

Opening Remarks

By

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The Art of Peace Charitable Trust Inaugural Reception and Dinner Honoring

Lin Evola-Smidt

United Nations

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Though we are here this evening to honour a gifted artist and champion of peace—Lin Evola-Smidt—I too have many reasons to feel honoured to speak on this happy occasion.

First of all, the mission of the Art of Peace Charitable Trust very much parallels many of the goals of the UN Charter. I am referring to the pursuit of a durable peace, disarmament, and harmony among the peoples of the world. It is therefore fitting that we are meeting in this historic building.

Many present here today know that the United Nations has long benefited from efforts to translate its lofty ideals into visual images, especially in the field of peace and disarmament. Visitors who take a casual walk around our grounds cannot help but note some common themes in many of our works of art. They will see a large pistol with its barrel tied into a knot. They will see St. George slaying a dragon made out of parts of dismantled missiles. They will see a giant hammering a huge sword into a plowshare, a statue that echoes a theme borrowed from the Book of Isaiah inscribed on a wall across the street from the UN. Entering this building, they will see the stained glass donated by Chagall to honour the memory of Dag Hammarskjöld and people everywhere who struggle for peace.

In recent years, we have hosted special displays with disarmament themes. These include the famous “Gun Sculpture”—made of 7,000 small arms that had been welded together into a giant cube. In the Disarmament Exhibit outside the General Assembly, one will find an electric guitar made from an AK-47 rifle. Our visitors have seen the ingenious creations of the Mozambican “Armas por Arte” project, which included statues and even furniture made out of weapons parts. We have also hosted an exhibition of native-American ancestral masks made out of parts salvaged from dismantled nuclear weapons, the detritus of the atomic age. And needless to say, I am proud that one of Lin’s “peace angels”—made of melted weapons—gracefully stands in my own office.

Art clearly has much to contribute in helping us to view our world in a different light, and thereby, to improve our hopes for changing it for the better. The more people contemplate such works of art, the more they will think about the underlying themes of disarmament, peace, and unity of the human condition that they represent. When Oscar Wilde famously declared that “Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life”, he was merely reminding us all of the various ways that art can influence human thoughts and behaviour, and change—not simply reflect—the world around us.

Much of Lin’s work has focused on the themes of human compassion, the spiritual unity of the world, the need to honour the memory of the victims of terror, and the compelling need for new progress in disarmament. I have no doubt that the United Nations—both as a whole and through the work of its parts—will continue its efforts to pursue the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction—nuclear, biological, and chemical arms—as well as new limitations and restraints in conventional arms. There are also today no less than thirteen multilateral conventions dealing with terrorist issues, five of which are deposited with the UN Secretary-General.

The work ahead in achieving the themes of peace and disarmament embodied in the “peace angel” statues must continue worldwide. In September 1963, just two months before his assassination, President

Kennedy stated in the General Assembly that “Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures.” Whether building new structures, or building new statues, there is much still much work to do.

I would like to remind this audience that the Secretary-General will soon be ringing the Peace Bell, in an event to open a new session of the General Assembly. This day is called the International Day of Peace. In one of history’s greatest ironies, this event in 2001 fell on 11 September. The day before, Secretary-General Kofi Annan issued his message to commemorate that day, saying “... let us dare to imagine a world free of conflict and violence. And let us seize the opportunity for peace to take hold, day by day, year by year, until every day is a day of peace.”

Despite the tragedy that followed, and in many ways because of it, we must never abandon our struggle to achieve such a goal. As Dag Hammarskjöld once put it, “The pursuit of peace and progress cannot end in a few years in either victory or defeat. The pursuit of peace and progress, with its trials and errors, its successes and setbacks, can never be relaxed and never abandoned.”

I wish to express my deep thanks to Lin Evola-Smidt, our guest of honour, for all of her dedicated and persistent efforts on behalf of world peace and disarmament. She has richly earned not just our gratitude, but our respect.