



CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
of VIRGINIA



Magna Carta

at the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia
March 30 – June 18, 2007

When the English settlers made landfall in Virginia Beach in 1607, they had little in the way of manpower, supplies, or knowledge of the new world. What they did have was a set of ideals and principles they intended to bring to their new colony. Those principles were drawn directly from Magna Carta, a document issued by the King of England in the dark of medieval Britain in 1215 and the first official expression of “The Rights of Man.” While the tenets of Magna Carta blossomed into new nations, social philosophies, and cultural democracies, the Magna Carta calfskins themselves were gradually lost to the ravages of time. Today, only four of the original 1215 Magna Carta documents remain.



Working closely with Lincoln Cathedral in Lincolnshire, England, the City of Virginia Beach and the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia are preparing for one of the very special events in recent memory in Virginia. In commemoration of First Landing in April 1607, CAC will exhibit the Lincoln Cathedral Magna Carta, the founding document of free democracy and the American legal and governmental system that underpins it.

Background

Nulli vendemus, nulli negamus aut differemus rectum aut justiciam
-- *To no one will we sell, to no one will we deny or delay right or justice*

In June of 1215, English barons rose up and forced King John to ride out upon the fields of Runnymede and sign the “big charter,” Magna Carta. In that moment, the energy of liberty was forever unleashed upon the world.

Magna Carta became the foundation of law that would entitle a person to a trial by his or her peers, establish taxation through representation, allow women the right to own property, call for the separation of church and state, and allow for the expression of the will of the people through a democratic system.

In Magna Carta appear references to the rights of life, liberty, and property, concepts that resurfaced centuries later across an ocean when Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of a new nation. The Bill of Rights, the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, central elements of modern law in the United States and Britain, and numerous constitutional documents in democracies around the world all directly trace their roots to Magna Carta.

Now, Magna Carta will visit the United States in association with the quadricentennial of First Landing of the English settlers. The exhibit of the document and educational programs will trace the roots of democracy to today’s American principles and values. Most importantly, the exhibit will recognize and honor the countless ways in which citizens act every day to breathe continual life into the principles of liberty.

Partnership with Lincoln Cathedral

Scholars believe approximately thirty exemplifications of Magna Carta were made for distribution to the counties of the kingdom in 1215. Today, only four remain: one at Salisbury Cathedral, two in the British Library, and the fourth, said to be the finest, at the Lincoln Cathedral in England. It is the Lincoln Cathedral copy that will travel to Virginia Beach's Contemporary Art Center of Virginia under special permission from the British government.

The Chief Executive of the Lincoln Cathedral, Roy Bentham, is overseeing all permissions for use and arrangements for the exhibit. The Contemporary Art Center of Virginia and the City of Virginia Beach are working closely with Lincoln Cathedral to develop the exhibition.

Magna Carta exhibit

The Magna Carta exhibit, designed by an award-winning Virginia firm working with CAC and City of Virginia Beach, will reflect the thoughts and actions that created our concepts of liberty. CAC's highly regarded educators are participating in the interpretation and development of exhibits that express how Magna Carta is as relevant today as it was eight hundred years ago. Alongside the document, interactive touch-screens will include content from leading scholars, historians, and authors.

The Magna Carta exhibit will reflect the progression of our democracy in the United States and the contributions made by people of diverse backgrounds and views. CAC's goal is for visitors to the exhibit to be able to connect Magna Carta to the events and dialogue of today.

Emancipation Proclamation and Declaration of Independence

Apart from Magna Carta itself, plans include an early Lincoln-signed copy of the Emancipation Proclamation from The Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the Dunlap broadside of the Declaration of Independence from the University of Virginia. The exhibition will show how every century of American history has been distinctly altered by principles first seen in Magna Carta. In addition, the exhibition will educate about how liberty, freedom, and citizenship has expanded over the evolution of American democracy to encompass men and women of all races and ethnicities.

In adjacent galleries, CAC will present a new art exhibition titled *By Our Heirs Forever: Magna Carta in the 21st Century* that will ask over sixty leading contemporary artists across Virginia to create works in response to the tenets of Magna Carta.

Message

Magna Carta will be the touchstone for the exhibit and will convey the significance of each person's engagement in a dynamic democracy. The enduring themes of Magna Carta that underpin our concepts of democracy include:

- Just power is derived from the governed;
- Inalienable rights are at the core of democracy; and
- Liberty is a shared value in the evolution of democracy.

CAC will underscore that these are not static, dusty ideas in history books, but ones that permeate countless decisions of our daily lives. Visitors will learn that the rights of man, civil liberties, human rights, and other contemporary topics are all part of the Magna Carta story. Magna Carta will invite the visitor to recognize that he or she, too, is indispensable in the daily enterprise of democracy.

National Education Association

CAC and Virginia Beach believe it is essential to involve Virginia's educators deeply in planning, outreach, and community engagement with the Magna Carta exhibition. Accordingly, the National Education Association has joined the project as a major sponsor.

NEA has pledged to leverage its enormous reach in support of the exhibit. With 2.7 million members in every community in the country – and the millions of students they teach – NEA will play a leading role in advancing the educational mission of the exhibit.

Furthermore, NEA celebrates its 150th anniversary in the summer of 2007 in Philadelphia. NEA will draw upon the exhibit as an element in its celebrations in Philadelphia.

Sponsorships

The Contemporary Art Center of Virginia is now seeking a handful of prestigious, respected organizations to support the project as sponsors. Foundations and corporations that have strongly contributed to society and the economy in other ways will not want to miss this opportunity. The total project budget for the presentation of Magna Carta includes security upgrades and other lasting improvements to the museum.

Special events, involvement in all programs, assurance that communications will carry the name of the corporation, and other benefits will be negotiated based upon corporate interests and financial support. Sponsors will receive credit for communications and educational programs delivered to visitors, educators, and students throughout Hampton Roads. Sponsors will also enjoy important outreach opportunities to a range of political, academic, civic, legal, and business leaders associated with this exhibit.