

the
imagination

can reach up

into itself

and grasp

the universe



Before the sun rings the sky
With its spectral alarm,
Waking the piercing chorus of trees,
Sounding the beginning of the race.
It's before the rats climb into the starting blocks
That the mind crawls from its barricaded bunker,
Eyes wide and unshielded from glare,
Undistracted by color and contrast,
Unified in shadow;
It is then that
The Imagination
Can reach up into itself
And grasp
The Universe.

Lynn Manning, from "In the Morning"



Bruce Hall, *Silhouette*
(*Underwater Series*),
photograph, from
Sight Unseen

if the world were flat
we'd yearn for mountains

if the world were dry
we'd write the sea

Jim Ferris, from "Lucky Number"



Imagination: A Celebration of the Arts and Disability

In June 2010, VSA, the international organization on arts and disability, hosted the largest celebration of arts and disability in the world. Artists, educators, researchers, and policy makers with and without disabilities gathered in Washington, D.C., in a spirit of creative camaraderie that crossed all boundaries of gender, ethnicity, age, ability, and artistic genre.

The festival featured 620 visual, performing, literary, and media artists from 67 countries and more than 2,000 participants from all corners of the globe. The total audience attendance was over 15,000. Even greater numbers visited art exhibitions that ran beyond the festival week.

Through the artists, the audiences, and the inclusive practices displayed, VSA is advancing its mission of providing equal access to the arts for all.

Forward

My brother, President Kennedy, once said, “I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist.”

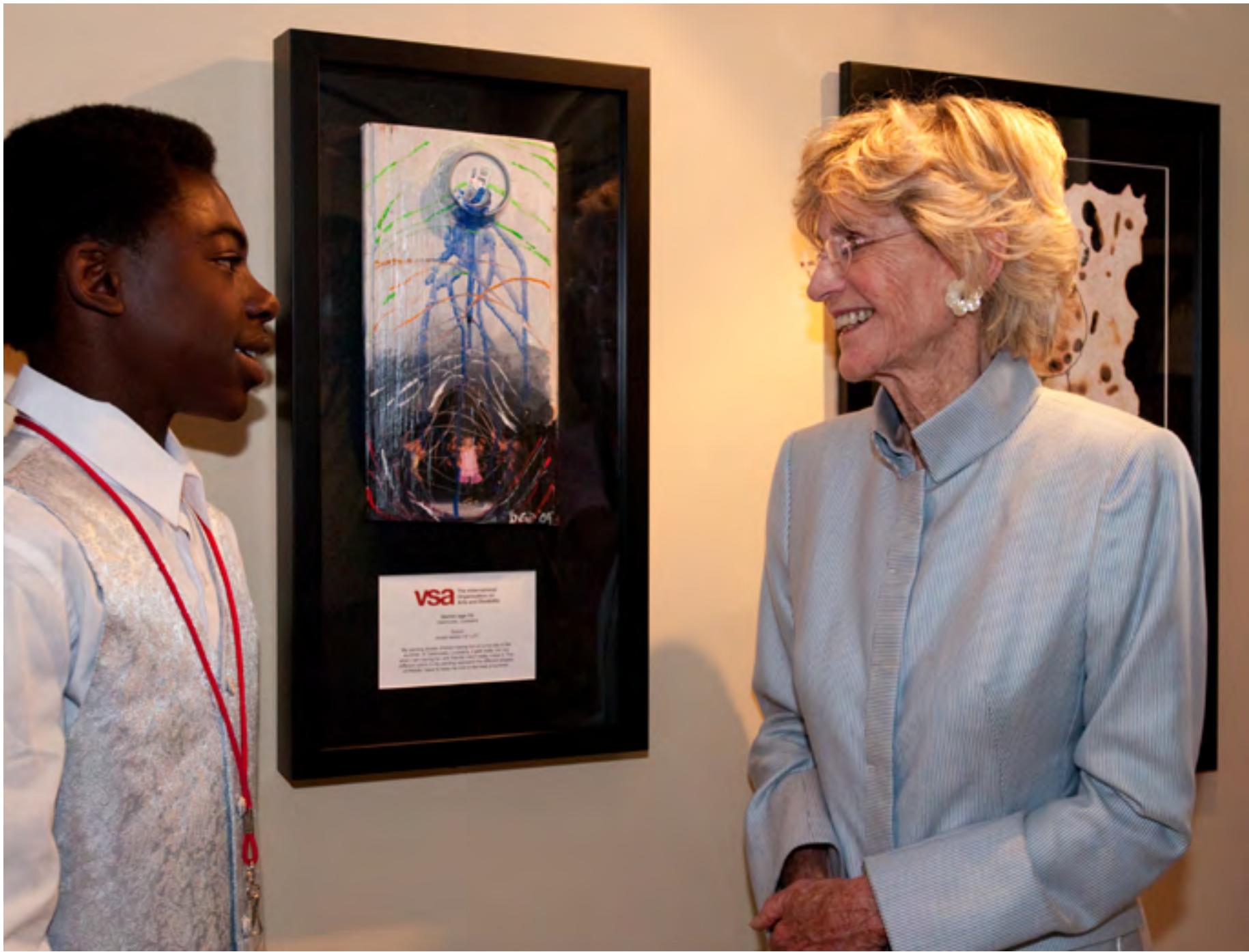
These words lie behind the founding of VSA. Nearly 40 years ago, at a time when people with disabilities had little to no access to the arts, we set out with the simple mission of providing more. It is incredible to reflect today on how far we, and society, have come. The 2010 International VSA Festival, captured so masterfully in this book, is a testament to that achievement.

4 It is the artists who are the champions of VSA’s story. Certainly an organization can provide access, but it takes people of courage, determination, and grit to cross over the threshold, climb onto a stage, stare into a canvas, and start creating.

I have been fortunate to meet artists around the world, in the largest cities and smallest towns, who have defied the perceptions of society through their work. Time and again, they tell me that it is neither easy nor comfortable. Yet still they persist, because the drive to create, and the joy that comes from that creation, far outweighs any struggle. How grateful we are for their spirit and how richer our lives are as a result.

This beautiful book is a tribute to those artists. Each page courses with a vibrancy, texture, and depth of feeling that made the 2010 festival unique unto itself.





I was honored to take part in the festival, to take in the talent that was nothing short of remarkable.

From 67 countries around the world, 2,000 artists, educators, and affiliates came to Washington, D.C., to participate and audiences of more than 15,000 enjoyed their work. These numbers would have been unimaginable 40 years ago, and represent a seismic shift in how our society views the talents and contributions of people with disabilities.

“If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him,” President Kennedy said.

We are proud of the role that VSA has played in providing people with disabilities the access, opportunity, and freedom to express themselves through the arts. As this book so clearly demonstrates, creativity has no bounds and the pursuit of truth never ends.

We salute those artists who have brought us to this day and look forward to enjoying the talents of those who are yet to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jean Kennedy Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jean Kennedy Smith
Founder, VSA