

Remarks on the Occasion of Eric Kuhne's Visit to Toronto, sponsored by TEDCO (June 4th, La Maquette Restaurant, Toronto)

City building is for people. But people often get relegated to talk of social capital, demographics and "stats" interest and consumer trends. The physical part of city-building is left to architects, planners, funders, who are generally left to imagine what people want. Eric Kuhne puts the discussion into proper perspective, suggesting that the architecture of culture that people have built predates the architecture of space around them.

We won't have successful cities until we pay attention to the civic heart, made up of stories, dream, aspirations that don't make it to the flow-charts. Until we listen to the civic heart we won't have great cities, but only cities of amenities. All cities will offer similar things in the future. What a city can give of itself, as a signature, is its enthusiasm, and that enthusiasm is constructed from what Mr. Kuhne recognizes as the romance of the civic life, its allegiances, its loves, its histories, its designs of neighborhood and affectivity. We are grateful to Mr. Kuhne for having restored the integrity of the civic discussion and for having pointed out to us the proper integration of citizenship and planning.

Civic Arts is close to what I call "Civic Aesthetic", the building of a city by reading the deep psychology of its citizens. From this comes a signature skyline and public spaces that don't ignore the citizen, spaces that are not testaments to power and brand independent of the longings of inhabitants. Mr. Kuhne's projects, world-wide, are invigorating clues to the marriage of mixed-use development and major capital funding, a union of municipal zeal and citizen delight. They pay attention to education, history and diversity in ways that are not merely token.

In Toronto, we are on the cusp of formalizing this vision, with a fortunate wealth, and a civic energism. How to build the future of the global city is on our minds, and we thank Eric Kuhne for having inspired us to a union of purpose about it. When all the stake-holders work in tandem with the person on the street, we will have more than sustainable cities, we will have cities that promote the business of happiness. This is Mr. Kuhn's message, and we are grateful to have heard it.

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco
Poet Laureate of The City of Toronto
Curator of the Toronto Museum Project and Center for Global Cities