

January 18, 1991

THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS: MISUSING TAXPAYERS' MONEY

INTRODUCTION

The National Endowment for the Arts remains embroiled in controversy. NEA defenders call it a battle over "censorship." But this is an attempt to divert attention from the real issues: to what extent the federal government should fund the arts; to what extent recipients must be held accountable for their grants; and to what extent American culture is affected.

That the NEA remains controversial is clear from the list of grants announced early this month. Tucked into \$47 million worth of new awards are grants to performance artists Karen Finley and Holly Hughes. Both artists, who specialize in "shock" material, were denied grants in 1989 because of the sexually explicit nature of their performances. Karen Finley is best known for smearing her naked body with chocolate and bean sprouts, inserting yams into her vagina and saying things like: "God is death. God is dead. Forget God and religion." Holly Hughes, a self-described "man-hating lesbian," specializes in portraying "lesbian desire."

Bias and Confusion. But NEA's woes go beyond the controversy over grants to artists who delight in sexually shocking audiences. Some of the more serious problems at NEA include:

- ◆ Bias against traditional forms of art and traditional values in general;
- ◆ Bias against religion; rejecting positive portrayals of religious themes as violating the separation of church and state, but funding attacks on religion as "artistic expression";
- ◆ Elevation of "freedom of expression" and "artistic merit" as the main criteria for grants, ignoring the NEA's charter legislation of 1965, which

set "encouragement of excellence" as the No. 1 criterion, followed by "access to the arts for all Americans";

- ◆ Confusion by upper management about how to comply with congressionally-mandated standards;
- ◆ Confusion about NEA's primary mission;
- ◆ Conflicts of interest in the grant-awarding process;
- ◆ A bureaucracy openly hostile to public scrutiny. NEA officials routinely withhold information, even from Congress. And they sometimes react harshly toward NEA critics. In a speech at the University of Pennsylvania last October, NEA General Counsel Julianne Ross Davis called the American Family Association and other religious groups "our enemies" who advocate "the elimination of democracy" and the "stoning" of "incorrigible children."¹ NEA Chairman John E. Frohnmayer has taken no action against his deputy nor has he publicly disavowed her outbursts.

As envisaged in its charter, the NEA is a force for excellence, education, preservation of American heritage and cultural diversity, and a means by which more Americans can appreciate and be uplifted by the best in art.

Attacking Standards. In great measure, however, particularly with regard to the visual arts (drawing, painting, and sculpting) and "performance" arts, the NEA has become a platform for attacks on religion, traditional art forms, traditional families, and traditional values. In the name of tolerance it has shown increasing intolerance toward standards of any kind. Its peer review process has become a buddy system for awarding grants to colleagues, friends, and clients of panel members, who are almost uniformly avant-garde in orientation.

Whether the agency can be fixed is a question that divides the agency's critics. Some want to abolish it entirely, arguing that it is beyond the government's acumen to determine which artists are worthy of sponsorship and which are not. Others want to reform it, preserving grants to certain segments of the arts community such as those museums and orchestras with widely-held reputations for excellence, like New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art or the San Francisco Opera.

Although there is no clear consensus among those who feel the agency is salvageable, suggested reforms include:

Greater oversight of the peer panel selection process. Although current legislation prohibits the most obvious past abuse (that of artists sitting on the same panels that review their own grant applications), membership on the

¹ Tape-recorded October 20, 1990. Speech filed with U.S. District Court in Philadelphia and cited by George Archibald in "NEA lawyer sued for remarks on Christian groups," *The Washington Times*, November 21, 1990.

panels should be broadened and closely monitored for conflicts of interest.

Minimal content restrictions. In 1989, NEA was prohibited from funding art depicting “sodomasochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children” and other works deemed “obscene” by the community standards definition established by the United States Supreme Court in 1973. This year all content restrictions have been scrapped.

Abolishing the Inter-Arts grant category. Inter-arts gives money to artists who do not fit into the other grant categories, bankrolling such bizarre “performance” artists as former pornographic movie star Annie Sprinkle, who masturbates and urinates on stage.

Abolishing grants to individuals. The original NEA charter did not provide for individual grants, focusing instead on strengthening arts institutions. Many individual grants have become bonuses for financially successful artists who do not need the money or a form of welfare for artists who produce unsalable works.

Increasing the emphasis on basic skills in arts education. Most of the NEA grants to educational institutions emphasize abstract thinking, art theory, and other esoteric topics instead of practical skills such as drawing technique.

Promoting excellence as the prime criterion, as the NEA charter explicitly requires. In the visual arts and theater, NEA grants consistently favor novelty rather than excellence. To be sure, experimentation is a valued part of a vibrant arts scene. This does not mean, however, that the NEA should reject artists who create traditional works of excellence just because their methods are not considered “new.”

WHAT IS THE NEA?

The NEA was established in 1965 when Lyndon Johnson signed the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act, which also created the National Endowment for the Humanities. With an initial budget of \$2.5 million and fewer than a dozen employees, the NEA remained a small entity under Director Roger Stevens for the next four years. After Richard Nixon appointed Nancy Hanks as director in 1969, the agency grew exponentially. By 1979, the budget had reached \$149,589,000 and two years later was \$158,795,000. Ronald Reagan cut the NEA budget for 1982 to \$143,465,000, but it soon began growing again.

The NEA’s 1991 budget is \$175 million, up from \$171.3 million last year, and the agency employs about 185 full-time staffers. Including the 1991 appropriations, the NEA has spent more than \$2.5 billion over its 25-year history. Virtually all major arts organizations in America now receive at least part of their funding from the federal government via NEA. This gives the agency enormous clout in

shaping the art world. NEA annually awards some 4,400 grants out of approximately 18,500 applications.²

Fostering Arts Growth. Through its grants to local, state, and regional arts councils, NEA has fostered enormous growth in arts administration throughout the nation. All 50 states and six U.S. territories now have arts councils. Regional and local arts councils have mushroomed from a handful in the 1960s to 3,000, including 600 professionally staffed organizations.³

The NEA distributes funds by awarding matching grants to nonprofit, tax-exempt arts organizations and fellowships to individual artists. Most of the fellowships are for \$5,000 or \$15,000. The largest grants are Challenge Grants, requiring matching non-federal dollars. These range from \$50,000 to \$1 million. The NEA also provides a minimum of 25 percent of its budget to state and regional arts agencies, which make their own grants.

NEA panels advise other federal agencies in commissioning artworks for federal buildings under the auspices of the Arts in Architecture program.

The NEA is directed by a presidentially-appointed chairman, currently Frohnmayer, and advised by the National Council on the Arts, a presidentially-appointed body composed of the Endowment chairman and 26 citizens who are "recognized for their knowledge of the arts, or for their expertise or profound interest in the arts."⁴

Expert Panels. Most of the work of approving grants is done by advisory "peer review" panels. About 800 artists or experts in the arts participate on the panels and are selected by NEA bureaucrats. The National Council reviews the panel decisions and makes final recommendations on grants and policies to the Chairman.

In 1966 the Endowment had six active programs: Music, Dance, Literature, Visual Arts, Theater and Education. In 1967, the first full fiscal year of operation, the Endowment added Architecture, Planning and Design (now Design Arts), Public Media (now Media Arts) and the Federal-State (now State Programs), which requires a three to one match in non-federal to federal funds.

Over the years, more programs were added. Now the NEA operates twelve programs, plus an office for public partnership, which handles Local and State Grants Programs and Arts in Education; an Office for Private Partnership; and Office of Policy, Planning and Research, which directs a fellowship program for arts managers, international activities, and research; and an Office for Special Constituencies, which targets aid to arts programs for the disabled, the elderly, and the institutionalized.

2 1989 Annual Report, National Endowment for the Arts, p.vi.

3 1989 Annual Report, p. iv.

4 1989 Annual Report, p. xxvii.

OVERHAULING THE ARTS

Unlike any other arts sponsor, the federal government has unique authority and unique responsibility. Its powers derive from its claim to represent all Americans and its money comes from mandatory taxation. No matter how deftly the NEA performs, its very existence implies the imprimatur of “official art.” Government subsidies connote government approval, so the NEA, unlike a private donor, must take into account public sensibilities as well as the impact of its own policies.

NEA grants greatly influence what is presented in museums and theaters and what private donors feel is worthy of support. Writes the NEA’s Frohnmayer: “Our grantees state unequivocally that fund-raising is substantially easier because of an Endowment grant. It is an endorsement — a mark of quality and achievement.”⁵

Since its founding, the NEA consistently has favored the avant-garde — defined by Webster’s Third New International Unabridged Dictionary as: “Those who create, produce or apply new, original or experimental ideas, designs, techniques... and sometimes: a group that is extremist, bizarre, or arty and affected.”⁶ There is a place, of course, for experimental art, and for NEA to fund some of it. The trouble is, the NEA so overwhelmingly favors the avant-garde that it crowds out other forms. Artists with the traditional skills of drawing, painting, and sculpting systematically are excluded from NEA grants and NEA peer review panels, which control the grants. As Visual Arts Program Director Susan Lubowsky told *The Washington Post*: “Art is always on the cutting edge, and anything on the cutting edge is going to offend someone.”⁷ By defining art solely as “cutting edge,” Lubowsky reveals the pervasive NEA view that the only “real” art is avant-garde.

Strict Guidelines. As a federal agency, the NEA should not be fostering bias toward one particular arts style over another. In fact its own grant guidelines specifically forbid it to do so: “[NEA] must not, under any circumstances, impose a single aesthetic standard or attempt to direct artistic content.”⁸

NEA’s skewing of the nation’s arts toward the avant-garde style has not necessarily led to higher quality art. A free market is the most reliable guarantor of excellence since it fosters competition. Government policies that hamper competition, as the NEA does, therefore, are not likely to foster excellence.

In NEA arts education programs, only a handful emphasize drawing skill — the fount of design and perspective. The 1988 NEA report on arts education *Toward Civilization* even omitted drawing from a list of “basic” skills that students should

5 Annual Report, p. iv.

6 Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged, Merriam Webster, 1967, p. 150.

7 Elizabeth Kastor, “Funding Art That Offends,” *The Washington Post*, June 7, 1989, p. C1.

8 National Endowment for the Arts, *Application Guidelines Fiscal Year 1990*, p 1.

acquire.⁹ Traditional, representational artists, meanwhile, repeatedly are blackballed in the NEA grants process. The New York Academy of Art, a graduate school dedicated to teaching such traditional skills as drawing, anatomy, perspective, and composition, applied to the NEA for a Challenge Grant but was turned down by an advisory panel. The reasons, according to a December 20, 1989, NEA memo from Jeanne Hodges, director of the Challenge and Advancement Grant Programs, and Visual Arts Program director Susan Lubowsky, included:

- ◆ “Concept of the program is not reflective of current developments in the visual arts field.”
- ◆ “Panel questioned the exclusive emphasis on figurative drawing and technique and its potential impact on art of our time.”
- ◆ “Panel disagreed with basic philosophical impetus of the application for being too rigidly modeled on European academicism with no acknowledgement of 20th-century concepts of Modernism. It was feared that this revisionist approach would stifle creativity in young artists.”

Lack of Balance. In other words, the NEA is not funding the New York Academy of Art largely because the Academy concentrates on teaching classical, technical skills. In a more detailed letter to the Academy, Ana Steele, NEA Acting Deputy Chairman for Programs, notes that the Academy’s curriculum, which focuses on human figure studies, is not “balanced” with Modernism. Lack of balance, however, apparently does not bother the NEA when it applies to the vast number of arts programs devoted exclusively to the Modernist perspective. Says Colgate University Political Scientist Robert Kaufman, an attorney who is now a Bradley Resident Scholar at The Heritage Foundation: “Based on the language in the NEA’s own statement of mission, it appears that NEA is clearly violating procedural due process.”¹⁰

Many other traditional artists and institutions have been denied grants. Among them is Frederick Hart, who sculpted the soldiers at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the “Creation” sculptures on the facade of Washington’s National Cathedral. In 1972, Hart asked the NEA for a grant to complete the design phase of the project. His application was denied. He recalls: “An NEA bureaucrat told me that they didn’t do religious things. Separation of church and state and all that.”¹¹ Today, the “Creation” is widely cited as one of the highlights of the National Cathedral.

NEA defenders like to point out that NEA sponsors or insures major traveling exhibitions of representational, classical art such as “Cleopatra’s Egypt,” “A Day in the Country: Impressionism and the French Landscape,” and “Flemish Still

9 *Toward Civilization: A Report on Arts Education*, National Endowment for the Arts, 1988, p.13.

10 Interview at Heritage Foundation, December 19, 1990.

11 Interview, January 4, 1991.

Life Paintings from Budapest." But current artists who produce traditional works are largely absent from the list of NEA grantees.

NEA "Stonewalling." Statistics on NEA grants to traditional artists are unavailable. "That's the problem," Hart says. "It's impossible to get them to give you any information. It would be interesting to find out who has been turned down."¹²

NEA Public Affairs Director Jack Lichtenstein says that NEA will not disclose rejected applications "as a matter of privacy."¹³ Denying public access to such basic data is a curious way for a tax-funded agency to operate. Even congressmen have had difficulty obtaining information, according to Richard T. Dykema, Administrative Assistant to Representative Dana Rohrabacher, the California Republican. "That's public information," he says of grant applications. "But the NEA stonewalls it."

Last November, The Heritage Foundation asked NEA Museum Program Administrator Larry Rickard for permission to examine the application of artist Mike Kelley, whose grant request for a show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston was vetoed by NEA Chairman Frohnmayer in late October. In a telephone interview, Rickard said the application, complete with "visual" samples of Kelley's work, could be seen immediately. A half hour later, at NEA headquarters, Rickard told a Heritage researcher that the file was not available and was "making the rounds" of the agency because of the controversy. He said he would call when it became available. Heritage is still waiting for Rickard's call. Another file concerning another controversial grant request was also "checked out," the Heritage researcher was told.

"They're more secretive than the CIA or the Pentagon," says New York artist and arts critic James Cooper, who has tried to research NEA grant procedures.¹⁴

Exaggerated Numbers. In 1975 the NEA itself conducted a study into how much money was allocated for realist art compared to modernist art. Heritage was not able to obtain the study, but Boston art consultant John Arthur said the survey greatly exaggerated the number of realist works funded, thus quieting congressional concern. Arthur, who was helping the NEA at the time to set up the national Bicentennial arts exhibit, says he observed NEA officials openly joking about their classification methods. Works that were overwhelmingly modernist but included a tiny, recognizable object such as a feather were judged to be "representational," Arthur said.

In 1989, the General Accounting Office asked NEA to review grants in the Painting and Works on Paper categories of the Visual Arts Program. A letter written by NEA General Counsel Davis to the General Accounting Office supports

12 Interview, *op. cit.*

13 Interview at National Press Club following a panel discussion on "Politics of the Arts," November 27, 1990.

14 Interview, January 2, 1990.

Arthur's contention as to how the works are classified. NEA Visual Arts Program Director Susan Lubowsky, says the letter, reviewed 2,400 slides of work by 169 artists who applied for grants in the Painting and Works on Paper categories in 1989. Lubowsky determined that works could be "broadly categorized as representational" if they "contained identifiable imagery."¹⁵ She concluded that 50 percent of the images qualified as "representational" and that 33 percent of that total were "strictly representational" because their "imagery was clearly true to life."

Art critic Cooper, who has attended hundreds of exhibitions by NEA-sponsored institutions, said he has yet to see a "strictly representational" new artwork funded by NEA. The pattern in NEA-supported visual artworks seems clearly oriented toward the avant-garde. Numerical evidence is scant, however, since, "no detailed statistics have been kept based on style of expression," NEA Counsel Davis wrote the GAO.¹⁶

Risk-Taking. The bias toward the avant-garde is not limited to the visual arts. In a January 22, 1988, memo to Members of the Professional Theater Companies Panel, Robert Marx, director of the NEA's Theater Program, outlined criteria for panel members to use in assessing grant applications. From the highest category (most likely to receive a grant) to the lowest (least likely), the salient factor was risk-taking. Theaters that indulge in too many "audience-pleasers" are to be rated lower in proportion to the number of publicly well-received productions. In other words, the more the public appreciates what is presented, the less chance the theater has of being considered worthy of NEA support. The result: NEA encourages theaters to produce works likely to be rejected in the marketplace.

ARTS EDUCATION

The NEA's official position on art education makes sense. The 1988 NEA arts education report *Towards Civilization* states: "Trying to create or perform the non-literary arts without skills and knowledge is like trying to write without vocabulary and syntax. The student is reduced to being the 'first artist.'...Arts education must include the vocabularies and basic skills which produced the great works of the past so that young people can build on those who came before."¹⁷

But NEA seldom follows its own wise counsel. Its grants flow almost exclusively to Modernist, avant-garde schools and multicultural laboratories; little goes to schools or artists who emphasize classical skills. In late December, NEA officials told New York Academy of Art officials not to bother re-applying for a grant, even though NEA Chairman Frohnmayer visited the New York City school ear-

15 Letter to Henry Wray, Senior Associate General Counsel, General Accounting Office, July 5, 1990.

16 Davis letter, *op. cit.* p. 5.

17 *Toward Civilization*, National Endowment for the Arts, 1988, p. 15.

lier in the year and suggested that they should re-apply, says Academy founder Stuart Pivar.

According to Richard Lack, founder of Minneapolis' Richard Lack Atelier School of Classical Art: "All of us who work as representative artists consider the NEA a joke." NEA has had an avant-garde focus "since its inception," he adds. "We took some interest in it in the beginning, but watching who was appointed to policy-making positions, we decided not to bother with it."¹⁸ Lack's school, which had been snubbed repeatedly by the Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program, finally received a grant for 1990-1991. The MAEP, run by NEA grant recipient Minneapolis Institute of Art, is almost exclusively biased toward avant-garde art, Lack told The Heritage Foundation. Lack said he believes the unexpected funding may be NEA's attempt to blunt criticism that realists are never funded.

One thrust of NEA-funded arts education is the advancement of what NEA calls a "multicultural" agenda. In practice this seems more concerned with criticizing traditional American culture than promoting understanding of other cultures. The National Arts Education Research Center, funded by a \$169,420 NEA grant and \$250,000 from the U.S. Department of Education, has compiled "A Framework for Multicultural Arts Education." This 1989 study, written at the Center's New York University offices, calls for "radically different" education techniques to discredit the traditional "melting pot" view of minority assimilation into American life.

INFLUENCING DONORS

Private arts sponsors take their lead from NEA when commissioning artworks and making donations. An NEA grant validates works that some individuals and corporations might otherwise flinch from supporting. Says *Village Voice* arts writer C. Carr: "NEA grants are the most prestigious available, emblems of an artist's worth or a venue's seriousness, and they attract corporate funding."¹⁹

Indeed, in declaring the NEA's policy requiring grantees to sign a pledge not to use federal funds for "obscene" works to be an unconstitutional abridgement of freedom of speech, U.S. District Judge John G. Davies in Los Angeles noted the power of NEA's grants: "If an artist chooses not to be bound by the NEA's obscenity restriction, he will not be able to obtain private funding."²⁰

Tim McClimon, vice president of the AT&T Foundation, told the *Village Voice* that an "arts ecology" has developed among corporations, foundations and the federal government. "We're partners," says McClimon. "... You can't view parts of an ecology in isolation."²¹

18 Interview, January 2, 1991.

19 C. Carr, "War on Art," *Village Voice*, June 5, 1990.

20 Kim Masters, "Obscenity Pledge Ruling," *The Washington Post*, January 10, 1991, p. B2.

21 Carr, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

The New York arts group Creative Time in a May 1, 1990, brochure for its Karen Finley "public poem" entitled "The Black Sheep," lists support from the NEA, the New York Council on the Arts (a heavy NEA recipient), the AT&T Foundation, Chase Manhattan Bank, Con Edison, The Cowles Charitable Trust, Jerome Foundation, JP Morgan & Co., Philip Morris Companies and New York Telephone.

In Washington, D.C., the Woolly Mammoth theater draws support not only from the NEA but from The Washington Post Company, C&P Telephone, Northern Telecom, Signal Construction Corporation and numerous foundations. The theater's most recent offering, "The Rocky Horror Show," is described in the show brochure as a gospel for "complete sexual liberation — 'give yourself over to absolute pleasure'" and "depraved," "a subversive idea with a definite hard-on for nonconformity." The brochure addresses NEA critic Senator Jesse Helms, the North Carolina Republican, in this fashion: "Just remember that when it appears to talk dirty to you, appears to homoeroticize you, appears to sadomasochize you or show you exploited individuals in sex acts, The Rocky Horror Show is only wishing to unconditionally thrill you, chill you, fulfill you."²²

THE PERCEPTION GAP

During the congressional floor debate last fall, NEA defenders frequently used the word "censors" to describe advocates of content restrictions. Representative Peter Kostmayer, the Pennsylvania Democrat, even declared that criticism of NEA constituted "book burning in America, 1990."²³ This is more than hyperbole; it is a distortion of what censorship is. Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines censoring as "to alter, delete or ban completely."²⁴ In the case of the arts, it might mean prevention of production or display. But it is not "lack of government subsidy." No NEA critic has suggested that the government muzzle artists, just that taxpayers are not obligated to pay for any and all artwork — particularly that attacking their most cherished beliefs.

The fact is that the NEA is actively involved in "censorship," but not in the way most NEA defenders mean. By systematically enforcing a modernist, avant-garde style, NEA censors all other art and, so doing, violates its own charter.

Constrained by Good Taste. One reason NEA is able to do this without public scrutiny is that the media are not telling the whole story. TV broadcasters and newspapers feel that good taste prevents them from reproducing the most offensive works funded by the NEA. The press is too well bred even to provide graphic descriptions. A January 2, 1991, *Los Angeles Times* article about the latest NEA

²² Playbill, *The Rocky Horror Show*, November-December 1990.

²³ Rep. Peter Kostmayer during House of Representatives floor debate, October 11, 1990.

²⁴ Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged, 1976, Merriam Webster, p. 361.

grant to performance artist Karen Finley describes her work only as “strongly feminist in tone.”²⁵ This leaves the impression that Finley, who calls herself the “Queen of Dung,” is controversial merely for being a feminist, not because of her vulgarities.

Because of this kind of obfuscation, most Americans have only an abstract concept of the works in question. Senator Helms, the NEA’s most active critic, has offered to debate the issue on any TV network providing he can show viewers what is being debated. All have refused. And for good reason. If NBC-TV, for example, actually aired some NEA-funded works, it would violate Federal Communications Commission rules against obscenity and risk losing its broadcasting license. One federal agency would find itself prosecuting a company for displaying materials sponsored by another federal agency.

Audience Turn-Around. A “Donahue” television show speaks volumes about public awareness concerning controversial grants made by the NEA. Host Phil Donahue began the show by eliciting audience applause for “artists,” implying that anyone favoring congressional oversight of the NEA is against art. Then two artists had a discussion in which they described scrutiny of NEA grants as “censorship.” Again, the audience loudly applauded. And when Representative Rohrabacher remarked that he did not think tax money should fund “obscene” projects, he received only polite applause.

As the show progressed, however, audience members were shown photos taken by NEA grant recipient Robert Mapplethorpe depicting naked men in homoerotic and sado-masochistic poses and some photos of naked children. When Donahue went into the audience to get some reaction, he found that his audience had turned. “This is smut,” one woman said. “I’m sick to my stomach,” said another. More and more people stood up to denounce what they had seen. By the time the photos made it around the entire audience, Rohrabacher’s stance against use of tax money for such “art” garnered nearly unanimous – and loud – applause. Simply by looking at a few photos, an entire audience shifted 180 degrees on the issue.²⁶

Because media coverage has been largely limited to abstract concepts, a number of misconceptions have prevented meaningful debate on the NEA:

MISCONCEPTION #1: Controversial works are no more objectionable than nudes seen in many major museums. NEA defenders frequently invoke images of NEA critics seeking to “censor” Michelangelo’s “David” or Rubens’ robust ladies.

25 Allan Parachini, *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1991, p. F6.

26 Donahue, taped on October 9, 1989.

REALITY: The works in question depict explicit sex (including such practices as inserting an entire fist and wrist into an anus), human excrement and urine, various portrayals of Jesus Christ as a drug addict, a homosexual or as part of a toilet facility.²⁷ In the NEA's 1991 reauthorization legislation, all content restrictions on grants were removed except for a single reference to "decency." Even this mild guideline has incensed many in the arts community. An NEA literature peer review panel resigned en masse in December 1990 over the "decency" provision, claiming they did not know what "decency" meant.²⁸ NEA Chairman Frohnmayer threw in with the dissenters when he declared at a December 1 meeting of NEA's advisory council: "I am not going to be the decency czar."²⁹ He said this despite his legislated mandate that "the chairman shall ensure" that grants must take into consideration "general standards of decency."

MISCONCEPTION #2: Most of what NEA funds is good. The objectionable works, says Chairman Frohnmayer, constitute only a handful of the "million images" funded by NEA over the years.

REALITY: Individual exhibits often contain not a handful but hundreds of images. Not only have NEA-sponsored exhibits included Andres Serrano's now-famous "Piss Christ," a crucifix submerged in the artist's own urine, but feature Serrano projects that use semen, urine, and pads soaked in menstrual blood. One work, "Piss Pope," is an image of Pope John Paul II submerged in urine. On a list of NEA-sponsored offensive images, Serrano's contributions at least number in the dozens. The NEA has also funded multiple grant recipients Karen Finley, Holly Hughes and other performance artists in dozens of performances. Finally, the list of exhibits of avant-garde images funded by NEA grants would be in the tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands. In a typical example, the NEA in 1989 gave New York's Whitney Museum of American Art \$75,000 to support the exhibit "The New Sculpture: Between Geometry and Gesture, 1965-75." The two dozen galleries in the exhibit contained hundreds of undistinguished objects such as rope, burlap, rocks and scraps of wire scattered on the floor or tacked to the walls.³⁰

27 Because of the offensive nature of some of these NEA-funded works, graphic descriptions will be confined to an appendix.

28 Kim Masters, "Some Resign Adjourned NEA Panel," *The Washington Post*, November 14, 1990, p. B10.

29 Kim Masters, "Arts Chief Refuses to Be 'Decency Czar'," *The Washington Post*, December 15, 1990, p. B1.

30 Interview with art critic James Cooper, January 3, 1991.

MISCONCEPTION #3: The arts would decline in America without federal funding.

REALITY: Private support of the visual and performing arts reached \$7.4 billion in 1989,³¹ compared with the NEA's annual budget of \$171 million. Federal funds have generated a substantial increase in personal and corporate giving to the arts, but it is debatable whether this has resulted in better quality art or more efficient use of dollars that might have been spent on other charities. The surge in arts spending has built arts bureaucracies in all 50 states, institutionalizing the arts market. Before, artists had only to please buyers or donors. Now, they expend considerable creativity appeasing federal bureaucrats.

MISCONCEPTION #4: No-strings federal funding of the arts is more consistent with "the American Way" than prudent oversight.

REALITY: Polls show that few Americans want censorship, but few also want tax money funding attacks on their most deeply held values. The public seems to be able to make the distinction between privately sponsored works and those publicly funded. They resent NEA spending millions on art that the vast majority of Americans find neither uplifting, ennobling, beautiful, nor meaningful. It is understandable that Americans oppose the use of their tax dollars by Annie Sprinkle, who, at a New York City show funded by NEA, declared after purportedly achieving orgasm with a sex toy: "Usually, I get paid to do this, but tonight it's government-funded."³²

MISCONCEPTION #5: NEA aid most benefits those who do not have access to the arts.

REALITY: A significant portion of NEA funding goes to symphony orchestras, opera and other art forms patronized by those who can afford even steep ticket prices. The pattern of funding suggests that it mainly is elites who are subsidized by the NEA.

MISCONCEPTION #6: NEA funds are distributed fairly across the nation.

REALITY: The 1989 NEA annual report reveals that 42 percent of grants went to just six areas: New York City (23.3 percent), Minneapolis-St. Paul (5.2 percent), Washington, D.C. (3.9 percent), San Francisco (3.8 percent), Los Angeles (3.1 percent), and Chicago (2.6 percent).

31 *Giving USA: The Annual Report of Philanthropy for 1989*, p. 159.

32 Walter Skold, "Public Funding of Erotic Show Stirs New Furor, Art vs. Smut Debate," *New York City Tribune*, January 31, 1990, cited in *Congressional Record*, February 22, 1990, p. E355.

MISCONCEPTION #7: NEA primarily helps struggling artists who would not produce art without federal subsidies.

REALITY: Many grants go to established artists who are anything but struggling. In 1986, NEA gave \$20,000 to best-selling author Tama Janowitz (*Slaves of New York*) so she could revise her next book, *A Cannibal in Manhattan*.³³ In 1987, NEA gave playwright/actor Wallace Shawn a \$20,000 playwriting grant. He had appeared in more than a dozen films in the previous seven years and had already written several successful plays.³⁴ Painter Rafael Ferrer received a \$15,000 NEA grant in 1989, his third from the agency. With homes in Philadelphia and the Dominican Republic, and a biography that lists 53 one-man shows and 127 group shows over the past 25 years, Ferrer would hardly seem a deserving artistic welfare case.³⁵

Sam Gilliam, an artist whose three-dimensional canvas and aluminum works fetch from \$25,000 to \$45,000 in New York galleries, received a 1989 NEA grant for \$15,000. It was the seventh NEA grant for the artist, whose commissioned artworks appear in Atlanta's airport terminal, a federal building in Detroit, subway stations in Boston and Buffalo, and convention centers in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.³⁶

Performance artist Karen Finley has received at least a half dozen NEA grants. Upon news that her 1990 grant application was vetoed by NEA Chairman Frohnmayer, fans sold out her \$25-a-ticket performance at the NEA-supported Serious Fun Festival in July 1990 at New York's Lincoln Center, then sold out a second, added show.

Performance artist Holly Hughes, who also has collected several NEA grants, was denied a grant in 1989. Yet that year she received a \$15,000 playwriting grant for a script for the show that was vetoed.

MISCONCEPTION #8: Criticism of NEA grants is an infringement on the free speech guaranteed by the First Amendment.

REALITY: The Bill of Rights specifically limits the government, not the populace: "Congress shall make no law...." Private criticism of public policy or publicly-funded artworks is protected speech.

MISCONCEPTION #9: Congressional oversight of NEA grants is an infringement upon freedom of speech.

33 Mark Lasswell, "How the NEA Really Works," *Spy* magazine, November 1990, p. 54.

34 Lasswell, op. cit. p. 55.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

36 *Ibid.*

REALITY: The Constitution does not prohibit Congress from setting rules for how federal money is spent. In fact, it is Congress's job to monitor whether taxpayers' money is being well spent.

MISCONCEPTION #10: Recent reforms have solved NEA's most pressing problems.

REALITY: There have been almost no reforms. By eliminating all content restrictions, Congress has given the green light to more funding of what NEA Acting Deputy Chairman for Programs Randolph McAusland described as "problematic grants."³⁷ NEA officials proved this by issuing grants early this month to Karen Finley and Holly Hughes. NEA Chairman Frohnmayer, who approved the grants, says he is "personally opposed" to federal funding of obscene art. But he has fought all restrictions on grants. On at least one occasion, he has said that NEA approval of an artwork means that, by definition, the artwork cannot possibly be obscene.³⁸

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

NEA defenders say that the agency aims for strict neutrality in grant awards. In truth, however, grants are approved by peer review panels, whose members are often themselves dependent to varying degrees on government handouts and on each other. The peer review process is a tightly-knit buddy system, with artists taking turns giving each other grants. Until this year, artists and museum executives could even sit on panels that awarded grants to their own institutions; they merely had to leave the room when the panel voted on their grant.

A Heritage review of grant awardees reveals that many grant award panel members or their institutions have been awarded NEA money, most during the same year. Examples: Laura Dean of New York's Dean Dance & Music Foundation sat on the Challenge II dance advisory grants panel; her Foundation received a \$100,000 grant.³⁹ Another panelist was Myrna Saturn Gatty, deputy director of the Atlanta-based Southern Arts Federation; her foundation received \$31,500.⁴⁰ Gus Solomons, Jr. sat on the same panel; his Solomons Company Dance Inc. of New York received \$19,000, part of which was to go toward "the creation of collaborative work by Artistic Director Gus Solomons."⁴¹

37 Quoted from June 1990 Independent Commission hearings by Vince Passaro, "Funds for the Enfeebled," *Harper's Magazine*, December 1990, p. 64.

38 As quoted in the *Orange County Register*, March 6, 1990, John Frohnmayer said: "If a panel finds there is serious artistic intent and quality in a particular piece of work, then by definition that is not going to be obscene."

39 1989 Annual Report, p. 8.

40 1989 Annual Report, p. 54.

41 1989 Annual Report, p. 10.

Cynthia Hedstrom, dance curator of The Kitchen Theater, sat on the 1989 NEA panel for choreographers' fellowships. The Kitchen Theater, doing business as Haleakala, Inc., received \$20,900 for its dance program.⁴²

Panel Back-Scratching. NEA in 1989 gave money to the institutions of all six members of the Media Arts Center advisory panel, and five of the six received grants for their institution from that panel. The Center for New Television in Chicago, whose executive director is panelist Joyce Bolinger, received three NEA grants totalling \$143,000, including a \$43,000 grant issued by the Media Arts Center panel. According to an NEA memo, Bolinger received part of the money as salary.⁴³

Film/Video Arts Inc. of New York, whose director is panelist Rodger Larson, received \$18,000 from the Media Arts Center panel.⁴⁴ The Southwest Alternate Media Project in Houston, whose director is panelist Ed Hugetz, was awarded four grants totalling \$160,000, including a \$30,000 grant from the Media Arts Center panel. Part of the money was to go to Hugetz, according to an NEA memo.⁴⁵ Visual Communications of Los Angeles, whose executive administrator is panelist Linda Mabelot, received \$20,000 through a Media Arts Center grant to the Southern California Asian American Studies Central.⁴⁶ National Alliance of Media Arts Centers, Inc. of New York, whose administrator is panelist Fenton Johnson, was awarded two Media Arts Center grants totalling \$100,000.⁴⁷ The South Carolina Arts Commission of Columbia, S.C., whose Media Arts Center director is panelist Michael Fleischman, was awarded a \$21,000 Circulating Exhibitions grant.⁴⁸

In the Inter-Arts program, five of the sixteen New Forms peer review panelists in 1989 had connections with recipient organizations: Gerald Lindahl, administrator of the New York State Council on the Arts, which received more than \$900,000 in total NEA grants in 1989; Lynn Schuette, director of the Sushi Gal-

42 1989 Annual Report, p. 13.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 90-91. Also, NEA memo concerning the August 16-18, 1989, meetings of the Media Arts Center advisory panel in Washington, D.C.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 90, 93. Also, NEA memo on August 16-18, 1989, Media Arts Center panel meeting.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

lery in San Diego, which received a \$12,000 Inter-Arts grant to support work by performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena.⁴⁹ Sushi also was awarded \$17,500 in the Visual Arts category for various projects⁵⁰; MK Wegmann, associate director of the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, which received three Inter-Arts grants totalling \$43,000,⁵¹ a Museum grant of \$15,000⁵² and a Music grant of \$10,000⁵³; Bruce Yonemoto, media and video artist, received a \$15,000 Visual Arts fellowship⁵⁴; Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, choreographer and artistic director of Urban Bush Women, received a \$7,000 choreographer fellowship,⁵⁵ and Urban Bush Women received a \$25,000 Inter-Arts grant through the Foundation for Independent Artists.⁵⁶ Zollar also was named in a \$12,000 Brooklyn Arts Council grant as choreographer for a multi-media production called "White Chocolate."⁵⁷

SAVING THE NEA

Although the very idea of government funding of the arts is itself questionable, a few basic reforms might end the worst abuses. Such reforms include:

- ◆ A study by Congress's General Accounting Office of allegations of conflicts of interest in the awarding of grants.
- ◆ A GAO study into charges that the NEA systematically discriminates against traditional artists and art forms. GAO, for example, should demand a list of funded artworks and inspect them to determine how NEA defines the term "representational."
- ◆ Eliminating the Inter-Arts grant division, which funds performance artists who do not fit into any other category.
- ◆ Returning to the NEA charter's demand for "excellence" as the criterion for grants.
- ◆ Reintroducing minimal content restrictions. Clearly written prohibitions on explicit sex, child pornography and attacks on religion are not inappropriate for projects funded by taxpayers. The descriptions of what is prohibited can be made very specific, leaving artists free to explore the widest array of subjects.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 197.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 64, 65.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 192.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

- ◆ Redirecting money from new works to projects that preserve the existing repertoire, such as paintings by the great masters. NEA already sponsors preservation programs for museums.
- ◆ Redirecting money to arts education programs that teach basic skills, beginning with drawing.

CONCLUSION

Chairman John E. Frohnmayer calls the NEA “critically important to the soul of this nation.”⁵⁸ Although the arts certainly flourished in America before NEA’s founding in 1965, Frohnmayer has a point: NEA has an enormous amount of clout. With a budget of \$175 million and 185 employees, NEA is a relatively small federal agency, but it is a giant symbolically. Indeed, the agency’s stated mission is to “foster artistic excellence by helping to develop the nation’s finest creative talent, to preserve our cultural heritage in all its diversity, to make the arts available to wider, more informed audiences, and to promote the overall financial stability of American arts organizations.”

Virtually every major arts institution and artist receives money from NEA. Along with the money, each grantee receives tacit approval and legitimacy from the federal government. The nation may be producing more art than in 1965, but whether the taxpayers are getting better art for their money is debatable. It is a long way from the paintings of Andrew Wyeth to the antics of Annie Sprinkle.

Taxpayers’ Rights. NEA defenders contend that the agency should be exempt from careful stewardship of federal spending. This shows contempt for the rights of taxpayers. Artists simply do not have a “right” to money taken from taxpayers. NEA’s congressional critics are accused of advocating “censorship” of the arts, but no lawmaker has suggested that artists be prevented from creating or displaying their works.

If censorship is being practiced, it is by the NEA. In violation of its own guidelines, NEA almost exclusively favors a single artistic style, avant-garde, discriminating against artists who create traditional, representational works. Because private donors use NEA grants as indicators of worth, NEA skews the arts toward the strictly experimental.

NEA’s grant approval system is rife with conflicts of interest, and this year’s reforms address only the most obvious abuses. Artists and arts administrators who sit on review panels still will have little trouble getting grants for themselves, their friends, and their own institutions through log-rolling and back-scratching. It is as simple as switching grant requests to different categories.

⁵⁸ John E. Frohnmayer, press release, February 7, 1990.

Reassessing Priorities. NEA defenders say that the reforms contained in this year's reauthorization have solved NEA's problems. But new grants this month to sexually explicit performance artists Karen Finley and Holly Hughes show that NEA is unable to police itself. More reforms are needed, including minimal content restrictions on federally-funded art and a reemphasis on excellence as the prime criterion for grant selection.

The General Accounting Office should examine charges that the NEA has violated its own prohibition against the establishment of a single arts style. The GAO also should be asked to investigate the grant-awarding process, which has been mightily abused and has potential for more of the same.

Finally, Congress should reassess its own priorities and NEA's future. In a time when already-pinched families are being asked to sacrifice more of their incomes to new taxes, Congress should ensure that every tax dollar is well spent. It does not appear that NEA, as currently constituted, is doing so.

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This is the third in a series of studies analyzing the impact of federal policies on American culture and cultural values.

Heritage Foundation Research Assistant John M. Slye contributed to this study.

All Heritage Foundation papers are now available electronically to subscribers of the "Nexis" on-line data retrieval service. The Heritage Foundation Reports (HFRPTS) can be found in the OMNI, CURRNT, NWLTRS, and GVT group files of the NEXIS library and in the GOVT and OMNI group files of the GOVNEWS library.

APPENDIX

SOME CONTROVERSIAL NEA-FUNDED WORKS

ADVISORY: The following summaries of projects funded by the NEA contain graphic descriptions of explicit sexual acts and obscene language. Part of the NEA's problem is media reluctance to describe controversial artworks. Therefore, while the inclusion of such a list is regrettable, it is also necessary. (Numbers in the left-hand column are the year of the grant.)

1969 "LIGHT"

The NEA gave a grant to *The American Literary Anthology*, which gave Aram Saroyan \$500 for his one-word poem consisting of the misspelled word "Lighgt."¹

1971 LIVING STAGE

NEA gave \$50,000 to Living Stage, which performed in public schools and had elementary schoolchildren shout "bullshit" throughout the group's performance.²

1972 JUDY CHICAGO

NEA gave Judy Chicago \$36,500³ for a work called the "Dinner Party," which depicts the role of women throughout history via a triangular table with 39 formal place settings consisting of vaginas on dinner plates stylized to fit the personalities of great feminists.⁴

1977 ANN WILCHUSKY

NEA gave Ann Wilchusky a \$6,025 grant for "sculpting in space," that is, throwing crepe paper out of an airplane.⁵

GAY SUNSHINE PRESS

The NEA gave a \$40,000 grant to the GSP to publish "alternative publications," primarily with sexually explicit homosexual themes, including descriptions in great detail, with illustrations, of group sex between men and between men and animals.⁶

1 *Report on the National Endowment for the Arts by the Independent Commission*, 1990, p. 37.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

3 Jonetta Rose Barras, "UDC's \$1.6 million 'Dinner': Feminist Artwork Causes Some Indigestion," *The Washington Times*, July 18, 1990.

4 Eric Gibson, "Chicago a Model Feminist Artist," *The Washington Times*, July 18, 1990.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

6 Winston Leyland, *Orgasms of Light: The Gay Sunshine Anthology*, 1977.

1984 SECOND COMING

NEA and the New York State Arts Council gave \$204,390 and \$73,370 respectively to the Franklin Furnace of New York City the year they put on a feminist performance art exhibition, *The Second Coming*. The feminist/activist group Carnival Knowledge assembled the show, which included one lesbian inserting her foot into another lesbian's vagina, an 86-year old woman boasting of sexual escapades with teenagers, and group sex photographs. One photo showed a woman breastfeeding an infant; it was titled *Jesus Sucks*. Priests were shown in sadomasochistic situations. The title of a photo of a newborn infant with its mouth open suggested the infant was available for oral sex. The month-long exhibition included a one-night performance by Annie Sprinkle titled *Deep Inside Porn Stars*, which explored pornography that is "not demeaning to women."⁷

POLITICAL ART DOCUMENTATION DISTRIBUTION

NEA gave a grant to PADD who, together with Carnival Knowledge co-sponsored *Tapping and Talking Dirty*, a live show at the Franklin Furnace in which two women casually discuss fellatio and swallowing human semen.⁸

1985 THUNDER'S MOUTH PRESS

The NEA gave Thunder's Mouth Press a \$25,000 Small Press Assistance grant to support books produced by Thunder's Mouth.⁹ A TM experimental novel titled *Saturday Night at San Marcos* relates the sexual molestation of a group of 10 children in a pedophile's garage, including acts of bestiality. The children relate how much they enjoyed the pedophile's sex games.¹⁰ The NEA acknowledges funding Thunder's Mouth Press, but disavows that the funding supported this book.¹¹

1987 CHERI GAULKE

NEA and NYSCA gave grants to the Furnace Theatre in 1987 to help fund performances by Cheri Gaulke. Her show *Virgin* was part of a series of programs during which Gaulke used her naked body to "explore female sexuality in relation to religion, myth, fashion, and eroticism in a partly Christian worship service, part pagan ritual."¹²

7 Betty Wein, "Sick, Pornographic 'Art' Funded with Your Taxes," *The Washington Times*, March 2, 1984, p.1B.

8 Betty Wein, *op. cit.*, p. 1B.

9 Rose M. DiNapoli, Letter to Senator Jesse Helms, July 7, 1989.

10 William Packard, *Saturday Night at San Marcos*, pp. 29-34.

11 DiNapoli, *op. cit.*

12 "This Week's News from Inside Washington," *Human Events*, February 17, 1990, pp. 3-4.

Her clad and unclad body variously represented Eve, the serpent, a preacher, a witch, and Jesus Christ.¹³

FRANK MOORE

After the NEA gave him a fellowship in 1985, Frank Moore appeared at the Furnace Theatre in 1987 with the help of NEA and NYSCA grants. In his show *Intimate Cave*, audience members are invited to shed their clothes and pair up to touch one another's bodies under his guidance.¹⁴

JOHANNA WENT

NEA and the NYSCA gave grants to the Furnace Theatre in New York in 1983, 1985, and 1987. All three years Johanna Went appeared at the Furnace Theatre as part of a series of performances that were funded in part by these grants. Went relies on props such as giant bloody tampons, satanic bunnies, three-foot turds, and dildos.¹⁵ The Furnace press release for her 1987 show, "*Twin Travel Terror*," described her as the "Hyena of Performance Art." The high point of her show was her "giant vagina headdress which she squeezed as white liquid gushed from her mouth" according to the *Village Voice*.¹⁶

1988 ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

NEA gave the Institute for Contemporary Art in Philadelphia a \$30,000 grant to put together *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*. After appearing in Philadelphia the exhibit then went on tour. Images in the exhibit include a self-portrait of the photographer with a bullwhip protruding from his rectum and photographs of one man's arm (up to the forearm) in another man's rectum, one man urinating into another man's mouth, a close-up of a man sticking his "pinkie" finger up his penis and a little girl with her skirt lifted, exposing her genitals.

NATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN TASK FORCE

The New York State Council on the Arts funded a photographic exhibition lecture series sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Fund for Human Dignity that was designed to encourage public acceptance of men dressing as women –

13 Cheri Gaulke, "This is My Body," *High Performance*, Spring-Summer 1982, p. 80.

14 Frank Moore, *Eroplay*, 1988, p. 126.

15 C. Carr, "Some Ghouls," *The Village Voice*, November 3, 1987.

16 *Ibid.*

transvestism.¹⁷ NYSCA gave photographer Mariette Pathy Allen a \$7,200 grant for the project.¹⁸

ANDRES SERRANO

NEA gave the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) in Winston-Salem, NC a \$75,000 grant to run SECCA's Awards in Visual Arts Program. Andres Serrano, one of ten artists to receive a \$15,000 award, was selected for his use of body fluids in photography including "Piss Christ" – a photograph of Christ on a cross in a vat of the artist's own urine.¹⁹

1989 CENTER ON CONTEMPORARY ART

NEA gave a \$17,500 grant to The Center on Contemporary Art (COCA) in Seattle to support a program of exhibitions, publications, and related events during COCA's 1990 season.²⁰ COCA's application showed that the season would include the exhibit *Modern Primitives*, featuring photographs of tattoos and ritualistic body piercing, including genital piercing.²¹ COCA also sponsored an event involving two naked women covered with paint rolling around on paper.

PATRICK MOORE AND THE BLUEBLACK COLLECTIVE

NEA gave large seasonal support grants to The Kitchen Theater, the Walker Arts Center and other avant-garde theaters where The Blueblack Collective has appeared. The show is *DYKES AND FAGS AND FAGS AND DYKES*. Patrick Moore, founder of the Blueblack Collective, says the intent is "to shove [the AIDS epidemic] down [heterosexuals'] throats and say that our lives have become terrifying because of this."²²

17 Fredric Dicker, "Men in Drag: Your Tax Dollars at Work," *New York Post*, March 16, 1988, p. 5.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

19 Nicols Fox, "NEA Under Siege: Artwork Sparks Congressional Challenge to Agency's Reauthorization," *New Art Examiner*, Summer 1989, pp. 18-19.

20 "NEA Fact Sheet on Southern Exposure/'Modern Primitive' Exhibition", The National Endowment for the Arts, March 16, 1990.

21 "Southern Exposure Presents 'RE/SEARCH Modern Primitives'," Announcement of Performance, October 20-November 16, 1989.

22 Joseph Koenenn, "An Angry Message to the 'Straight' World," *Newsday*, January 13, 1989, Weekend, p. 15.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE GALLERY

The NEA gave Southern Exposure a \$5,000 grant to support a series of exhibitions and installations for the year, including *Modern Primitives* (see above) plus live shows including an "autoerotic scaffold."²³

1989-90 ANNIE SPRINKLE

NEA gave a \$60,000 seasonal grant and the New York State Council on the Arts gave a \$25,000 grant to The Kitchen Theater to support its 54-show performance art season, 12 of which were by Sprinkle and titled *Annie Sprinkle: Post-Porn Modernist*. Sprinkle masturbates with sex toys and, after inserting a speculum into her vagina, invites audience members on stage to view her cervix with a flashlight.²⁴

1990 ARTPARK

NEA gave a \$20,000 grant to Organizers of Artpark, an arts festival at a state park in Lewiston, N.Y. One event was to be a "Bible Burn" put on by a group called Survival Research Lab. SRL stated its intention to "create large sexually explicit props covered with a generous layer of requisitioned Bibles. After employing these props in a wide variety of unholy rituals, SRL machines will burn them to ashes."²⁵ When the planned event was protested, Artpark canceled the show and SRL sued Artpark.²⁶

ARTS FESTIVAL OF ATLANTA

NEA funds the Georgia Arts Council, which supports the Atlanta Arts Festival. NEA gave grants of \$127,000 in 1990 and \$125,000 in 1989 to The Center on Puppetry Arts. Pat Gann, the artistic director of the Center on Puppetry Arts, put on a puppet show at the Arts Festival which, according to witnesses, included oral sex between puppets.²⁷

23 *Ibid.*, 1989.

24 "Bush Rewards NEA with Raise," *Human Events*, February 10, 1990, pp. 3-4 and Valerie Richardson, "NEA Uses Tax Dollars to Fund Art Show by X-Rated Video Star," *The Washington Times*, February 6, 1990, p. A1.

25 "Arts Group Planned to Burn Bibles to Ashes," *Religious Rights Watch*, September 1990, and *Washington Post*, August 15, 1990, p. C1.

26 Judd Tully, "Rejected Artist File Suit," *Washington Post*, September 9, 1990.

27 Kathy Scruggs, "Arts Festival Puppets Depict Oral Sex," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, September 23, 1990.

CHICAGO FILMMAKERS

NEA gave a grant to CF which put on a militant feminist show, *Rattle Your Rage*, which featured a *Sister Serpents Fuck a Fetus* poster depicting an unborn baby with the heading "For all you folks who consider a fetus more valuable than a woman, have a fetus cook for you, have a fetus affair, go to a fetus' house to ease your sexual frustration,"²⁸ and Maria Epes' work, *Off With Their Heads: Revenge for Rape*, a sculpture that shows three male figures down on their knees, hands bound, penises stretched out on a block with the heads of their organs chopped off.²⁹

COASTAL EXCHANGE 3

NEA gave funding to Gallery 1708 in Richmond, Va. to put on an exhibition of New York and Virginia artists co-sponsored by the Richmond Arts Council. Included was a painting by Carlos Gutierrez-Solan — director of the New York State Council on the Arts visual arts program — that depicted "three naked men done in blood red about to engage in sexual intercourse, with one of them highly aroused."³⁰ The work was displayed in a gallery window facing a downtown public street.

DEGENERATE WITH A CAPITAL D

NEA gave a \$70,000 seasonal support grant to Artists Space — which gave a \$250 subgrant to a New York gallery called Black and White in Color — to put on a show called *Degenerate with a Capital D*, which included *Alchemy Cabinet* by Shawn Eichman, featuring the remains of the artist's own aborted baby.³¹ Another exhibit was Dread Scott's *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag* which invites viewers to walk across an American flag spread on the floor.³²

KAREN FINLEY

The NEA denied a grant to Karen Finley to put on the show *We Keep Our Victims Ready*, in which she smears chocolate syrup on her naked body and sticks bean sprouts to the syrup to represent sperm.³³ NEA gave grants to the Walker Arts Center in

28 John Stevenson, "Group Efforts: Women Who Hate Men Who Have Penises," *Chicago Reader*, March 16, 1990.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Barbara Gamarekian, "Window Painting Rates a Cover-Up," *New York Times Service*, May 1990.

31 Richardson, *op. cit.*, February 15, 1990, p. A8.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Paula Spand and Carla Hall, "Rejected! Portraits of the Performers the NEA Refused to Fund," *Washington Post*, July 8, 1990, p. G1 and George Archibald, "Speculation in Arts World Has Frohnmayer Quitting," *The Washington Times*, July 2, 1990.

Minneapolis (\$95,000), The Kitchen Theater, Lincoln Center (\$75,000) and others with the knowledge that Karen Finley was scheduled to perform this act and would be paid in part with NEA funds.

GIORNO POETRY SYSTEMS

NEA gave grants to help GPS sell videos, CDs and cassettes with titles like "Smack My Crack," "A Diamond Hidden in the Mouth of a Corpse," and "Better An Old Demon Than a New God."³⁴

HOLLY HUGHES

NEA gave Hughes a \$15,500 play-writing fellowship to finish writing the very play that the NEA denied her a grant to perform,³⁵ according to *The Washington Post In World Without End*, Hughes, who specializes in lesbian themes, says that she saw "Jesus between my mother's legs"³⁶ and "places her hand up her vagina 'to show how her mother imparted the secret meaning of life.'"³⁷

JOHN MAC WELLMAN

NEA gave a \$15,000 NEA play-writing fellowship to Wellman which helped fund *Sincerity Forever*, about Christ's Second Coming. "Christ" uses vulgar obscenities and condones any and all types of sexual activities as being consistent with Christ's Biblical teaching.³⁸

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT

NEA gave a \$20,000 writing fellowship to Minnie Bruce Pratt who stated in the *Washington Blade*, a homosexual newspaper, that "the material I sent to the NEA was explicitly lesbian and it was homoerotic. That's the material they read, and they decided to give me the award after they read it."³⁹

34 Products listed on the order form from Giorno Poetry Systems, 1987.

35 Span and Hall, *op. cit.*, p. G1.

36 Span and Hall, *op. cit.*, p. G5.

37 Archibald, *op. cit.* July 2, 1990.

38 Alisa Solomon, "Wellman-Speak," *The Village Voice*, August 28, 1990.

39 Dianna J. Williams, "Minnie Bruce Pratt's Poetry Scores 'Another Victory for Us,'" *The Washington Blade*, February 15, 1990, p. 29.

SAN FRANCISCO GAY & LESBIAN FILM FESTIVAL

NEA gave \$9,000 to Frameline — the organizer of this ten-day film festival — for “administrative costs.”⁴⁰ More than 100 films were shown, including *Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay VideoPORN*, *Tongues Untied*, and *Blow Job*.⁴¹ In a letter to the General Accounting Office, NEA stated that the National Council “affirmed the [NEA review] panel finding that the work, when taken as a whole, had ‘serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value.’”⁴²

DAVID WOJNAROWICZ

The NEA gave a \$15,000 grant to Illinois State University Gallery in Normal, Ill. for an exhibit titled *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*. The exhibit contained photographs of men performing oral sex, anal sex, oral-anal sex and masturbation. The exhibit also contained the essay *X-Rays From Hell*, which was denied NEA funding in 1990 for another exhibit. The essay describes New York Cardinal John O'Connor as a “fat cannibal from that house of walking swastikas up on fifth avenue” and a “creep in black skirts.”⁴³

1991 KAREN FINLEY

The NEA gave a \$25,000 grant to The Kitchen Theater for Video, Music and Dance in New York City to support a work that “deconstructs” conventional TV talk shows.⁴⁴

HOLLY HUGHES

The NEA gave a \$15,000 grant to Holly Hughes to support production of “No Trace of the Blond,” which, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, “explores feminist themes using subject matter dealing with vampirism.”⁴⁵

40 Lou Chibbaro, Jr., “NEA Awards \$9,000 to SF Lesbian and Gay Film Festival,” *The Washington Blade*, February 9, 1990, p. 11.

41 Valerie Richardson, “NEA Helps Fund Gay Film Festival,” *The Washington Times*, June 19, 1990.

42 Julianne Ross Davis, “Letter to General Accounting Office,” *The National Endowment for the Arts*, July 5, 1990, p. 4.

43 Valerie Richardson, “Artists Deliberately Bite Hand That Feeds,” *The Washington Times*, February 15, 1990, p. A1.

44 Allan Parachini, “Finley, Hughes to Receive NEA Grants,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1991, p. F6.

45 *Ibid.*, p.F6.