

## **National Arts Club prez slams proxy as 'ruse'**

James, meanwhile, defends his hoarded apt. as 'ivy on the bricks'

By Heather Holland

The National Arts Club and its former president Aldon James have continued to clash as litigation resumed in court and an alternative proxy was sent out to club members regarding the club's upcoming election of governors. In a letter sent to club members, NAC President Dianne Bernhard claimed the alternate proxy is a ruse to confuse voters.

Meanwhile, the club's former president, O. Aldon James, responded a news story in Town & Village last week that detailed the squalid conditions of an apartment space he'd used at the club, as well as other spaces he'd controlled that were hoarded. Those spaces have since been returned to the control of the club and cleaned up.

"My brother and I, we live like hamsters," said James when asked to comment on the condition of the rooms before renovation. "There's the cliché, some people might say this place is a mess, and others might say this mess is a place. (The club) was wonderfully weird. There was mystery and magic in there. We wanted it to look haunted. It was organic. It was like ivy on the bricks."

Last week, Bernhard said she didn't know how James managed to bathe or shave in the apartment which had a bathtub crammed with personal belongings and a feces-caked bathroom floor.

On Friday, the club's attorney offered a reply brief in court, hoping to keep an "interim stay" issued by appellate justice Richard Andrias last week, which enforces expulsion of the James Group from the club until full briefings are completed. The club is arguing that by allowing James to continue on as a member, the court is allowing him to harass other members and NAC staffers.

"I think we are in good shape to keep the stay in place," said Riopelle in an emailed statement.

As far as the proxy is concerned, earlier this week, Bernhard sent out a letter to club members explaining why the club has decided not to consider amendments that were included in an alternative proxy sent out by two James' supporters, William Samuels and Pat Hackett. The club had sent out its own proxy through the Nominating Committee of the Board of Governors, but

members were confused when another proxy arrived in the mail, which looked eerily similar to the one sent out by the club.

Five proposed amendments were included in the proxy, including a proposal to distribute the club's annual financial reports to all members and prohibit club tenants from serving on the Board of Governors, among other things. In the letter, Bernhard slammed each one, calling them "suspect" and contradictory.

"Fellow members, you have to vote for what you think is right," wrote Bernhard.

"If you think that the Samuel/Hackett intentions are pure and the coincidental timing of these 'Good Governance' proposals has nothing to do with the fact that Aldon is no longer running The National Arts Club, then you should vote in favor of those particular amendments. But, if you are among those who feel 'tricked' into returning a deceptive proxy to Ms. Hackett, please speak up and call Kristin at our Club's office to correct your proxy."

James stated that he took no part in the distribution of the alter proxies, but said that he understood why Hackett and Samuels did so, stating that he was skeptical about the fact that the club's proxies were asked to be mailed to the club's lawyer rather than the secretary. He said he thinks that the reason she had it done this way was to keep the responses hidden from other members.

However, James said that he would not try to run for club president. When asked about his future prospects, James responded that he still wanted to be a member of the club and saw a hopeful future for the institution.

"I want to stay a member," said James. "I don't have to necessarily be on the board to support the club. I would be very happy to be an Indian and let others be the chief. The phoenix will rise. A lily rises from the mud. The larger agenda is to find themes to bring people together. Arts are magnetic by nature. We never found an art medium that we couldn't support before."