

17 October 2012

Judge Tanya Kennedy
Housing Court
111 Centre Street
Room 623
New York, New York

Dear Judge Kennedy

My name is Hank O'Neal. I have lived in Greenwich Village since 1967 when I was posted here by the Central Intelligence Agency. I have known Kasoundra Kasoundra since 1968 or possibly 1969. In those early years I knew her to be a talented artist, a charismatic, often unconventional woman, and someone who could be difficult. It is now 45 years later and these characteristics can still be found in her, despite being older and facing serious health issues.

I have been involved in the music business for decades and the world of photography and art during the same period. I remain deeply involved in these fields. My most recent musical activity involved donating my forty-year-old record company to National Public Radio, my most recent book of photographs was published in March and coincided with a show at the Howard Greenberg Gallery. I am qualified to discuss Kasoundra as an artist, and to a lesser degree as a person.

I would submit that landlord and landlord's lawyers, professional guardians, and for profit hospitals and nursing homes have no standing in discussing such matters and certainly are in no way competent to discuss matters relating to Kasoundra's health or her ability to function in the world. This must be left to doctors and in some cases health care providers and social workers.

Regarding Kasoundra's art. I have no idea what it is worth. Market places will determine that, but it might be instructional to look at a case I have been involved with first hand since 1968, the year after I arrived in new York City.

In the summer of that year, Marian McPartland asked me to help her with a complicated matter, to remove the drums from a club called Bill's Gay

Ninties in the East 50s. The drums belonged to the just deceased George Wettling, a legendary musician who had just died of galloping cancer and one drink too many.

When I managed to drag his drums to the fifth floor of a building at 57th and Eighth Avenue I was greeted by a widow who had also had one drink too many and a cluttered apartment full with paintings. I had known Wettling painted; he'd had shows in the 1940s, but hadn't in years. The alcoholism and failing eyesight prevented him from doing serious work. But the pictures in his apartment were marvelous. I asked the Widow Wettling what she intended to do with them. She planned to trade them all to a saloon on 8th Avenue for \$300 worth of credit. I told her this would be a foolish thing to do, that I could find buyers who would give her \$300 apiece. Which is exactly what I did.

Earlier I mentioned I was sent to New York by the Central Intelligence Agency. I did so because it has relevance to this story. I sold two of the paintings to the Director of Domestic Operations of the CIA in Washington and another to a colleague in the New York Field Office. The pictures moved pretty quickly. George's work looked like later painting of Stuart Davis, his mentor, friend and drinking buddy.

Fast forward to last month. My colleague in the New York office, now long retired, became a prominent art collector. His most recent gift was a collection of French drawings he presented to the Phillips in Washington DC earlier this year. He telephoned to say he'd been visited by representatives of the National Gallery. They want him to make a donation from his collection of exceptional works by noted artists. But the one museum really liked was a rendering of McSorley's Saloon by one George Wettling. And why not. It is an exceptional painting and I wasn't surprised. Six or seven years ago Michael Rosenfeld tried to buy one of my Wettlings for \$35,000.

The point is this. The art in Kasoundra's apartment could just have easily been thrown into the street at George Wettling's. The artist she emulated, Joseph Cornell, is just as important today as Stuart Davis. Fortunately this did not happen, but a year ago I photographed everything in her tidy, well-organized apartment, just in case.

Sometimes our most talented people are not the easiest to get along with, they live unconventional lives and are often difficult. Frequently that's

what makes them so good. I have lived and worked with my share of difficult artists in the fields of music of photography. I can speak from experience having lived with a prominent female jazz vocalist for many years.

I would respectfully urge that Kasoundra be allowed to return to her apartment if the doctors feel this is practical, that she organize her work, that she create new work if her health permits and that she be provided with the kind of assistance she needs to accomplish this. Is she requires a guardian this should be given to someone who knows her and respects her needs. If she is not capable to live alone or is incapable of navigating the physical requirements of a walk up apartment arrangements should be made for her to live in an assisted care facility in New York close to her friends, not someone miles away.

I would be happy to discuss this with anyone you feel appropriate. My telephone number is 212-674-0265. My email is chiarohank@aol.com

Sincerely,

Hank O'Neal