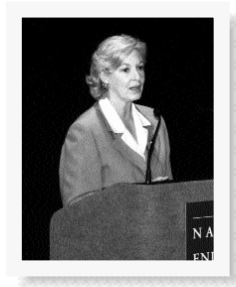


INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIRMAN



One of the joys of being Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts is experiencing the vast and diverse array of art in America. When I came to the agency in October 1993, I began a canvass of the arts in communities nationwide, and I managed to visit all 50 states, taking the pulse of the arts everywhere. In city after city, the desire for a strong arts presence was manifested in new facilities or burgeoning ideas. The community could be as small as 3,000 or as large as several million; the desire was there, but often, the long-range planning was not. Let's build it, and they will come, and we will worry about tomorrow, tomorrow. This philosophy, coupled with a declining public commitment to funding the arts, was a recipe for disaster.

Some communities did have an infrastructure for sustaining their arts, and while there was no one solution that seemed applicable to all, I felt that rather than reinvent the wheel, we needed to share our ideas and talk about a commitment as a nation to our ongoing arts legacy.

More than 100 years ago, a citizens' movement dedicated itself to preserving and celebrating our natural resources. Out of this was born our national park system and the plethora of environmental groups that exists today. Now, at the end of the 20th century, when America's vision of the arts has had such a profound impact on the world, it seems right to commit to our cultural resources in the same way.

In April 1994, we held “ART-21: Art Reaches into the 21st Century,” the first national conference on the arts called by the Federal government. Over 1,000 people came to Chicago to discuss four issues that then loomed large in the non-profit arts: The Artist and Society, Lifelong Learning in the Arts, Arts and Technology, and New Ideas for Federal Arts Funding. Those first steps were interrupted to a degree by the budgetary cuts and restructuring the agency undertook in 1995-96, but the issues remain no less vital. The Endowment, and indeed the entire arts community, began to take a look at the ecology of the arts process, of nurturing the arts and preserving a legacy, and at different models for stabilization and survival. Arts service organizations, such as the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (now Americans for the Arts), the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the American Assembly and a host of others considered the state of the arts in colloquies, conferences and a number of reports.

In 1996, we decided to continue this national discussion by going into a number of communities and meeting not just with the arts leaders, but with representatives of all aspects of civic and social life. The American Canvas, as this initiative came to be called, would be a great vehicle for sharing ideas and information on the issues vital to the nonprofit arts. At each of the American Canvas forums, the structure was designed to take a question for consideration, listen to the responses of all the panelists, and then open it up to the audience.

Each of the six privately-funded forums explored a different aspect of the successful integration of the arts into communities. The host cities were chosen for their leadership in the development of innovative strategies for supporting the arts and using the arts to build strong communities. Each forum began with broad and general questions for the panels’ consideration:

1

COLUMBUS, OHIO

1. *How can the arts promote civic responsibility and good citizenship?*
2. *What role do the arts play in community understanding and civic participation?*
3. *What role do the arts play in cultural heritage and citizen pride?*

Chairman's Introduction

2

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

1. *How can the arts build and maintain the viability of a community's social infrastructure?*
2. *How do the arts build a positive legacy for children?*
3. *What role do the arts play in linking communities and building a solid social framework?*
4. *How do the arts help to ensure livable communities for tomorrow?*

3

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

1. *How can the arts support education, children, families and communities?*
2. *How do the arts ensure student success and good schools?*
3. *In which ways do the arts strengthen family?*

4

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

1. *What is the role of the arts in community economic development and growth?*
2. *How do the arts build communities?*
3. *What is the Bottom Line?*
4. *The arts as a community economic resource*
5. *How can responsibility be taken for America's arts legacy?*

5

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

1. *How can the arts improve the quality of life in America's communities?*
2. *Why do the arts enrich community life?*
3. *What advantages do the arts bring to community planning, design and development?*

6

MIAMI, FLORIDA

1. *How can the arts ensure equity and access to America's culture and heritage?*
2. *Equity—How do the arts provide opportunities for all citizens and bridge populations?*
3. *Access—In which ways are the arts available to all Citizens and How do the arts serve the needs of various ccnstituencies?*
4. *Forms of Expression—How do the arts allow open and responsible exchanges of ideas?*

In January, 1997, the American Canvas Steering Committee met to review this dialogue and draft ten Calls to Action. These actions were endorsed on January 30, 1997 by the full American Canvas Committee, a group of national leaders from all sectors of public life. This committee has begun to search for specific ways that their organizations and sectors can work together nationwide to assist communities in ensuring an arts legacy for future generations. A list of the participants and the Calls to Action are included in this book, and summaries of each of the Forums and the participants' responses to the Calls are featured on our World Wide Web site at <http://arts.endow.gov> under the "American Canvas" section. We see this site as a permanent home for the free exchange of information and ideas on how communities can take action to sustain the arts.

This American Canvas report, however, is primarily an analysis and distillation of the major issues we face in the nonprofit arts. It raises a number of red flags about the current state of the arts in America, and we conclude with challenges and opportunities for everyone in the arts to consider.

The National Endowment for the Arts has undergone radical changes in the past four years, and I am certain that change is the only sure bet for the future. The nature of the public funding network for the arts for the next century depends upon the political will of Congress and state and local elected officials. The very real hope for the arts is that they will be vital in the daily life of communities, and that through the Endowment, communities will, in turn, find ways to sustain the arts at the local level. As a nation, however, we are obliged to take stock of our cultural resources and the quality of life the arts bring to all our citizens. The future of the arts in America depends upon the will of the people. The spirit to grow is there, but a flower can be crushed with a single step. Given half a chance, art will flourish and carpet the landscape with color and life. Let us tend these seeds we have sown and hand down undiminished to our children the artistic legacy we have nurtured.

Jane Alexander