

Upstate Artists Guild
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March 14, 2008

Bob Mirch, Mayor Tutunjian and the City of Troy government,

The Upstate Artists Guild finds the actions of the City of Troy against the Sanctuary for Independent Media appalling and deliberately perverse. To hide behind spuriously inflated building code violations to temporarily disrupt a show and to attempt to permanently dislodge a local arts organization is an insult to your citizens, your many artists, and most of all to you, the government of the City of Troy. The recent explosion of the arts scene within the Capital Region and surrounding areas shows how strong and vital the area's artists have become. The retrograde actions of the City run counter to a movement that up until now the City has supported and embraced. We remain dumbfounded as to how the City of Troy could allow Bob Mirch and his cronies to shut down an exhibit based on personal distaste stemming from misinformation and ignorance.

First, we consider this attack to be a direct violation of Mr. Bilal's First Amendment rights. Second, we condemn Mr. Mirch's scare tactics and believe that he has made specious use of City office in order to execute a personal witch-hunt against the artist. That Mr. Mirch's personal interests are completely unconnected to the closure of the Sanctuary by his own subordinates the very next day after he organized his protest strains all reasonable credulity. Further, that this untoward tactic should result not only in the censorship of the work of several artists, but the closure of the Sanctuary for Independent Media is doubly regrettable and an inexcusable affront to the greater arts community. We call for public apology from Mr. Mirch and the reversal of Code Enforcement's closure.

The UAG pledges to support Mr. Bilal and the Sanctuary for Independent Media and will continue to work to that effect until the issue has been resolved, the artists and venue have been absolved, and a public apology has been made. As the birthplace of Uncle Sam, a bastion of abolition, the forge for the War Between the States and one of the chief flash-points of the American Labor Movement, Troy has played a long and illustrious role in the preservation of our freedoms. Therefore, we are confident that upon reflection, the City will do the right thing and take a stand for Mr. Bilal's right to Free Speech, and by extension, the rights of all.

Sincerely,
The Upstate Artists Guild Board of Directors