

As the only surviving grandson of Fred Mendel and the son of Johanna Mendel Mitchell (Fred Mendel's daughter), who was Honourary Chair of the Mendel Gallery for approximately twenty-five years until her death in 1999, I am in complete shock.

The communication from Mendel director Gregory Burke dated June 5th states that "many people have asked me about the Mendel's legacy and even probed about the Mendel family's thoughts on Remai Modern. I'm happy to share the Mendel family's support of our project with them."

This is emphatically not a true nor a considered representation of the entire Mendel family's feelings about this Sunday's closure of the Mendel Art Gallery. The Mendel/Mitchell/Merchant side of the family, which includes seven direct bloodline descendants of Fred and Claire Mendel, have always been extremely vocal about their displeasure regarding the "cultural corporate hijacking" of Fred Mendel's legacy and great gift spanning fifty years to the citizens of Saskatoon. But what I find particularly distasteful is the attempt to politically whitewash this "cultural genocide" and somehow alter the actual history and spirit of Fred Mendel's vision for Saskatoon and the Gallery.

Apart from the fact that both myself and my sister Camille Mitchell (also a major donor and former Honourary Chair of the Mendel Foundation), whose letters to Saskatoon's City Council asking to be heard at a critical juncture in the decision-making process regarding the expansion and preservation of the Mendel were completely ignored by the Mayor and Council; and apart from the fact that the Mendel/Mitchell/Merchant descendants of Fred Mendel were not consulted, nor invited to the fiftieth anniversary of the Mendel, nor solicited by the StarPhoenix as to their input regarding the milestone closing of this institution to which my family and my family's business (Inercon/Mitchell's Gourmet Foods) had made the largest and most significant longstanding financial contributions for most of the Mendel's fifty-year history, there is a huge breach of the original vision and cultural spirit of the Mendel, which have seemingly now lost their firm rooting in the community.

The reason my grandfather founded the Mendel Art Gallery, that he decided to donate one third of the cost of construction of the Gallery and also gift the crown jewels of our family's "Group of Seven Collection", was to give something back to the community that had supported him in the form of a celebration of Canadian cultural identity. The purpose of the Mendel was to highlight the very best of what Canadian art had to offer, and to ensure that a uniquely Canadian voice, indeed a Prairie voice, indeed a Saskatchewan voice of local artists could be given birth and

nurtured to grow and evolve in the community. This was the mission and success of the Mendel Art Gallery. Prominent Saskatchewan artists who Fred Mendel mentored and aided, like Bill Perehudoff, Ernest Lindner, and Eli Bornstein, were given opportunities and supported by the Mendel family. Even Joni Mitchell was influenced by Fred Mendel's art consciousness and her own art was shown at the Mendel Art Gallery.

This community spirit and engagement started in Fred Mendel's personal art gallery above the family meat packing plant in the 1940's, some 20 years before the The Mendel Art Gallery opened and is a strong part of my family's story and cultural heritage. Rather than buying Picasso prints, Fred Mendel opted instead to focus his attention on encouraging and supporting the young, hungry and developing artists of the Prairies, thereby helping to give birth to a distinctive Prairie voice. With the closure of the Mendel Art Gallery, I fear this spirit, which is the great and valuable gift of my grandfather and the true birthright of the Mendel Art Gallery, is threatened to be lost forever in Saskatoon if it is not an integral part of the Remai Modern's founding principles.