, as we passed the Statue of Liberty, we were all standing at the railing admiring New York City.

My eight months in Europe started in London visiting museums and castles and seeing some theater, and then continued on to Amsterdam and Vermeer, Rembrandt, and Van Gogh. My plans to take a train from there to Paris changed at a party hosted by someone I met in Amsterdam where I met a good friend of the host. An American woman, older than me, she had just arrived from Stuttgart where she had bought a new Porsche. Apparently, she did this every year. I told her my plans, and she said, “Why don’t you ride with me instead to the south of France?” I hesitated, but my host said, “Don’t be crazy. Marilyn knows France very well. You would be lucky to have her as a guide, and you’d get a free ride as well!” So I did.

***This is just what the doctor ordered for my romantic
“tour de France.”***

Marilyn had rented an apartment in a small village near Nice named Haut-de-Cagnes. She had visited several times before and had fallen in love with a woman who lived there. I stayed with her until she helped – pushed – me to find a room. The village was magical, one of the so-called *villages perchés*, or “perched villages,” high above the Mediterranean. There were no cars, only steep and winding walkways, and a gathering of expats and French, Bohemian and worldly. This is just what the doctor ordered for my romantic *tour de France*.

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One rainy day about a month after I arrived, I was walking across the plaza in front of the Chateau. I saw a black man with a suitcase and typewriter case talking to one of the old French women in black who lived there. As I approached I heard he was American and did not speak French so I approached to ask if I could help. He said, “Oh, are you American? Do you speak French?” I said yes and helped him find the apartment he had rented in the village. He had just arrived via Marseilles from Africa and had come to write a book. His name was Alex Haley, and he was grateful for my help.

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Being an “old timer” in the village by then, I helped Alex get settled and, over the next few days, showed him around and introduced him to Marilyn. We three had dinners and wine and chats. Alex told us he was writing a book that traced his African-American ancestors back to Africa before they were brought as slaves to the U.S. Marilyn and I looked at each other skeptically, but Alex was a great storyteller and he proceeded over these meals to tell us bits and pieces of what he had found. His stories were filled with people who had names like Chicken George, Kunta Kinte, and Izzie. While in Africa, he told us, he had recorded *griots*, storytellers who were the keepers of family and tribal history.

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Sometimes, when I visited him for a meal and wine, he would tell me more of these stories sitting in front of the big stone fireplace, and I still found his tales far-fetched and unbelievable. I began to think of him as “Uncle Remus.” At that time, Alex had a reputation as a celebrity interviewer for *Playboy* magazine and also as the author of *The Autobiography of Malcom X*. This meant that, from time to time, he had to return to the U.S. to interview someone for *Playboy* – and to make some

time to time, he had to return to the U.S. to interview someone for Playboy and to make some money. When he left he offered me his apartment to save money from my travel budget. In exchange I helped transcribe some of his audio tapes on his old typewriter.

One time, when Alex was away the phone rang and a hoarse voice asked, “Alex?” I replied that he was in the U.S. The caller was James Baldwin, on his way to the south of France. He wanted to meet up with Alex who had discussed doing an interview with him. James had a bad cold and was in a bad mood. His French then-boyfriend had left him in London. James was looking for the boyfriend, whom he suspected was somewhere down here near Nice. After that trip, James fell in love with the area and rented a villa in Saint Paul du Vence, a village higher in the hills than Haut de Cagnes and famous for a Matisse Chapel. Baldwin lived there until he died.

“Thank you for your help and friendship here in Haut de Cagnes while I am writing Before this Anger.” – Alex Haley

Although I was very happy in that village and didn’t want to leave, Alex encouraged me to continue my journey and my adventure. He was right. On departing he gave me a paperback copy of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and signed it, “Thank you for your help and friendship here in Haut de Cagnes while I am writing *Before this Anger*.” That was his original title for the book that later became famous as *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*.



At Musée Picasso, Antibes, France, 1967

SEATTLE AGAIN

When I returned to Seattle in April 1968, the “anger” that Alex referred to was in full force. The protests against the war in Vietnam were raging. Among the things I have in storage here in Seattle are the orange turtle neck sweater and bell bottom jeans that I wore to protests, most memorably the march on I-5 that closed the freeway in a rain storm.

*My dear parents, who had not gone to college, quietly asked me,
“What will you do with an art history degree?”*

My dear parents, who had not gone to college, quietly asked me when I got back from my grand European tour, “What will you do with an art history degree?” Actually, I had never given it a thought. Thinking on my feet, I said “Oh...maybe I will get a master’s degree so I can teach or work in a museum.” That seemed to settle them a bit even though it meant my returning to and paying for more school. In fact, I had no intention of going back to school. Way too much was happening off campus and on the streets by then.

MLK RFK

Shortly after I returned to Seattle, Martin Luther King was assassinated and, in June, as I watched on TV, Bobby Kennedy was assassinated after a rally in Los Angeles. The anger was now.

DICK WHITE

In late June after trying to recover from these events, I finally went to the UW Placement office to try to find a job. In the days before computers you faced walls of 3x5 cards with information about job openings – almost like an art installation, now that I think about it. I perused card after card. Nothing seemed to fit. Right when I was almost ready to give up, I came upon a card that said “Gallery Assistant” with a phone number. I had no idea what a gallery assistant did, but I called and was asked to come for an interview.

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The interview was with Dick White and the job was with his Richard White Gallery, the precursor to today’s Foster/White Gallery. The gallery was on Occidental Avenue in Pioneer Square, and I was surprised to learn that an art gallery was located there. Pioneer Square was a nearly-deserted part of town that I already knew well as the locale of the city’s gay bars, including the Golden Horseshoe where I had spent many nights while at the UW when I should have been studying. Parnassus coffee shop in the UW art school’s basement was the underground gathering place for all beatniks, radicals, hip artists, and also closeted gay students – even those not in art school. Unlike now, it was dark all day in Parnassus and the music was Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, as well as Shirley Bassey singing “Goldfinger” – a favorite. There, between classes during the day, I met up with my gay pals from across the campus – art, business, drama, etc. – and we made our plans for meeting at the Golden Horseshoe at night.

*Even if I had known what a gallery assistant usually did,
it would not have been anything like the job I had just taken.*

So I knew the neighborhood, also known as Skid Road. When visiting the bars, we used to park on Occidental, a block behind the bar. The day I went to meet Dick White for the interview was the first time I had ever been there in daylight. Dick and his secretary, Shirley, met with me, and I got the job on the spot. Dick told me I was to begin immediately. I had no idea what a gallery assistant did and, even if I had known what it usually was, it would not have been anything like the job I had just taken. Dick and his good friend, the late great architect Ralph Anderson, had begun to buy and restore the dilapidated buildings in Pioneer Square, and that, along with the gallery, became part of my job description.

Dick was an entrepreneur of the first order. He had fallen into the gallery business by accident because he liked Northwest Coast Indian and African art and realized he could make money selling it. A friend suggested he also show the work of a Seattle painter named Jack Stangel. Selling out that show was all he needed to become a “gallery dealer.” When he figured out I knew something about art he made me the gallery director – a week after I started!

In those days, even after Dick and Ralph got started, Occidental and Pioneer Square remained undeveloped and, for me, wonderfully alive. Ralph had his architectural offices in a building around the corner from the gallery, and a staff of young architects including Jim Olson, George Suyama, Bill Booth, Gordon Walker, and Shirley Cartosian. Around the other corner were two of Seattle’s top high-end interior designers: Allen Vance Salsbury and Jean Jongeward. The American Institute for Architects occupied the top floor at 311 Occidental, Dick’s gallery was located on the second floor, and at street level were interior design product showrooms. There were no new bars or restaurants, just long-time haunts where we would all hang out for lunch or after work. In fact, The Gallery (as it was first called) was pretty much the de-facto happy hour spot.

As Dick and Ralph slowly bought and refurbished that block of buildings, other businesses were attracted to the area, such as the original Elliott Bay Book Company on the same block and one of Seattle’s first French restaurants, François Kissel’s Brasserie Pittsburg, nearby on Pioneer Square itself at First and Yesler. Virginia Wright rented a space in front of Dick’s gallery on the second floor to open Current Editions, her pioneering gallery that showed contemporary prints including the very first prints of Andy Warhol (the Marilyns and the Maos), Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns. I sometimes worked on Sundays for Ginny and had the great pleasure of spending days with those now historic works of art.

“We should open a café on the sidewalk.” – Dick White

One summer morning when Dick and I were talking about how tired we were of eating at the old local places, he said, “we should open a café on the sidewalk.” We got into his station wagon, drove to a place to buy tables and chairs. He called his dear mother Helene and told her to make some sandwiches. We got back to the gallery, set up the tables, and he called Ralph to tell his team that

“lunch was being served” in front of The Gallery. I became the waiter and everyone loved it. They loved it so much that one of the Seattle papers came to take photos and write about it for the front page of the Sunday edition. By Monday, the Seattle Police and the health department showed up at The Gallery to inform us that, first, we had no license to sell food, but – more importantly – eating outside in “public” was against the law in Seattle. I know, hard to believe today. Our friends and customers, including staff members of Allied Arts of Seattle who were in their office around the corner, were so outraged that they set about to change that old law. And they did. When you are eating outside at any one of a multitude of restaurants in Seattle, you can thank Dick White, The Gallery, and Allied Arts!

DON FOSTER

After a few years Dick wanted to sell the gallery. His attention was drawn instead to his expanding projects in Pioneer Square, to an old yacht and a place called Kiana Lodge, which he owned and rented for events, and to property he purchased in Cuernavaca (Mexico). One day he told me he was meeting with Don Foster about a possible sale. Don had been a key player in the Seattle World’s Fair and was then working for the Ford Foundation in New York City. I didn’t know him. One day Dick returned from lunch with Don and announced that he had sold the gallery.... Oh, and by the way, he had sold me with it. Part of the deal with Don was that I would stay on because Don was still commuting back and forth between Seattle and NYC. It was then that I met Don for the first time. Don was the exact opposite of Dick. Elegant and well-connected in Seattle society, he wanted to leave the Ford Foundation so he could spend full-time in Seattle with his then-partner, Peter Donnelly who was the executive director of the Seattle Repertory Theatre.

Don was the exact opposite of Dick. I learned a lot from both Dick and Don, and what I learned was yin and yang.

Don wanted an upscale, “uptown” style gallery, and we set about to remodel and reopen as Foster/Richard White Gallery (later the Richard was dropped). The first show was John Franklin Koenig who was originally from Seattle but had been living in Paris for decades. John had quite a following of collectors, many of whom had visited him in Paris where he showed at the Galerie Arnaud. I developed shingles during the push to remodel the gallery and make the deadline opening, but it was a great success and Don’s gallery career was launched.

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I learned a lot from both Dick and Don, and what I learned was yin and yang. In retrospect it amazes me how much trust and responsibility they placed in me. I could suggest a show, and they would say yes. I went to New York several times to bid on paintings by Mark Tobey or Morris Graves at Sotheby’s and to meet with the two artists’ New York dealer, the great Marian Willard. I became interested in photography and, when Foster/White was asked to assemble an art collection for Rainier Bank (now Bank of America), I proposed a photography collection. They said yes, and I assembled photographs both here and in New York. We worked on corporate collections for most of the banks and law firms in Seattle at the time. In conjunction with a Merce Cunningham residency and new-work commission at Cornish College of the Arts, I proposed an exhibit of the sets and costumes created for Merce Cunningham by the likes of Warhol and Rauschenberg. And Don agreed.

One day Ron Dowd, a friend from my UW days who graduated in Interior Design, called to take me to lunch. Ron was one of the stars of the interior design program – which, by the way, was very well known then under the direction of Professor Hope Foote, a formidable teacher and brilliant designer. At lunch Ron said “I have never been to New York City, but I want to move there and you have been there so many times. What do you think? Tell me about it.” And I did my best. Ron moved to New York and, sure enough, soon landed a good job. He, with his partner Rob Jacobsen also from Seattle, went on to design such projects as the famous Studio 54.

By this time I wanted to move to New York.

Charles Cowles was curator of Fine Art at the Seattle Art Museum from 1975-79. After that he returned to New York and opened the Charles Cowles Gallery on West Broadway. One day while still in Seattle, he came into the gallery and said “I have met a terrific student at the UW studying museology, and I think you should take him on as your intern.” His name was Cee Brown, and I did as Charlie suggested. He was right. Cee was bright, full of energy, fun, and capable. By this time I wanted to move to New York. So my plan was to train Cee and then tell Don I was moving, and he would already have a good replacement.

One day, after my plan was underway, Cee said, “Let’s go have lunch,” something we had never done. At lunch he said, “I am moving to New York because I got a job at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).” I was crushed. He could tell something was wrong and said he thought I would be pleased for him. So I confessed my secret plan, to which he said, “Great, do move, too – it would be fun.” But then I had to figure out anew how to do it. And in fact, I did, by hiring Karen Quint. Karen did a great job for Foster/White and is now at Mighty Tieton with her husband Kerry, doing a great job there, too. If you don’t know about Mighty Tieton, east of the mountains here in Washington State, go there and find out.

NEW YORK CITY / NYSCA

I moved to New York City in 1977. Don generously gave me a leave of absence in case I wanted to return, though I never did. I did some work for the gallery from New York, bidding at auctions, meeting with clients, and, memorably, assisting the NYC Police Department on a problem with forgeries of Mark Tobey paintings. I also was trying to find a job. I got in touch with Ron Dowd, who was by then famous in the hip design world of Studio 54, hanging out with Calvin Klein, Liza Minnelli, Andy Warhol, etc. The first time we met in New York was at the Spring Street Bar in SoHo. At that time SoHo was not the glitzy shopping mall it is now, still rough and tumble not unlike the early days of Pioneer Square. We had a great visit, and he gave me some job tips. After that we seldom saw each other, but it was always great to meet up with him and his partner Rob Jacobsen.

The New York Times ran their first, and very long, article on a mysterious disease that was affecting gay men in New York City.

The last time I saw Ron he didn't look well. Ron had always been tall, very handsome, and well built. But now he looked thin and seemed very weak. I thought he must have cancer or something, but we didn't talk about it. Soon after that *The New York Times* ran their first, and very long, article on a mysterious disease that was affecting gay men in New York City. It included a photo of Ron and a story about him and his death from this disease, at first called "gay cancer" and later known as AIDS. Ron was from Puyallup.

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After months of job hunting, my money was almost gone and I had found nothing. Then my pal Cee called me and said he had just heard from a friend at MoMA about a job at the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA). I had never heard of it. I asked what the job was and he said, "assistant to the chairman, and the chairman is Kitty Carlisle." Most of you are too young to know of her, but she was famous from TV: *What's My Line?* and *To Tell the Truth*. She had been married to the late Moss Hart, a famous playwright and director. With George S. Kaufman, Hart wrote *The Man Who Came to Dinner* and *You Can't Take It with You*, and he directed the films, *My Fair Lady*, *Camelot*, and *Gentleman's Agreement*. He also wrote a very successful memoir titled, *Act One*. So together, Moss Hart and Kitty Carlisle were one of the most glamorous celebrity couples in New York City.

"You need a job!" – Cee Brown

I told Cee, "I'm not qualified to work with Kitty Carlisle," and he said, "You need a job!" And he was right. So I called for an interview with the human resources director at NYSCA. Two days later I got a call that Mrs. Hart wanted to interview me. On a rainy Saturday afternoon in February, I went to East 64th and Madison Street, one of the most elegant buildings in Manhattan, to be interviewed. I got off the elevator into what was Mrs. Hart's apartment and was met by the maid who took my wet coat and served me Earl Grey tea and cookies until Mrs. Hart was ready. She entered, not unlike the way she used to make an entrance on TV – glamorous, beautiful, coiffed, and well-dressed – and we began. I was nervous as hell. But after a few minutes, I was having fun. Mrs. Hart asked, "What sign are you?" When I said Virgo, she said, "That's why we get along." I left that afternoon, not thinking for a moment that I would get the job, but thinking I had just had one of the most wonderful experiences of my life. I promised to call Cee ASAP when I got home to my sixth-floor walk-up in Little Italy, no cell phones back then. He said, "I know you got it." Indeed, on Monday morning I got a call saying Mrs. Hart wanted me to begin the next day. And that was my introduction to the world of public funding for the arts and to the woman who became my "Manhattan Godmother."

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At the time, the budget of the New York State Council on the Arts was second only to that of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). NYSCA had a 40 million dollar budget the first year I was there. It was founded by Governor Nelson Rockefeller who, with his wife Happy, was a friend of Kitty's. After Moss Hart died suddenly, Rockefeller appointed Kitty first to the New York State Women's Commission and then to the board of NYSCA. In many respects, the NEA had been modeled on NYSCA, which preceded it.

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NYSCA funded everything from the Metropolitan Museum, New York Opera, and MoMA to most of the so-called “alternative art spaces,” such as Creative Time, PS 1, and the Kitchen. From the New York City Ballet to Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, and Twyla Tharp. The Public Theatre and all the off-off Broadway theaters, to arts group out in all the counties of New York state including the Albright-Knox in Buffalo, and the George Eastman House and Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester. And tiny arts groups in the Adirondacks and Syracuse.

“I think we deserve a hot fudge sundae!” – Beverly Sills

Kitty Carlisle Hart became chairman of NYSCA and was a hard-working *unpaid* champion of the arts and public funding for the arts. She traveled all over the state to wherever she was invited, to attend ribbon cuttings, openings, exhibits, etc. She lobbied governors Carey and Cuomo – no easy task – and the New York State Assembly to preserve funding for NYSCA. The Council had a top notch staff of 45 who worked tirelessly on behalf of our grantees. A favorite memory from those days was a trip we made in a limousine in a snowstorm from Manhattan to Albany to testify to the State Assembly who wanted to reduce the NYSCA budget. Along with Kitty and me was Beverly Sills and the great choreographer, Agnes DeMille. They were well-received, and the NYSCA budget was not cut. On the way out of Albany, Beverly said, “I think we deserve a hot fudge sundae!” All agreed and the chauffeur pulled over to a Howard Johnson’s. All three were wearing fur coats, which we piled on the adjoining booth while we enjoyed our hot fudge sundaes.

CENSORSHIP

Over the years, NYSCA had received both kudos and criticism for funding avant-garde and cutting-edge work. The first I recall was for the Polish group, Squat Theatre, performing a piece called *Pig, Child, Fire!* in a Chelsea store front. I had seen the piece. At one point one of the very hefty woman performers “moonied” the storefront window. Mayor Ed Koch was quoted in the *New York Post* about this. Kitty and he were not, shall we say, best pals, and he blamed Kitty directly for wasting taxpayers’ dollars – which was not the first time I would hear this accusation.

*The New York Post attacked NYSCA for funding
“pornography.”*

Then later, another article in the *New York Post* attacked NYSCA for funding “pornography,” in particular for funding a photography exhibit at the nonprofit, SoHo Photo, an alternative space. As part of my job, Kitty asked me to go see the show and report back to her. The exhibit was an early show of work by Robert Mapplethorpe before he was famous. I already knew his work from my photography days at Foster/White, but I had not seen a lot of it. As I viewed the show, I came upon a photo of a man in a white shirt and tie and trousers with the zipper undone and his penis exposed. The subject was a senior staff member at NYSCA, and I froze. This was a Saturday, and on Monday morning this staff member came into my office. He was highly respected and directed one of our major funding programs. He said, “I heard Mrs. Hart asked you to go see the Mapplethorpe show,” and all I remember was that I was shuffling some papers and kept looking down. He asked what I thought he should do. I had no idea, but he asked me to tell Kitty first and then arrange an appointment for him to meet with her. I thought probably he planned to offer his resignation

appointment for him to meet with her. I thought probably he planned to offer his resignation.

This was not to be my last encounter with the work of Robert Mapplethorpe or with attacks on public funding for the arts or with censorship. But it was my first lesson in courage, leadership, and wisdom to see how Kitty handled this and eventually many similar situations. She never saw the specific photo, but she assured the staff member that there would be no problem for him with regard to his job. I was then asked to work with our PR office to draft a response to the *Post* article in which Kitty stood firmly committed to freedom of expression and the artistic value of Mapplethorpe's work.

My first lesson in courage, leadership, and wisdom was seeing how Kitty handled this attack.

Kitty and Moss Hart had experienced the Blacklisting years of the McCarthy Era. Many of their friends including Dalton Trumbo, Lillian Hellman, and members of the Hollywood Ten, including Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart, were called before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in D.C. This period created a painful schism in U.S. artistic communities, especially in New York City and Hollywood, between those who “named-names” to the committee to save their careers, and those who were named or wouldn't name them.

This is an important part of art history and a crucial topic to remember and study today. Some of the artists who were targeted came out of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Federal Art Project created by the Roosevelt Administration to give work to visual artists, writers, dancers, theater artists, etc. These artists included Jacob Lawrence, the namesake of the gallery we are sitting in tonight, and his wife Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence. Among other Seattle artists employed in the Federal Arts Project were Jacob Elshin, Fay Chong, and Mark Tobey. Other notable visual artists were Ad Reinhardt, Lee Krasner, Louise Nevelson, Philip Guston, and Arshile Gorky. Many were immigrants who had fled the rise of Nazism in Europe. An equivalent program in theater included Orson Welles, Sidney Lumet, Burt Lancaster, and Canada Lee. And the Federal Writers' Project documented folk culture and also produced the slave narratives, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*. If you look at the list of artists given jobs through the WPA, it was an incredibly “multi-cultural” group of artists as well as gender-balanced for the time.

Many artists became targets of the witch hunts of McCarthy and HUAC because of their political persuasions.

During the darkest times of the Depression, artists received support and created work that is still important today in American art history. As you likely already know, artists tend to be “liberal” (small “L”), and many of the artists during that time had fled fascism, were socialists, or even flirted with communism. Their political positions became the target of the witch hunts of Senator Joseph McCarthy and of HUAC, and their lives and careers were destroyed. The recent movie *Trumbo* gives you some insight. An important footnote to the McCarthy era is the life of a lawyer named Roy Cohn who played a key role in the witch hunts. If you know *Angels in America*, the theater work (and film) by Tony Kushner, you may be familiar with Cohn. He later became a mentor to young Donald Trump.

Cohn died in 1986 of complications from HIV/AIDS.

ARTISTS / CONTROVERSY

I was with NYSCA for seven years. During the time I spent there, I was able to see the process of making grant decisions up close, with the peer panel reviews and careful analysis of our staff. I became a champion and defender of public support for the arts.

In my last years there, I served as director of Planning and Development, and in that position I initiated the Individual Artists Task Force to analyze how NYSCA provided support directly to individual artists. Its goal was to see if we were doing a good job and how we could improve. Funding from NYSCA went to not-for-profit organizations like museums, theaters, dance companies, art spaces, etc. We were not allowed to give money directly to individuals. NYSCA funded individual artists through a regranting program with the New York Foundation for the Arts, which had a fellowship program for artists. What was not known though, was how much of the rest of NYSCA's funding reached artists, and there was a sense in some quarters that it should be more. The study helped inform NYSCA funding, helped to quantify "artist fees" that were paid by the organizations we funded, and got attention even outside New York.

My years with NYSCA made an indelible mark on me, and I still have friends from the incredible staff who worked so hard and with such passion to support the arts in New York state. After leaving NY and NYSCA I kept up contact with Kitty. We had become good pals. Whenever I returned to NYC I always made a point to get together with her, to reminisce and to discuss the politics of the day and what was happening in our lives. Later when I was with Artist Trust, Kitty did a wonderful benefit evening in Seattle in support of Artist Trust.



This photo was taken in the foyer of Kitty's apartment by Antonio, the elevator-concierge of the building. I was visiting after I moved to Bali. I made the "heart" batik shawl for her to connect our times together with my life on Bali. I was

leaving after a long afternoon tea during which I told her that I had awoken one morning to NPR's Morning Edition and heard them say, "Today is September 4th, the birthday of Kitty Carlisle who is..." years old. I told her she should start telling the world her real age, which would be much more fun since people would say, "Oh my god, you don't look..." She said, "Really, do you think so?" During my time working with her, her standard bio for press and event purposes listed her age as one which I knew to be "a bit younger" than reality. Not long after my visit, announcements of her appearances celebrated her real age. She was active and performed into her 90s.

On a visit home to Seattle while I was still living in New York, my art history classmate Anne Focke asked to meet for lunch. During our meal, she told me about one of her new brilliant ideas, to create a funding program for artists in Washington state as part of an NEA grant that was used for the purposeful demise of her pioneering alternative space *and/or*. We talked about her idea, I gave my thoughts, and she asked if I wouldn't want to help. I said, "Thanks, but I live in New York," and returned home to NYC. To make the story short, though, I came to think maybe it was a good temporary project for me. My mother was elderly, Seattle had changed in the years I had been away, and it might be nice to get in touch with what was happening here.

That project became Artist Trust. To start, I was a project consultant with Anne, we called ourselves "co-directors." Then, as this "idea" became a reality, I was offered the position of executive director and left New York – although I kept a storage locker there! I was with Artist Trust for almost seven years, and Artist Trust is now celebrating its 30th anniversary. It has grown into one of the most respected and largest artist funding sources in the USA.

Living Travel C4
Television C7

Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Thursday, October 16, 1986



Artist Trust boosts those who go it alone

By Regina Hackett
PI Art Critic

An explosion of the arts — and ever-greater support to back it up — has taken place across the country in the last 20 years. Most of the support, however, has gone to symphonies instead of individual composers, dance companies instead of dancers, and museums instead of visual artists. While not begrudging these art organizations a nickel, Seattle-area art activist Anne Focke, David Mendoza and Thatcher Bailey want to redress the balance. They want to aid art where it begins, with individual artists. To this end they are launching a statewide, non-profit foundation called Artist Trust tonight, with celebratory parties in Seattle, Yakima and Spokane. The Seattle event takes place at the Old CityClub Building and features Jean Gardner, Gov. Booth Gardner's wife, as a special guest, and a performance by Alan Lande.

As Mendoza points out, Artist Trust isn't exactly an original idea. It's modeled on similar successful programs in Minnesota, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio. According to the latest U.S. Census figures, there are 30,000 artists working in this state. Since most artists need to hold down other jobs to survive and might easily identify themselves to census takers as cab drivers, waiters, teachers, carpenters or deep-sea divers, Focke rightly thinks the estimate is conservative. Whatever they do, artists don't usually make a lot of money. On their art alone, they take in an average of \$760 per year, and their total median income per year is a underwhelming \$4,561. Considering that architects are included in this survey — inflating it — the figure means some artists have turned frugality into a science. Artist Trust can't hope to

KLRT SMITH/P4
See ARTISTS, Page C9

My first encounter with cultural controversy in Seattle came during my time at Artist Trust. It began with a decision by then Seattle-First National Bank (later bought by Bank of America) to sell the Henry Moore sculpture *Vertebrae* that sat in front of its downtown office building and ship it to Japan. Linda Farris (of her eponymous gallery) and I organized a protest to keep the Moore sculpture in Seattle and were ultimately successful. The next controversy was over murals by Michael Spafford and Alden Mason, commissioned for the State Legislative building in Olympia. Both Michael and Alden were UW art professors when I was here in school. A group of legislators along with the Secretary of State decided Spafford's *Labors of Hercules* were too overtly sexual and that Mason's abstract paintings were not appropriate for an historic building, so they set about to have them removed. The battle to save them was long, and I give thanks to my brother Fred Mendoza, a lawyer, for saying "OK" when I called him one night to ask for help. I am sure he had no idea this would turn into years of legal and court battles that began with some court rulings in our favor but eventually led to the disappointing removal of the murals, which I know is painful for Michael to this day.

***It was an act of claiming membership and ownership
in the American public.***

During the attacks on artistic freedom of expression one of the constant issues centered on "public funding" for the arts, that is, through the NEA and state and local arts councils. With the advent of "public funding" of arts and culture, beginning with the NEA and NYSCA, in essence, every taxpayer became a philanthropist, as some small percentage of their tax dollars were awarded to an array of arts programs. In fact, this public approach led to the "democratization" of arts support and thus of the artistic expression. One of Kitty's favorite lines, which I wrote once for a speech she gave, was that public funding for the arts meant that NYSCA supported "everything from *Aida* to *Ain't Misbehavin'*. Therefore, when the likes of Senator Jesse Helms and others denounced the "publicly funded art" that they disapproved of, I began to think, "Wait a minute. I and many others are part of that *public*, and we pay taxes and we support that art." Thus we launched the I AM THE PUBLIC campaign and created a pin that became very popular. In fact, I was both surprised and moved to find how much that statement meant to people, beyond the arts. It was an act of claiming membership and ownership in the American *public*.

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My second encounter with Robert Mapplethorpe's work came in 1989. By that time he had died from AIDS, and his exhibit *The Perfect Moment*, organized by the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art, was at the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center. When the exhibit opened in April 1990, Hamilton County prosecutors charged the museum's director, Dennis Barrie, and the museum itself with obscenity, the first time criminal charges had been levied against a museum in the United States.²

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With support from the NEA, an organization called the National Association of Artists' Organizations (NAAO) was created as a nonprofit, membership organization of alternative art spaces and artist organizations nationwide. Artist Trust was a member. NAAO held annual conferences at which we

got to know our colleagues and sometimes made life-long friends. I had known some of the people involved from my New York City days, and others were new colleagues. Together we considered ourselves a “tribe.”

***With the attack on the Mapplethorpe exhibit,
some us decided we must respond.***

With the attack on the Mapplethorpe exhibit, some us decided we must respond. Although Arts Wire was being developed by then, for the most part these were pre-internet/pre-email days.³ Most organizations like Artist Trust didn’t even have a fax machine. Art Matters foundation made a grant to buy fax machines for a network of organizations so we could effectively and immediately communicate about the fast-moving events at the time. Those fax machines were buzzing. The following year a group of us from NAAO gathered to mobilize because the attacks were escalating. We decided to create the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression, and once again Art Matters, along with the Andy Warhol Foundation, gave us start-up funding. We functioned as a network at first with Charlotte Murphy, director of NAAO, and Joy Silverman, director of LACE in Los Angeles, steering our ship.

Finally it was decided NCFE needed a director and an office. At one of the meetings it was announced, after a lunch break, that the group had decided I should be the director. I said, “No, I live in Seattle, I have a job,” similar to my, “No, I live in New York,” when Anne asked me to stay with Artist Trust. But the rest is history. I left Artist Trust and entered full time into the Culture Wars.

THE CULTURE WARS

“The NEA Four,” along with Mapplethorpe, became the symbols of the Culture War.⁴ The “four” were performance artists: Karen Finley, Tim Miller, Holly Hughes, and John Fleck. Their funding, recommended by peer panels, was overturned by the NEA chairman due to the subject matter of their work. The National Campaign for Freedom of Expression took the case to court with the help of the ACLU attorney, Marjorie Heins, and the Center for Constitutional Rights. One of our lead attorneys, David Cole from CCR, is now a lead attorney for the ACLU. We won in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals – the same court that ruled Trump’s immigration ban unconstitutional this year, 2017. The NEA Four case eventually went to the Supreme Court. In 1998, about three weeks after I arrived on Bali, I received an email that the Court had ruled against us. The ruling and that entire period of time are now a part of art history.⁵ They are worth studying, especially with what is happening today and what, I predict, may be about to unfold.

***The National Campaign for Freedom of Expression
took the “The NEA Four” case to court.***

During my almost seven years with NCFE, I travelled all over the USA to talk about the then-new and growing threat from the far right and their effort to restrict freedom of expression, among other things. Their other targets were LGBT issues, abortion, feminism, HIV/AIDS, etc. The works of art that were targeted usually dealt with these issues. The Mapplethorpe incident gave rise to many more

incidents in small towns and large, for artists known and unknown, including Andres Serrano and his “Piss Christ” and Sally Mann and her photographs of her children.⁶ The list is long. NCFE published a booklet and other resources on what to do if you were under attack.

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As a newbie in the world of First Amendment and censorship, I set about to meet the other players, people working for organizations that had long been fighting these battles, like the American Library Association, American Booksellers Association, PEN, and others. As I made the rounds I began to realize that many of these people and groups were not aware of what each other was doing and, in some cases, had never met. So I proposed to Archibald Gillies, then president of the Andy Warhol Foundation, that NCFE and the Warhol Foundation host a gathering at Andy’s old Factory studio for everyone we could find who was working on First Amendment issues. Although the NCFE and I were unknown to most of the invitees, there was great interest in Andy’s place and the turnout was very good. This group became the Free Expression Network (FEN) and continues to this day.⁷ After I left, NCFE was absorbed into one of these organizations, the National Coalition Against Censorship.

For many non-arts activist groups, the view of the arts world was one of elitism and disinterest in the battles of racism, feminism, LGBT, and economic justice.

These years also saw the rise of the “Religious Right,” which launched the first grenades in what became the “Culture Wars.” A book that was very important for me and others during that time was by James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America – Making sense of the battles over the family, art, education, law, and politics*.⁸ Hunter was one of the first thinkers to connect the dots between the challenges to all areas of culture from the far right. As the battles escalated, NCFE became a partner with many other organizations and efforts to respond to these attacks including the ACLU and Southern Poverty Law Center. One thing I found both valuable and disconcerting at the time was that, when I approached the non-arts activist groups in an effort to work together, they were surprised as well as welcoming. For many, their experience and view of the arts world was one of elitism and disinterest in the battles of racism, feminism, LGBT, and economic justice. Many NAAO members worked closely in communities dealing with these issues, and NCFE helped become a conduit for them to the larger struggles in what Hunter saw so clearly as the “Culture Wars.” Now, having been away from the U.S. and NCFE for almost 20 years, I can only observe that this battle has recently taken on a new life.

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While still with Artist Trust, I was invited to join the board of Art Matters foundation. This small philanthropic organization was founded in 1985 and was funded entirely by Laura Donnelly. In the beginning, it provided support to “alternative art spaces” that were presenting the work of new, cutting-edge artists who had a hard time raising money. Later Art Matters began to fund artists directly. “Cutting-edge” for AMI (it was first known as Art Matters Inc.) meant work on the “edge,” either in form or in subject matter. Art Matters’ list of grantees represents a chunk of the history of American art in the last three decades including Andres Serrano, John Kelly, Glenn Ligon, Lyle Ashton Harris, Nan Goldin, Marlon Riggs, Mel Chin, David Wojnarowicz, Ann Carlson, and Jennie Livingston. who used her Art Matters grant to make *Paris Is Burning*.

These were both exhilarating and exhausting years.

By the early 1990s when the Culture Wars were in full gear, Art Matters took a lead in responding both to HIV/AIDS and the attacks on freedom of expression.⁹ Indeed, many of the artists funded by Art Matters were those being targeted for censorship. AMI helped to create and support organizations such as Visual AIDS, which created the “Red Ribbon” project. (Visual AIDS shared office space with AMI.) The now famous red ribbons were debuted at the Tony Awards when members of Visual AIDS went backstage and asked presenters to wear a red ribbon. This was followed by the Oscars, Grammys, and every major cultural event after that. Art Matters also supported the group Gran Fury which, among other now-famous projects, created the “Kissing Doesn’t Kill” bus posters, now included in the collection of MoMA. The Estate Project for Artists with AIDS was supported by Art Matters to deal with the estates of artists who were dying so that their paintings, photography, and other works were not lost to future generations. In some cases, the families of these artists were embarrassed by, even hated, the work of their offspring and would gladly have destroyed it.

These were both exhilarating and exhausting years.¹⁰ NCFE was always scrambling for funding as all such groups have to do. It had too little staff to do all that was expected and needed of it. The politics were ugly. This period coincided, though not coincidentally, with the AIDS crisis. Our friends and colleagues were sick and dying. We were visiting hospitals, caring for sick friends, attending memorials in between protesting, rallies, and our activist day/night jobs.

A “BREAK”

By the end of 1997 I was worn down. I decided to leave NCFE and take a break. I thought about what I might do next. During my years with NCFE, I had often been invited by art schools to speak to their students about “cultural politics” or “art and politics,” which were not otherwise part of the curriculum. I had begun work on a reading list and even on a possible curriculum for the San Francisco Art Institute, where my friend, the late great Ella King Torrey, was president. I so much enjoyed the occasions when I had the chance to meet and work with art students that it occurred to me I might explore this as a next phase in my life. As it turned out, though, my life took a different turn.

Only several years later did I realize the toll that politics and the AIDS crisis of those years had taken.

In May 1998, I left for Bali on the first leg of a two-month trip around Southeast Asia where I had never travelled. I arrived ten days before the fall of the 30-year Soeharto dictatorship, with Indonesia at a historic moment of upheaval. I remember the front page of *The Jakarta Post* a few days after that historic day with a full-scale, above-the-fold headline: “FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION.” It was like an omen, and I still have that newspaper. Basically, I never left Bali after that point. Although I did not fully comprehend it when I decided to leave NCFE, I was physically and emotionally burned out by politics and the AIDS crisis. Only several years later did I realize the toll those years had taken.

politics and the AIDS crisis. Only several years later did I realize the toll those years had taken.

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I have lived on Bali now for nineteen years. I have kept up with my friends and colleagues – and family, of course – as I am still on the board of Art Matters, and we gather yearly to review grants and renew our tribe. I am so grateful for the experience that Bali has given me, the people, culture, and the immersion into Southeast Asia. I was woefully ignorant about this region before I landed here, despite the Viet Nam/American War and the fact that I have ancestral Southeast Asian blood because my father was born in the Philippines. During my first months on Bali I read voraciously every book I could find, both fiction and non-fiction, about Bali, Indonesia, Southeast Asia. Since then I have been fortunate to travel and explore this region, and my dream is that more UW art students and artists from the U.S. will have the chance to know this incredible part of our world.

PAINFUL POSTSCRIPT

The experience of fighting these battles came with a painful realization. I entered the fight with a naïve assumption: that the arts world would all be of the same mind regarding censorship and freedom of expression and politics. Instead, we wound up in battles inside the arts community, with many telling us we should keep quiet, that we were rocking the boat. We definitely had supporters. Some were individuals, such as Jacob and Gwen Lawrence. Others were in the foundation community. In addition to the Warhol Foundation, we were supported by the Robert Sterling Clark, Nathan Cummings, and the Albert List and MacArthur foundations. All of them understood, more than most people, what the battle was about. But friendships were also broken during this time. Here in Seattle, in DC, in New York, there were people in the arts community who saw us as troublemakers, endangering arts funding. They did not want to stand up for artists like Mapplethorpe, and the LGBTQ acronym barely existed in those years. NCFE received an award from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force for standing up for LGBT artists. I like to think of that time as a turning point or at least as one important step toward gains and cultural changes that continue today. At the same time, as I made the above remarks at the UW art school, it was barely two weeks after an election that came as a harsh, stabbing reminder that what is gained can be lost without vigilance, activism, and courage.

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Whenever I re-visit this document – as I have now, editing it in late-spring 2017 – I remember more. Each year the Mayor of New York City presents the Mayor’s Awards for Arts and Culture. One year, Blanchette Rockefeller (Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.) was one of the award recipients. Mrs. Rockefeller was on the board of NYSCA and was one of the Council’s most respected members, respected by her board colleagues, the staff, and Mrs. Hart. Mrs. Rockefeller was serious and, as the staff said, “showed up,” meaning she did her homework and whenever possible attended even minor meetings of the committees she was assigned. It was a horrible weather day in Manhattan. Kitty and I left her apartment on east 64th and Madison in her state car heading to Gracie Mansion. It was late afternoon, drenching rain, traffic was a mess. We arrived after the ceremony had begun, and we squeezed ourselves into the hall jammed with attendees and stood pressed against the back wall. We arrived in time for the Mayor’s presentation to Mrs. Rockefeller...and also for the presentation to another recipient, Elia Kazan, the film director. Known for *On the Waterfront* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Kazan was also known as one who cooperated with HUAC. He “named names.” which meant

he informed on friends and colleagues in the film industry who were accused of having “Communist sympathies.” Those named wound up on the infamous “Black List” and had their careers ruined. Kazan, who was talented and ambitious, was pressured by HUAC to name names or lose his career. He caved and went on to a very successful career.

The award ceremony ended, Kitty and I were still pressed against the back wall by the crowds, and she was trying to decide whether or not to make an effort to reach Mrs. Rockefeller to offer congratulations. Suddenly she grabbed my hand, squeezed it very hard, and kept holding on. Just then Elia Kazan approached and said, “Hello, Kitty.” She replied “Hello, Gadge” (using his intimate nickname). I could see he was reticent as Kitty held onto my hand, and he passed by. She decided to call Mrs. Rockefeller later in the evening to offer her congratulations, and we left to find our car. Once seated in the backseat Kitty said, “That is the first time I have spoken to Gadge since he named names.” That had been about 40 years earlier.

***Our recent election came as a harsh, stabbing reminder
that what is gained can be lost without
vigilance, activism, and courage.***

REFERENCES & READING LIST

1. When we began talking about our degrees, David and I believed we were the only art history graduates that year. Admittedly, the art history degree program was very new. However, research by Jeanette Mills, an art history alum on the School’s staff, proved that five or six other students received undergraduate degrees in art history that year. So much for relying only on soft human memories. (Anne)
2. [“25 years later: Cincinnati and the obscenity trial over Mapplethorpe art,”](#) by Grace Dobush, *The Washington Post*, October 24, 2015.
3. [“Archaic Social Media: Arts Wire uncovered,”](#) Posted on *Carrying On*, February 11, 2017.
4. [Timeline of NEA Four related events](#), from the Franklin Furnace.
5. *Sex, Sin, and Blasphemy: A Guide to America’s Censorship Wars* and *Priests of Our Democracy: The Supreme Court, Academic Freedom, and the Anti-Communist Purge*, both by Marjorie Heins, one of the attorneys from the ACLU who worked closely with NCFE on the NEA Four. Her books should be required for art history! (David)
6. [Hold Still \(A Memoir with Photographs\)](#) by Sally Mann.
7. Website for the [Free Expression Network](#).
8. [Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America – Making sense of the battles over the family, art, education, law, and politics](#), by James Davison Hunter.
9. [Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America](#), by Brian Wallis (editor), Marianne Weems, and Phillip Yenawine. A [book review](#), written by Pamela Clapp, was published in *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader*.
10. [“A History of the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression,”](#) by David Mendoza.

David also added the the following podcasts

- “[Free Speech Advocate on the State of College Campuses](#),” a segment from *Morning Edition*, NPR, May 29, 2017. [Copyright 2017 NPR]
- “[How ‘Sgt. Pepper’s’ shaped a musical era](#),” *PBS NewsHour*, May 28, 2017.
- “[Looking at JFK’s legacy in the shadow of his death](#),” *PBS NewsHour*, May 28, 2017.

Note: The website for David Mendoza’s product line is: d-bali.com.

📁 Eighth decade, Re: artists

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