

Introduction for Mary Schmidt Campbell at the NY Times/Alliance for the Arts
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When I heard that Governor Spitzer had appointed Mary Schmidt Campbell Chair of the New York State Council on the Arts, I thought “Of course! Perfect choice!” To be honest I’d been a little less than confident about the depth of Governor Spitzer’s interest in the arts, in theater anyway, since I met him at a fund raiser for Empire Pride Agenda a couple of years ago and, after he was introduced to me, he said “Nice to finally meet you! How’s your P.R. firm getting along!?” I said it was getting along fine. And I still voted for him.

So it was reassuring to me when I learned that the Governor had made such a fantastic choice, the *only* choice, really, to replace the late great Kitty Carlyle Hart as Chair of NYSCA. Can you think of anyone else who’d fill Mrs. Hart’s shoes – not to mention her taffeta ball gown, elbow-length evening gloves, ermine wrap and diamond tiara – with as much grace, aplomb, dignity and managerial acumen, what my grandma called *tserchl*, as Mary Schmidt Campbell? Having placed the largest state’s arts budget in the country in such capable hands, it doesn’t worry me so much *who* the Governor is, with Mary around. She made it through the Koch administration and apparently got along with the man, she even has nice things to say about him – so hearing that a genuine miracle-worker was adding Chair of NYSCA to her other responsibilities, I could only have been happier hearing she’d been appointed Governor. Governor Mary Schmidt Campbell, it works for me!

I know Mary primarily in her role as Dean of NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, of which I’m an alumnus. I’ve watched as, over the past 17(?) Years, she’s transformed the school from an interesting but fragmented collection of interesting but fragmentary programs into America’s pre-eminent institution for the training of serious theater, film, dance and electronic media artists. Along with everyone else in the extended NYU/TSOA community, I’m awestruck by her brilliance as an administrator, diplomat, listener, executive. I’m deeply impressed by the wide variety of her interests, the depth and texture of her knowledge of all the various media within her purview, by her unstoppable, discerning curiosity and enthusiasm, by her insistence on forging, through hard work, vital connections between profession and vision, between artist and community, between art and public moral, spiritual and political conversation. To every challenge Mary brings her curator’s and historian’s sensibilities, basing what she’s building and helping others to build on a critical encounter with antecedence, tradition, the past. Out of the past, I’ve heard her remind young – and not so young – artists, comes what’s coming next, comes what’s ahead, comes the future.

At this moment our whole country’s addressing itself, with a collective energy unprecedented in my experience, to a calamitous loss of common understanding: of the meaning of leadership in a democracy. We’ve committed ourselves to a difficult search: for the qualities required for leadership. I consider myself very fortunate to know and to have worked with someone who leads by virtue of her virtues, and leads spectacularly well. I’m very fortunate to have the pleasure to introduce to you my friend and personal choice for an school, council, city, state or country she might choose to run: the Chair of the New York State Council on the Arts, Dean Mary Schmidt Campbell.