



Speech by Rip Rapson:

Rapson Lauds 25 years of Work at ‘Razor’s Edge of Change in the Arts and Cultural Community’

*Kresge CEO on hand to celebrate contributions of
Artspace President Kelley Lindquist.*

October 4, 2012

I’ve observed and participated in Kelley’s career from the time he began at [Artspace](#), when I was in private law practice providing pro bono legal services to arts organizations in Minneapolis.

Over the next two decades, as Kelley and I both built our careers in Minneapolis, Kelley and Artspace had a way of never straying too far from my professional life. While deputy mayor, I was inspired by Kelley’s work to create an arts and culture policy for the city. When I led the McKnight Foundation, Kelley’s modest little Schubert project led me to get crosswise with our foundation’s patriarch, who had deep misgivings about the project – although we invested anyway. And more recently, Kelley’s need for working capital precipitated my having to convince the Kresge board of trustees that they ought to extend one of their very first program-related investments to Artspace.

Like his father – one of the great figures of Minneapolis’ legal community for more than a half-century, Kelley has never been one for half measures. When he began Artspace, it was with the then-radical mission to advocate for artists’ space needs – before such an idea was fashionable. Before people took for granted the centrality of arts to the shape and pace and rhythms of contemporary urban America.

But there was something about Kelley that made people who were paying attention believe that this organization of one person with an annual budget of \$40,000 might actually become something more than a boutique exercise.

Little could they have imagined just how right they were. Before too terribly long, Kelley realized that

advocacy alone wasn't going to get artists the space they needed. Waiting for others to pick up the cause didn't suit him. So he morphed Artspace into a developer of nonprofit real estate for artists in Minneapolis. As they say, the rest is history.

I won't bore you with all the facts of where Artspace now finds itself. But a couple are striking:

- So much for his \$40,000 budget – Kelley now oversees a \$30 million annual budget and is supported by more than 50 funders.
- No longer simply a mainstay of the Minneapolis arts scene, Artspace now has projects in nearly half the states of the union, providing housing for more than 1,000 artists and families and creating administrative and retail space for more than 300 arts organizations, entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- And because Artspace not only develops properties, but continues to own them, it now has a portfolio of a half a billion dollars of arts infrastructure real estate – affordable housing, studio and retail space, administrative and performance space.

Those are the data points. But they, of course, only begin to describe the true influence that Kelley and Artspace have had in this country. Simply stated, they have been at the razor's edge of change in the arts and cultural community over the last 25 years. In a number of important ways.

First, Kelley was one of the first to recognize that artist live/work developments were not a step in the process of ushering in some higher use of real estate – these developments were instead a statement about serving artist needs in perpetuity.

Second, Kelley has, perhaps as much as anyone, been responsible for arts and culture investments taking their rightful place as drivers of economic and community development. As Artspace projects give new life to deteriorated or underutilized historic structures they generate property taxes and boost property values, they help communities become safer and more connected, they ensure that residents become more actively engaged in creative outlets that shape vibrant urban life.

And third, Kelley has inspired a generation of creative placemakers. One of my great joys while in Minneapolis was watching how Kelley and his staff got into the water system of a place. He brought onto the staff people who possessed his same qualities of vision, tenaciousness, honesty and ruthless adherence to excellence. And, well beyond his own organization, he has inspired a wide net of practitioners in

communities across America who have redefined how we think about the role of artists in the urban ecology.

It's been an honor to watch this extraordinary trajectory of accomplishment. It's been a privilege knowing that the person responsible for it is so utterly decent, thoughtful and humble. Thank you for the ride, Kelley. I know it's far from over.