Jean Monnet, the French economist and principal architect of European unity, commented toward the end of his life that if he were to start over again he would begin with culture. His regret about not paying closer attention the significance of culture in his deliberations on the unification of Europe should give us pause. (It should also give pause to present-day European leaders, but that is a topic for another occasion.) Were he able to start again, Monnet was saying, he would be more attentive to art, music, film, language and other expressions of everyday life and the imagination, and he would be less attentive to rearranging trading zones, appeasing corporate desires and worrying about the agitations of the marketplace. I like to think that Monnet, as he grew older, came to see the importance of art and its imaginative unruliness in his hopes for a better Europe. I also like to think that he understood the ways in which the imaginative unruliness of art, as I am calling it, serves to keep open spaces for debate and disagreement in civil society.

This is not to deny that art provides pleasure, what the French – in their affection for art and erotics – call *jouissance*. What interests me, however, is art’s ability to provide a counterforce to the administered, surveillant society that we now inhabit. Art comes to us unrequested, unfiltered, and uncensored, in the words of E.L. Doctorow. The qualities of unrequestedness, unfilteredness, uncensoredness are what art must possess in order to be relevant. You will find these qualities in the work of the three artists being honored this evening. By keeping open spaces for debate and disagreement, the work of Marian Penner Bancroft, Beau Dick and Ron Tran contribute powerfully to the kind of unruliness I am talking about. Their work stands against the present miasma of public rhetoric. It helps to make visible what otherwise would remain invisible.

The art critic Clement Greenberg observed that artists are tied to their patrons by an umbilical cord of gold. As a Trotskyist, Greenberg wrote dialectically about the relationship of culture to economics. Some patrons of art, however, have succeeded in cutting the Greenbergian umbilical cord by supporting culture without demanding works of art in return. Soon after I arrived in Vancouver in 1987, I was invited to the first VIVA Awards ceremony. The decision of Jack and Doris Shadbolt to establish a foundation in support of mid-career artists convinced me that I might have come to the right place. This conviction received further impetus when Michael Audain established the Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement in 2004. At a time when government funding for the arts in Canada amounts to not much more than the cost of a single wing of an F-35, the ongoing support of the Shadbolts and Michael Audain resonates strongly. Jean Monnet would understand (or so I imagine). He would recognize that the support and recognition being offered to artists this evening helps to sustain a conversation about the world we are living in as well as about the kind of world we would like to live in.