



UPTOWN MULTI-CULTURAL ART CENTER

1630 West Wilson Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60640

web site: www.art-teez.org

Artist Protests City Law by Giving His Art Away

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Contact: Chris Drew (day)

773/561-7676

(Evening) 773/973-1863

e-mail umcac@art-teez.org

The "Free Speech Artists' Movement" accuses the City of Chicago of enforcing illegal Municipal Codes that deny artists/citizens their complete free speech rights in the public way.

One artist who says the City is shorting artists on their speech rights is protesting by giving his art away in the Loop. City law allows an artist to give her/his art away but not to sell it without severe restrictions. Federal First Amendment case law says there is no difference between selling and giving away speech and that it does not matter whether the speaker is paid. To protest the peddlers license law that unfairly restricts artists, artist C. Drew will be screen printing patches in public in the Loop on a random schedule all summer long. He intends to blog about his experiences to build support for artists' rights.

Artists and concerned citizens are beginning to rally around the idea that they should have their full First Amendment rights in Chicago. Screen-print artist C. Drew has promoted a basic understanding of artists' First Amendment rights on his cable TV show, Printing T-shirt Art. He has contrasted the 1st Amendment rights of newspapers to sell their speech on the public sidewalks and parks, with the rights of artists in Chicago. One need only look for the artists in Chicago to realize they are unseen in most of the city on a daily basis. He compares the zero street art scenes for artists in Chicago with the rights of artists in New York City to sell in parks and on streets where flourishing art scenes exist. He explains this difference as resulting from the fact that- unlike in New York where artists fought and won in court - artists have not fought for their full speech rights in Chicago, yet.

It is not an accident that Chicago artists are absent from Chicago streets and parks. Chicago Municipal Code has denied artists significant 1st Amendment rights. Even after losing two Federal court cases (see art-teez.org/free-speech.htm for links to cases), the city persists in demanding that artists must obtain a peddlers license, which classifies them as "Itinerant Merchants," to sell their speech in Chicago. In the second lawsuit the city lost, Chicago's policy of requiring a peddlers license for speech sales was shown to be unconstitutional.

Presently, with a \$165 peddlers license in hand, artists must submit the art they intend to sell a month in advance to have its political content confirmed as worthy of a “Speech Permit.” Once this has been done the artist is provided a letter-label sticker to put on the back of their peddlers license card which restricts the artist to a single corner of the Loop for the entire month applied for. The artist is still restricted from selling speech anywhere else in the vast banned areas of Chicago. When people gather in other places for events in many of the banned zones the artist is rooted to a corner unable to reach those audiences. This is not “free speech.”

The actual “Speech Permit” regime the Municipal Code sets up is a bureaucratic nightmare. Almost no one uses it. It is not even followed by those who administer it. Artists and political activists on the street have accommodated themselves to several locations around Grant Park where they have found police leave alone most people claiming “political speech” 1st Amendment rights. Others take their chances selling where they will, bending with the mood of police and the moment. Only the most ardent artists/citizens are ever seen.

Emerging artists are banned from most commercial areas, the Loop and any open activity in the city parks. This ban has acted to prevent artists from finding the public and each other and eliminates the logical locations for artists to create art scenes around Chicago. This leaves only the art fairs and neighborhood festivals in which artists can sell their art. These fares & festivals are too expensive for emerging artists, who do not yet have a large enough following to afford the \$150-500 festival fees to which the City adds an additional \$25 tax as a final insult. Art scenes need free sales spaces for emerging artists to flourish. It is the emerging artists who have the energy and mission to create art scenes. It is the emerging artists toward whom Chicago is heartless. It is the citizens who lose the art scene possibilities this policy suppresses.

Artists are organizing to demand their 1st Amendment rights to free speech. Visit art-teez.org/free-speech.htm for details.

We are seeking Artists to send statements in support of their 1st Amendment rights to umcac@art-teez.org. Artist statements will be collected into a testimonial booklet, read from at speak-outs around the city and published online.

To get involved leave a message at 773/561-7676.