

# Christine G. H. Franck | STUDIO

Mr. Marion Smith, Chair  
National Civic Art Society  
300 New Jersey Ave. NW  
Suite 900  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Marion,

Thank you and the board for asking me not to resign from the board and for the time you spent discussing my concerns about the executive order. I have considered everything over the weekend and regretfully, I still feel I must resign. It was with frustration and foreboding that I first read the Architectural Record article describing the executive order, learned of NCAS's leading role in it, and then watched the AIA claim they don't discriminate in architecture.

Yes, since the beginning of the National Civic Art Society, improving our nation's civic realm has been core to our mission. And, yes, at the January 2019 board retreat we discussed that reforming federal architecture and the GSA process were still priorities, but they held little appeal for donors. However, having been unable to participate in the last three board meetings, having missed our president's several emails describing his interactions with the White House and GSA, and despite skimming board meeting minutes at the time of their issue, I was not aware that our GSA reform goals had become an executive order mandating styles and prohibiting others. I deeply regret that at this most critical moment I could not have been a more involved trustee and that I failed the larger classical movement, in which I have invested my entire professional life.

I am resigning to signal my strong opposition to the strategy of accomplishing major cultural change through an executive order, rather than a process that includes the classical and mainstream architectural communities. I am also in opposition to the content of the draft executive order. I hope by resigning I can be of some final benefit to NCAS with the following thoughts.

An executive order is a misguided strategy for the following reasons: it will likely be tied up in lawsuits; it will be easily undone in the next administration - whether a year from now or five; because it is an authoritative action it is being used to support the mainstream architectural community's incorrect, but damaging, argument equating classicism to fascism, which is profoundly dangerous to contemporary classicism. Quite simply, it is the wrong mechanism to achieve lasting change. Such change will never come about through force.

The executive order process was poorly executed because, at a minimum, the NCAS should have involved the ICAA and Notre Dame. Ideally, the NCAS should have also encouraged open dialogue about our civic architecture with all involved parties – even those who think differently about

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architecture than NCAS does. It is not too late to recommend that the executive order be an executive order for a commission on Federal architecture and that the public should have a role.

I also want to be clear that I do not support the content of the draft executive order, nor do I support much of the negative rhetoric that has appeared on the NCAS website's "about" page in the last few months. Regarding the executive order, I do not support making any style the preferred or default style for courthouses or other federal buildings. There are buildings in both classical and modernist traditions that create a good civic realm and that the public likes. I recommend that if an executive order is finalized which specifies anything about buildings, it should not rely on style but on design qualities that produce humane, beautiful, noble, and durable buildings.

Contemporary classicism was moving along very well on its own terms, making great strides in institutional projects and gaining tolerance, even acceptance in some cases, in academia. Much of this gain has been made by not attacking modernism. Rather, the gains have been made by arguing the many benefits of classical, traditional, and vernacular architecture and urban design on their own merits. It is easier to converse with those whose world view differs when one approaches them with respect and seeking common ground. I recommend NCAS take this approach in the future rather than an exclusionary, defensive approach.

Finally, Marion, while you mentioned that the arguments equating classicism to fascism and slavery were new to you, they are not new arguments. Nor are the arguments that classicism can't be built today, that it is not "of our time," that it cannot incorporate today's technologies or needs. We classicists have had to work against these canards time and time again. They won't go away until a new generation is practicing and teaching, in the meantime, we do not need to feed them with executive orders. NCAS can be less of a target by diversifying the board in gender, color, and political leanings.

I have previously shared with you my deep concern that this has and will significantly set back contemporary classicism's progress. I know, of course, that is not what NCAS intends, so I hope moving forward NCAS will mend the bridges this has broken and work with others to resolve the problems it has caused rather than acting defensively. Finally, please redirect your GSA reform efforts to expanding what "contemporary" architecture is as well as reforming the process to give the public a voice in the design of their civic buildings. That would be lasting change.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the mission of the National Civic Art Society. I have enjoyed working with and getting to know you all. Those I have not met in person, I hope to do so someday.

Sincerely,



Christine G. H. Franck