



As much of contemporary society now acquires information, I consulted the world wide web to become more acquainted with the arts awareness organization, Gnosis Ltd. The prior conversation I had with Suzanne Johnson, the founder, president, and executive director of the non-profit group left me wanting to know more about its past public outreach events.

When I got on gnosisltd.org, I recognized the familiar name, Beadle, and clicked on it. There was a clip from the

documentary film, *beadlearchitecture*, that Gnosis produced in 1999 and later ran on PBS, but my internet connection was not granting me the ability to view it. Defeated, I went back to the home page.

Yet, somehow the fragments of the Beadle documentary emanated from my speakers. A man's voice first cut in and stated, "I was looking for an architect to build..." and then it abruptly halted. Aggravated with the lethargic phone connection, I clicked the sign off button, and the man's voice

boasted, "take our ideas and build us a....". And then, instantaneously, I was disconnected from this lingering information. I wanted to hear more. I wanted to hear the anonymous man's story of how he found an architect to build him a house. I can only assume he wanted a house, and I can only assume he wanted the well-known Arizona architect, Al Beadle, to design his place of residence.

I haven't yet gone back to hear the remainder of the story because I eventually became content with my impression of the fragmented monologue. I thought how appropriate this disjointed experience was, being that the mission of Gnosis is to combine what may seem incomprehensible or fragmented and present it in a manner that allows for an extensive group of people to begin to appreciate, comprehend, and distill the information for themselves in a new and different light.

The official mission of Gnosis "seeks to preserve and present the significant creative contributions of individuals who have changed our world," through the organization of major community outreach projects. Suzanne described the mission of the organization as building bridges and striving "to make art and the profound process of creativity accessible by providing experiences for a wider audience to witness the promise of the human spirit." Their focus patrons are educators, researchers, and individuals. The beginnings and continuation of Gnosis lay in understanding the process and fundamentals of creativity and may be owed to a bar of soap or a bus ride through Palm Springs, or a visit to a Mexican town.

stin archi (greek for in the beginning)

Suzanne's previous career was in the production side of advertising, mainly in television commercials. She questioned the validity of expending all of her creative energy on these particular messages, wondering if it was all worth a bar of soap. As her goals developed into creating documentaries, she knew she needed to find a different outlet. The creation of Gnosis has provided the opportunity to achieve this goal. The piece of documentary I was briefly exposed to on the web was a result of massive fundraising and research, including a tour of homes and other buildings designed by the late Al Beadle in Phoenix a few years ago. This is just one point for the establishment of Gnosis.

A second reinforcement of her idea occurred in Palm Springs. When on a tour bus there, Suzanne was privy to a question from a woman when passing by one of its many unique homes. A woman wondered out loud, "who lives there?" Suzanne saw this question as an opportunity to make public the homes that are atypical of our southwestern suburban communities. Similar to the usual response (wow,

this is beautiful!) when visitors come to her home, designed by her husband architect, Michael P. Johnson, Suzanne realized that most people believe that a custom designed and built home means choosing the quantity of bedrooms or picking out paint colors. Suzanne saw the need to provide all people with the experience of viewing what kinds of spaces architects are capable of designing. She wants all people to know that they, too, can have this type of living environment. She firmly believes that good design should not be exclusive to people who are involved in or have careers in creative fields.

This bus trip generated the recent home tour in Phoenix, where architects opened and showed their homes to people on the Gnosis tour. This occasion was another chance for Gnosis to act as a liaison or intermediary between the norm or typical and the well designed or, unfortunately, atypical.

Suzanne spoke to me of a trip she took to see the work of the Mexican modern architect, Luis Barragan. It was here when she made the pivotal decision to begin her journey to "explore, motivate, share, and communicate about the mystery and complexity of the creative spirit." She said the homes she visited, full of filtered light, bright colors, and tactile surfaces, immediately calmed and elevated her senses. She explained this as an effect of good design, where a space is placid and calming, and where everything is slowed down a bit. Then and there, this moment reinforced her desire to express her feelings to others, hoping "to inspire them to do something just as nice".

sto paron (greek for presently)

Inspiring people to do something nice means hard work to show people nice things. Even if people don't like what they are exposed to, at least Gnosis provides them an opportunity to think about it. But this does not come effortlessly. The organization is comprised of a dynamic board of directors, advisory board, and individual members. Without them and the collaboration of other organizations as well as time, discipline, and energy, the mission of Gnosis would be difficult to attain. Gnosis relies on support, fiduciary, advisory, and otherwise, to generate possibilities for their projects to prosper. For instance, one relationship Gnosis has is with Arizona State University, where Cheryl McNab, the Director of External Relations at ASU's College of Architecture, creates support and opportunity for events. McNab has been instrumental in setting up symposia at ASU, involving their professors, providing a venue for the viewing of documentary films, and even getting student volunteers to participate in the home tours. McNab also shares in the vision of Gnosis and constantly indulges the group with resources and grant information. In addition to this kind of aid, Gnosis also relies on assistance from the design community.



Without Digital Extension, a graphic design firm, Gnosis would have a heady time getting their information into the hands of the public. Gnosis strives for their literature to be very tactile and beautifully designed, as it is a reflection of what the organization stands for and wants to advocate.

sto mellon (greek for in the future)

The most recent mailer I received was the invitation for the next major Gnosis event. In April, Gnosis is collaborating with SMOCA and taking a trip to Marfa, Texas to spend time at the Judd Estate and Chianti Foundation. The postcard explains that Donald Judd, considered a minimalist, left New York City for Marfa in the 1970s because he was tired of the "art scene." He was able to secure a substantial amount of land with some warehouse buildings, as well as many small buildings in the town, where he continued to make art and architecture and install permanent art in the Texas landscape.



The trip features tours of the remnants of his time spent there as well as research for a documentary. The documentary, to be produced by the Gnosis Board, seeks to try to understand his work. According to Suzanne, this will take an immense amount of preparation. She explained that "one's response to it is intellectual, not facile and emotional. It is steeped in philosophy and mathematics. Examining, just witnessing, Judd's work begs for one to question why, to analyze and deconstruct, to try to determine his thinking process. As Judd states in his 1965 treatise, *Specific Objects*, "A work has only to be interesting." At the very least, that it is."



I suppose I could say that Gnosis strives to place creative works and processes in front of people and ask them to observe, to learn something new, and perhaps to discover interest. It's not so different from a class at school. For me, it sounds like a perpetual field trip, where there is excitement and anticipation, where everything is pre-organized and the agenda is clear. The agenda is to learn about a subject on which the observer is no expert. Hence, gnosis, knowledge or wisdom, this, one will gain. [s]



Images of Marfa, Texas and Judd Estate courtesy of SMOCA.