

A Telephone Call,

or,

A Tale of Three Presidents,

or,

My Venetian Adventure

It started, as all good things do, with a telephone call.

Actually, as I hope my tale will show, these days few things start, end, or progress exclusively with telephone calls. That last bastion of contact through an, albeit disembodied, human attribute, has disappeared more and more from my life and, I assume, from most of yours. These days most of what we do moves forward through electronic means, and, at the height of the adventure I am about to tell, there were days when I went through several hundred emails at a time. I could not have done this project before the spread of electronic communications. These technologies are not only binding us together in time and space in new ways, but they are also corroding our

experience of real space. Yet those very same technologies allow us to experience a place, to visit it and to do things there, in a much more intense manner. It is not so much that computer and communications technologies are replacing the real world, or “meatspace,” as they are creating moments of intensity within a global landscape that is becoming more and more homogenous. These points of belonging, of comfort, and of spectacle, or community and solitude bound together by technology that wraps around us like a cocoon, isolating us at the same time that it plugs us in, are what I believe architecture, design, and art are all about.

But I digress. I wander through sprawl. I give away the point of my story.

I was experiencing sprawl. That is to say, I was sitting in the office of the architects for the Art Museum’s expansion in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, when my cellular telephone rang –as I said, a rare, and therefore noteworthy occurrence. It was my secretary, Terrie Benjamin. “A Mister Berreta is trying to reach you,” she said, with what turned out to be her infallible ability to mangle the names of foreigners even as she remembered every single name of every single supporter of the Art

Museum, their parents, their children, their grandchildren and their former girlfriends –true local knowledge;

“Something about the Biennale.”

I must digress again. La Biennale di Venezia started in that most serene apparition of a city in 1895 as a way of showing the best art of the world and thus attracting tourists. All the most important countries of the time erected pavilions in the municipal gardens, or Giardini, to showcase their most avant garde work, with Italy, not a producer of a great deal of great art at the time, taking central place. The Biennale was such a success that it is today the single most important art event in the world. Several hundred thousand people attend, the countries that do not have pavilions in the Giardini rent palazzos or stores to be part of the show and for the “aperto,” or opening, every single person of any note in the art world descends on Venice.

In 1975, the Biennale organization, which also puts on the annual cinema show and festivals of dance and theater, added an architecture biennale in the off years. The first time I attended, my partner, Peter

Haberkorn, turned to me as we were walking away from the Giardini during the opening day, and said:

“This is what it must be like when you die.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“They say your whole life rushing before you,” he answered, and he was right.

Every architect, every curator, every student, and every architecture groupie (yes, they exist) we had ever known was walking by us.

“Have him call me,” I told Terrie, and went back to the glorious future of the Art Museum unfolding in front of me on the drawing tables.

Five minutes later my telephone rang. “Hello, Mr. Betsky, this is Paolo Baratta. You do not know me, but I have a problem, and thought perhaps you might be able to help me.”

“Hello, Mr. Baratta,” I answered the mellifluous voice of an Oxford-educated Italian, “What is your problem, and how can I help?”

“A few weeks ago, I was asked to come back to the Venice Biennale, which I headed a few years ago and which has experienced some

problems recently, as President, and I found out that my predecessor had neglected to appoint a director for the next architecture Biennale.”

This was in December, and the next biennale was slated to open at the beginning of the following September.

“Well, Mr. Baratta,” I replied, “As you might know, I have been often, and was commissioner for the Dutch pavilion three times. And I have always thought that you must think the Biennale as a spectacle, not just an exhibition of drawings or models. It is a show that must draw us in, and show us, “mostrare,” demonstrate or reveal, what architecture is. You have great resources to do so, but too often your wonderful spaces overwhelm the models and drawings nobody understands and the photographs of buildings that you should visit in real life. A Venice architecture biennale should show objects and images as good as the art biennale, and I think it could do so by going beyond buildings to look at the intensity of architecture you can find in interiors, in landscapes, in films, in everything that is beyond buildings. I would be happy to give you some advice on how to do that, and maybe suggest some names of people I know.”

There was a short silence, as the architects in Rotterdam looked at me quizzically at Peter rolled his eyes at my speling.

“I think you have solved my problem,” said President Baratta.

“Well, I can suggest people, but if you are thinking of me, I have a full time job....”

“We must talk about this more. When can I see you?”

“Well, we are actually on our way to Amalfi for our first vacation in five years. You know, it is very cheap there this time of year...”

“Perfect, I will come to see you there.”

Three days later, a chauffeured Mercedes pulled up to our hotel. “We must eat something, where shall we go?” asked the President.

“Well, we went to a small place in the harbor last night, but...”

“Perfect.”

We rode down into town and stepped into the little seafood restaurant where we had received our pleasant, but perfunctory meal the night before.

“Minister,” said the owner as soon as he laid eyes on the President.

“No, no, I am not a Minister,” said the President.

“Yes, you are, said the owner, leading us in.”

“But no.”

“But yes, yes, I am sure.”

“Well, I *was* minister of the environment, and minister of housing, and minister of social affairs, and under-minister of foreign affairs, but I am not a minister *now*,” sighed Baratta.

Thus began my friendship with one of the most intelligent and charming members of Italy’s semi-private, semi-governmental aristocracy I have ever met. Food appeared, as if out of nowhere, and by the second bottle of wine the President –never Baratta, or Paolo—had persuaded us to abandon our vacation and drive almost a thousand kilometers up to Venice, “just to look and talk some more.”

We arrived the day before Christmas, put down our bags and went off to the Arsenale, the medieval arsenal of the Venetian army that served as the Biennale’s main exhibitions space since Baratta commandeered

and renovated it in 1980. Massimiliano --Max, a muscular former swimmer, an expectant father with a twinkle in his eye and a way of getting everything done-- met us. He walked up to the main door, opened the 12-foot high doors of the half-mile long medieval rope-making factory, empty and freezing, and said:

“Eccolo. Fill this.”

I looked at Peter, he looked at me, and shrugged:

“So there goes 2008,” he said, “What are we doing in 2009?”

Thus began my Venetian adventure, commandeering a budget of about \$4 million and a massive array of designers to put on a little show on evenings and weekends while running the Art Museum during the day.

It took a little persuasion for the Art Museum Board to let me do it, and it caused a few sleepless nights, but the show did happen.

Now, Venice had actually never been one of my favorite cities. In fact, when I traveled around Italy with my backpack as a high school student, I visited every city except Venice. The place has a way of sneaking up on you, though, or rather, of unfolding in front of you as you glide down the serpent of the Gran Canal. It has affected me like so many

generations of romantics, lulling us into its illusionary grandeur to the point that we do not even smell the sewer in our hotel rooms or notice the hordes of tourists swarming all around us.

The Biennales, however, are something else. They transform a city that gains its charm from a bygone glory into a site for very contemporary posturing. The art stars --or, in the case of architecture, the archistars-- descend on the city, and with them the panoply of paparazzi and potentates that dress art with power. Paul Allen's yacht, the *Octopussy*, which outdoes the Queen's own yacht, is invariably parked right in front of where you exit from the Arsenale. Damien Hirst competes with Larry Gagosian, if those names of artists and dealers mean anything and, during my run of things, the latest hedge fund manager or oligarch with a few billion to spare dances with the Zaha Hadids and the Daniel Libeskind. Our own Alice Weston was amazed to find Ms. Hadid alighting from the waterbus, or vaporetto, as both found this public conveyance easier to manage for those of uncertain footing than the over-powered and over-charging private water taxis. But I digress again.

So, I began making trips once every few weeks to Marco Polo airport, usually on weekends to minimize my absences from Cincinnati. After the usual tyranny of travel, Delta Division, I would trudge the fifteen minutes down to the quay, where a speedboat driven by somebody from central casting with a tan and large sunglasses would take me into one of the two palazzos being used by the Biennale organization while their permanent home was under renovation. There the gang would be waiting for me –Cristiano Frizzelle --Chris, head of Biennale Servizio, which coordinated everything, Manuela Lucadazio --Manu, “responsible for architecture,” an architect of considerable charm and even more considerable appetite for designer clothes; Max, the ladies from the press and publications, from protocol and collateral events, the logistics chief and the accommodations head, all asking for a few minutes of my time. And then there was Francesco, a Roman friend who became my Assistant Director and my savior. He lived around the corner from the President and, when distance and culture intervened, the two of them solved everything over a quick espresso on the corner, Francesco texting me as they talked.

At the hub of all of it stood Andrea del Mercato, a former communist organizer and assistant to the philosopher-mayor of Venice who was now the Biennale's Executive Director, invariably sporting a Hermes tie, a blackberry, and a cigarette. The President and I made a bet: by the opening, I would have weaned Andrea off cigarettes, and Baratta would have weaned him off his blackberry. We both failed. Andrea gave my first Hermes tie for my birthday. Now I am addicted.

Once, we were sitting in a meeting that was going on longer than usual. We were debating whether one of the many countries that did not have an official pavilion would have a room somewhere in the cavities of the Arsenale, or whether we would tell them to rent a palazzo in town, when Andrea finally elevated the discussion to a fundamental issue of precedence and priority.

"Mr. President, this is an ontological problem," he began, only to have the President cut him off:

"Fuck ontology. Just find the space."

Both the President and I liked to get things done --meetings that were scheduled for two hours we managed to wrap up in fifteen minutes. I

thought I was definite, but the President had the ultimate weapon.

Without a word, he would look you in the eye, and wiggle his right index finger ever so slightly. Finis.

I had my own office, a fifth-floor walk-up at the top of a tower in the middle of the Arsenale. It had commanding views, but an air conditioner that never seemed to work, so I spent most of my time a floor lower, sitting in a welter of computers and telephones with the staff that were helping me to choose, contact, negotiate with, and make arrangements for the dozens of architects who were to show their work. One day, a heavy thunderstorm passed over, rattling the tower, but not interrupting our telephone calls and emails around the world. When it was over, something drew me up, so I went up to my desk, looked around, and there, suddenly, so close I felt I could touch them, were the Alps. Suddenly, I felt like I was in a real place, in the shadow of those mountains that stored the water that then flowed down the Po to the marshes all around us, feeding the lagoon and setting us all adrift on our little islands, inventing a world of architecture that we would stage in this most theatrical of apparitions.

Working in Venice, I realized that it is a performance piece carried out every day with millions of tourists as audience. Those addressees do not sit still, but move in packs through every inch of street and on the water. The actors are the 50,000 people who still live in Venice to serve those tens of millions, the waiters, gondoliers, shopkeepers and Biennale organizers. After the first press conference, everybody there seemed to know me --the barista pulled my morning cappuccino without asking, waiters at restaurants where I had never eaten answered my requests for water with "Si, direttore." I even had a card that identified me as a "Venetian worker," entitling me to ride the waterbuses at a fraction of the tourist cost. The public transport system of Venice, by the way, is the only profitable one in the world.

I discovered the two-price system. One evening, after working until about ten in the evening, the President finally pronounced a "basta," and said, "Let us have some food."

We walked across the street to Harry's, the President embraced the presiding Cipriani, and we tucked into a meal that, including the excellent wine from the President's own Tuscan vineyard, soon ran, by my calculations, to well over five hundred Euro.

When the bill came, I said:

“Mr. President, let me pay, they have a deal here that foreigners receive a 20% discount because the Euro is so high; I will just invoice it back.”

Out came the index finger again, which then waved for the bill. A folded piece of paper arrived, and the President slid it over to me:

“2 coperta 90 Euro” was all it said.

I wish I had bad things to say about the experience, but whatever went wrong happened to the architects, not me, at least not in Venice. There was the time when my flight there via Paris was canceled and I ran to the Delta counter, organizing a rebooking through Frankfurt and sprinting to the door as they were closing it, sank into my seat and found my blackberry screaming at me about something that had gone wrong at the Art Museum I had just left, and it became too much. I literally started sobbing, to the astonishment of my seatmates, holding my head in my arms in a deep crouch, trying to breathe.

But that was then, and by the time I arrived in Venice, the speedboat took me to the meetings over the open lagoon and there were Chris,

Manu, Andrea, the President, the whole gang, and somehow it was all OK.

The experience was one of sprawl, of moving through space physically a half dozen to a dozen times, but through the ether mostly, typing and talking away before work started at the Art Museum or late into the night. I even had students design a city of sprawl as a competition for the Biennale, and we had Italian Telecom sponsor it.

What I did in actuality was to invite about two dozen architects to play in the Arsenale. I asked them what I thought was a very simple question: “How can we reveal, appropriate and domesticate those systems, mainly of a technological nature, that control our daily lives, and do so in such a manner that we can be at home in the modern world?”

The answers were varied, ranging from a giant spider Ms. Hadid designed as a combination house, lounge, desk, bed and sex object, and which was so large that when it arrived it had to be placed next to the only door that would admit it, conveniently near the entry, to a chessboard of bathrooms, kitchens and beds you could rearrange at will, to an entry on living alone in our nomadic modern world, which

featured pets that inflated when you sat down on a chair to which they were attached, as your presence and weight sent air through the leashed connecting the fake dogs to your place of rest. There were saddles that became cities, cities built out of laser-cut fragments of kids' toys, blobs that morphed bodies, cars and buildings, and a gondola that took you on a virtual ride through Venice –Italy, or Venice, Las Vegas, or Venice, Macau.

Construction was a nightmare. It cost as much to ship a container from China to Venice's port as it does to then get the contents of that container, by union-guided barge, into the Arsenale across the lagoon. Construction workers ranged from German technicians in white coats assembling white blobs to a crew of Barcelona students, barely clad, who worked in shifts so that seven people could sleep at a time in the hostel they shared. When they had finished their installation, "Internet 2.0," a completely transparent domestic environment in which every object had a chip embedded within it, so that it could be addressed from anywhere in the world., they partied. Their teacher, Vicente Guallart, hired a DJ, a set dresser, and a make-up artist to set up a rave, then photographed the results, which were his only documentation of the

installation. They were still going at it when we arrived at ten the next morning.

One early Sunday morning, I was trying to wake up in the little flat they had rented for me near the Rialto Bridge, when my telephone rang.

“Aaron, it’s me, don’t worry, it will be OK.”

I thought for a minute, gulped some more coffee, concentrated, and then answered,

“Oh, hi Frank, what do you mean don’t worry?”

“I hated everything I was working on, threw it out, and started over again.”

I was wide awake now. Here was Frank Gehry, three weeks before the opening, at the beginning of the “ferogusta,” the summer holiday when everything in Italy closes down completely, smashing a hole in my beautiful line of objects.

“You can’t, I love the design, it is great, Frank, trust me, it is...”

“Don’t mess with me. You know it was no good. But I have a great idea.”

The idea involved finding and shipping about fifty twelve-by-twelves, massive, 8-foot long beams, and constructing a giant scaffold. Next, we had to find plasterers willing to attach waving screens of clay over this construction, and to do so during the event, so that the structure would always be under construction. And somebody had to pay for all of this. Biennale Servizio sprang into action, blackberries purred and cellphones were attached to every ear, as Frank calmly called his 29-year-old Russian developer client, claiming that the structure was research for their building in Moscow and, besides, didn't he want to have a party in Venice? The client forked over \$300,000, workers stayed away from vacation, and we went to find clay. "Here we make Venetian plaster that looks like clay, it is better," the master workman assured me.

"Better show me real clay, too," I said.

"But it will crack!"

They lugged their beautiful facsimile of clay as well as the messy, drying, cracking plates up into the tower. I photographed them both

with my blackberry and pushed send. Within five minutes, I had my reply.

“Lv crking. Fg.”

When Frank Gehry finally walked into the event, where the plasterers were sculpting what the architect said were his version of St. Teresa’s cloak from Bernini’s famous sculpture, all wept.

In the Italian Pavilion, 20,000 square feet of white-walled space in the Giardini I also had to fill, the largest problem was the architect Rem Koolhaas’ refusal to participate. We solved that one by mounting a show of the paintings by his wife, Madelon Vriesendorp, of imaginary worlds, while showing a film that follows the housekeeper at a house Koolhaas designed as she tries to clean, fix, and negotiate with the complex gadgets the architect installed. Another architect brought in two dozen Chinese artisans to build a bamboo forest, only to have the bamboo stuck in customs. It was not properly cured. Italian bamboo would not do, the artist said. The forest was just a bush at the opening, but rose steadily during the three months the show was open.

The real way I filled that space was to turn to my students at the University of Cincinnati. I told them that I was interested in experimental architecture, gave them a short lecture on architecture that is not meant to be built, but is not utopian either, acting rather as a kind of research into and criticism of the build environment, and sent them off to their computers and libraries. Two days later, they had filled the pavilion for me with experimenters from around the globe. Two of them came as coop students to help organize it all.

Beyond the areas I had to fill, I also had to accord all the nations' submissions, which I could only rubberstamp, and the "collateral events," or special events for which participants paid 25,000 euros in exchange for being part of the official program. The Vatican got my blessing for showing the church of the future (then demurred), a display of gaudy Venini glass did not. The Estonians were the most difficult. Like any former colony, they did not have a pavilion. They were assigned a corner of the Arsenale in the Baltic Section. Instead, they proposed building a replica of the gas pipeline currently being built between Russia and Germany, stretching between the German and the Russian pavilions in the Giardini.

“If you can get permission from the German and Russian authorities,”
Andrea told me, “Go for it.”

So I sent letters and negotiated. I finally got the German commissioner to say that if we moved the pipe three feet further away from his pavilion, he could tell his minister he could not object, because we had conceded to demands. As to the Russian commissioner, he kept not answering my emails and faxes. I ran into him on a waterbus.

“You don’t understand, he explained.” “I have not heard, I do not know, I do not want to know.”

I understood then, and wrote a formal letter on letterhead saying that, if I had not heard back within three days, I would assume consent. The pipeline, a bright yellow abstract piece of sculpture that was the hit of the show and a favorite with children climbing through it, was built. I am glad that most commissioners cannot stand their ministers of culture.

Somehow, the Arsenale and the Giardini filled up, banners started appearing around town, the hotels said goodbye to people in white shirts and print dresses and greeted those dressed all in black, and the show got off the ground.

The opening itself was a giant blur, highlighted only by the combined fiftieth birthday party and twentieth anniversary celebration my partner, Peter Haberkorn, and I threw each other in the garden of the Arsenale.

“You know,” the President had said to me one day, “You really are a romantic. You claim that you like things tough, but you really want utopia.”

I had to agree, and thought back to the end of Voltaire’s *Candide*. “I’ll faut cultiver notre jardin,” that picaresque novel ends, in Turkey, of all places, and so I sought somebody to make a garden. I commissioned Kathryn Gustafson, who did such a beautiful job for the Lady Dianna Garden and at Millennium Park, and sent her to the Garden of the Virgins, all the way at the end of the Arsenale. She started scouting, and then the Chinese showed up. They had installed their pavilion there for the last four biennales, and claimed stakeholders’ rights. The President swayed under an onslaught of ambassadorial missives.

“What is behind that wall?” Kathryn asked me one day, while Andrea, the President, the Consul General of the People’s Republic and I stood in the garden, arguing over cohabitation.

“It is just a wilderness,” Andrea shrugged.

Kathryn found a gap in the garden wall and hacked her way through the brambles, finding her site. Four months later, it was part vegetable garden, with all the tomatoes ripe, part memorial built into ruins, and part a yin and yang symbol carved in grassy mounds, surmounted by helium-filled balloons denoting the heavens. That is where we had our party, the balloons swaying in darkening sky, and all that life rushing by –and staying, this time.

It rained on the official opening day. It was a mess. We all got drenched. I fell into the Gran Canal, in Kathryn Hepburn fashion, as I was trying to attend three different dinner parties at the same time. The President acted presidential, Andrea almost imploded, and I just tried to smile a lot. My favorite moment was showing a group of Founders from our Art Museum around before the opening. They showed up early in the morning, somewhat jetlagged and befuddled, and curious as to what this event was that had taken me away from what is obviously the most beautiful city in the world to this tourist trap, and then entered in through those big wood doors. Suddenly they found themselves greeted by the President, charmed into submission, assailed by sights

and sounds, and trialed by television crews and reporters asking what Cincinnati thought of this year's Biennale, was it better than last? Was this the future of architecture or the wrong path?

On the day of opening, I had the honor of reading my work ridiculed and vilified in *Le Monde*, *El Pais*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, the *Guardian*, the *Times* of London and the *Los Angeles Times* --the leading newspapers of just about every major country in the world. To top it all off, the *New York Times* did not even bother reviewing it --the ultimate insult. If I had not seen it happen to all my predecessors, I would have been a bit worried. I am looking forward to going back this August to watch the same happen to Kazue Sejima, the elegant Japanese woman who is my successor. She says she is looking forward to it as well. She lies very well.

Then it was over, just like that. Peter and I were packing our bags when the telephone rang, again.

"Hello Mr. President, ready for a farewell drink?" I answered, seeing the familiar number.

"You are not going, you must stay."

“I can’t, I already have a ticket, I...”

“We are already making arrangements. The President has heard about this and has decided to come.” By this he meant Giorgio Napolitano, the beloved President of the Republic of Italy. I had no choice. Two days later, we were waiting for the waterbus at the Rialto when we saw a parade of speedboats, lights flashing, preceding a boat flying official colors, with an ambulance boat trailing.

“Mr. President, I am not yet there, I...”

“Don’t worry, he comes early, I will give him some lunch first,” Baratta calmed me.

We arrived in time to greet the procession as it stepped onto the quay, lined up in order of protocol, and then I led the group through those doors. The real President, who bears a resemblance to Uncle Junior from the *Sopranos*, stopped.

“Eccolo,” he said, and shook his head in wonder.

We paused at an installation by the Austrian firm Coop Himmelb(l)au, a giant bubble with lights flashing in and around it. I coaxed the President inside, and grabbed one set of paddles.

“These measure your heart rate and pulse,” I explained, showing how thumping beats and flashing lights echoed through the space as they measured my nervousness.

The President nodded, and took hold of the handles. “Thump. Thump. Thump.”

The octogenarian smiled. “I am very proud of my heart.”

Two days later, slightly delayed by a fox running across the runway at the Frankfurt airport –but that is another digression-- I was safely back in Cincinnati and thought I was done with Venice. I knew I had agreed to a wrap-up session, but hoped they had forgotten. Then the telephone rang again, and Terrie answered. “It is Mr. Beretta for you.”

“You agreed to another visit.”

I sighed, looking at the mountains on my desk and dreaming of the Alps.

“The President of Austria is coming to make an official visit in October, come then, we will show him around, then we will have our meetings.”

So, I went back.

On the appointed day, I stood at the entry to the Arsenale one last time, protocol officers and guys with earpieces scanning the tourists now clumping around us, sensing something of import. The Other Real President arrived, trailing only his wife, his son and daughter, and his son-in-law. And one rather meek looking bodyguard, actually called Hans. It turned out it was his seventieth birthday, and this was his idea of a holiday. So, I toured him around, and found myself peppered with questions by a former schoolteacher who spent a year bumming around America in a second-hand Impala while he studied American electoral systems. When we reached the end, the ladies from the press and protocol, the men from collateral events and construction, Chris, Andrea, and Manu, the whole gang, they were all waiting to start our work.

“You must come to lunch with us,” President Schuster proclaimed.

I looked at the President, Baratta, that is, who shrugged. Protocol. The gang slunk off, we never had our meeting.

We sped off to Torcello, one of the islands in the lagoon, where we toured Santa Maria Assunta, the early medieval cathedral that turned out to be one of Schuster's and his wife's favorite, and about which they knew way more than I, and then sat down for a three-hour lunch at a branch of Cipriani. We spoke of the economy, the war, art, architecture and especially, of course, the American elections. We drank a great deal of wine. As the sun was setting, we headed back into Venice, and I remarked that the scene looked like a copy of an Impressionist view of the city, or, better yet, a Turner, reinforcing the notion that Venice was a figment of artistic invention, not a real city

"Its economy certainly is, but then what economy isn't" huffed the son, a junior executive at an IT firm.

"You were looking for architecture beyond building," said the son-in-law, a doctor; "Don't you think you are looking for pure phenomena, something that transcends fixed boundaries, and so aren't you just trying to find another imitation of nature, like all artists and architects,

only more abstract, as our lives these days are so much more abstract and we know nature to be just energy, not solid and void?”

“But I want to translate that experience into the framing of everyday life,” I protested.

“Well, then you failed,” answered the son-in-law, “because the best of your biennale is just those moments of escape, abstractions where we feel our body disappearing. I think you are tired of architecture, of buildings, of reality. You talk so much about sprawl, I think you are afraid of your own body, your own coherence, you do not want to give up control, but you look for ephemeral things everywhere.”

“Leave him alone,” President Schuster said, “He is just looking for beauty, like all of us.”

President Baratta looked at me, arched an eyebrow, and turned away.

We docked, we said goodbye, the Schusters invited me to come visit them in the Schloss anytime (and I see he was just reelected), and Baratta sent me on my way. The economy was falling apart, the Art Museum was in full operation, and reality beckoned. I was glad to be

back in Cincinnati, surrounded by beauty at the Art Museum, and hard at work bringing people and art together.

But every time I go to a Reds game, I reach into my drawer to find that red hat with the C on it, remember I lost it at the last Opening Day parade, and grab instead the bright red cap with the Venetian lion, rampant and roaring, to shield my eyes from the sun as it sets over the Ohio river and I watch our team bat its way to glory.

Aaron Betsky

May, 2010