

SEEKING NEW SOLUTIONS

If the American Canvas forums raised more questions than they answered—questions concerning the evolving role of the arts in American society, the health of the nonprofit sector in general and its coexistence with increasingly dominant commercial forces in particular—the forum participants came up with an impressive array of answers, too. Many of these involved new, more inclusive ways of defining our cultural pursuits, admitting the validity of less formal, more pervasive and participatory forms of expression. Art is no longer just for artists, and for their specialized, discerning audiences. Rather, art has something to offer all Americans.

In the process of expanding our cultural lexicon, other American Canvas participants described a future in which the arts, writ large, would play a much more central role in the lives of our communities. No longer restricted solely to the sanctioned arenas of culture, the arts would be literally suffused throughout the civic structure, finding a home in a variety of community service and economic development activities—from youth programs and crime prevention to job training and race relations—far afield from the traditional aesthetic functions of the arts. This extended role for culture can also be seen in the many new partners that arts organizations have taken on in recent years, with school districts, parks and recreation departments, convention and visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce, and a host of social welfare agencies all serving to highlight the utilitarian aspects of the

arts in contemporary society. At the American Canvas forum in his city, for example, Los Angeles City Councilman Joel Wachs spoke of the need to integrate the arts into the work of neighborhood councils, planning commissions, and similar agencies designed to serve civic and community needs. “I think we have to look at our structures for doing this,” explained Wachs, describing the shared responsibility of searching for new areas in which the arts might contribute: “It’s partly government, and it’s partly arts institutions, and it’s partly business...”

The American Canvas initiative itself was part of that exploration, a process that can be reduced, ultimately, to a search for new money, new alliances, and new ways of thinking about the arts in American society—fundraising, collaboration, and advocacy, in other words, standard themes in the nonprofit sector, to be sure, but ones that have been treated to some surprising variations in recent years, at the American Canvas forums and elsewhere.

“...THE ARTS ARE A TOOL IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD...”

Funding invariably looms large in discussions of the future of the arts, and the American Canvas forums proved no exception in this regard. Recognizing the strain on existing public and private sources of support, however, American Canvas participants were quick to point to potential new revenue streams, many originating outside of the traditional sources of arts support. Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs General Manager Aldolfo Nodal cited \$3 million in federal economic development funds that are helping to build a new theater in Canoga Park. The transportation and criminal justice systems, similarly, are among a number of other areas with which the arts community might profitably develop new relations. “We need to link into all of those support mechanisms and get that support,” Nodal insisted. “And the only way to do that is to build these relations...into the fabric of such basic public-sector functions as crime prevention, housing, education, and transportation.” Such partnerships as these have helped Nodal’s Department of Cultural Affairs budget grow in recent years, at a time when many others in the public sector have had to fight to hold onto what little they have. “I feel lucky,” he explained, “because my budgets grow and we don’t have the same kinds of battles... We’ve been able to get across to the powers that be, and also [to] the people at large, that the arts are a tool in their neighborhood, and in their community.”

They are a tool for Mary Ann Mears, the sculptor-turned-arts-activist from Baltimore (whose activism landed her a seat on the Maryland State Arts Council, in

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fact). A participant at the Charlotte forum, Mears offered a blueprint for integrating the arts into a number of federal programs, putting the resulting “nonarts” revenues to use at the local level. “Target HUD, Commerce, and the Small Business Administration as well as other government agencies,” Mears advised, focusing on “community and economic development. Consciously model this process for replication at the state level.” Both the Department of Commerce and the Small Business Administration, she believed, could do more to stress the economic benefits of the arts, while HUD should “highlight the value of the arts in their guidelines for CDBG (Community Development Block Grants) grants.” These kinds of arrangements were common in the 1970s, Mears pointed out. “In Baltimore, CDBG funds helped pay for the capital expenses for three theaters (Center Stage, The Arena Players and the Baltimore Center for the Performing Arts). They were also used for public art projects.... During the Carter administration local jurisdictions were encouraged by HUD to use CDBG funds for the arts.”

Baltimore has failed, on the other hand, to take advantage of a more recent federal economic development tool, the so-called “Empowerment Zones.” Cities in which such zones have been established “should be encouraged to include the arts in their processes and efforts,” Mears believed. “In Baltimore, which is an Empowerment Zone grant recipient, there has been no inclusion of the arts perspective. Appropriate arts connections could be job training in the arts...[and] the development of community arts facilities as community, educational, economic and physical revitalization opportunities.” Artists housing can also be used as a community revitalization tool, Mears suggested. “The use of public housing subsidies for artists housing can make a project viable.... Tax credits are another tool.” Mears described one such effort currently underway in Baltimore: “The Howard Street Artists Housing, which community leaders initiated and for which the city created a partnership. This is the old downtown retail district which is largely boarded up now. It is strategically located near a number of cultural institutions and the redevelopment will support those existing resources by creating a much improved environment while reclaiming an area rapidly sliding downhill.”

Ellen Lovell, former director of the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, shared Mears’s belief that there is ample room within the federal sector for more support for the arts. “If we can have a duck stamp help pay for the Fish and Wildlife Service,” she reasoned, “we can have a dedicated revenue for the National Endowment for the Arts.” Lovell also pointed to promising developments at the state and local levels. “Twelve state arts councils are building private endow-

ment funds through a variety of mechanism,” she noted, “including being able to get their legislatures to pass special dedicated revenues focused on those endowments. At the local level, you have something like the Denver Scientific and Cultural District, which is a one-tenth of one percent tax that the citizens have voted now twice on themselves, that’s raising \$26 million a year for cultural institutions in the metropolitan area. And in Broward County, Florida, to pick one more example, they imposed a tax on video rentals and sales of CDs and tapes that’s raising \$2.2 million dollars a year, that’s really fueling a renaissance there, especially in public art.”

Speaking for the state and local level, both Jonathan Katz of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) and Robert Lynch of Americans for the Arts (formerly the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies) described a variety of new income sources for the arts. NASAA has tracked revenue-generating schemes as various as endowment income, bond issues, tax check-offs, and proceeds from lotteries, organized-crime property seizures, and vanity license plate sales, while monitoring as well the growing list of partnerships that state arts agencies have formed with other departments at the state level. Such ancillary funds, Katz notes, “can be an important component of a state’s support of arts and culture. Most state arts agency leaders target supplemental funds toward specific programs or purposes, and the bulk of their agency budgets come from the state general fund.”

Supplementary funding, moreover, can prove to be a temporary windfall, suddenly drying up in the face of a fiscal crisis. “They should be approached cautiously,” Katz adds, “when they tie the state arts agency’s budget to a funding source outside the scope of the public planning process.” Even with the most generous, well conceived special-purpose revenue streams, Katz warns, “supplemental funding strategies do not mitigate the need for ongoing advocacy to ensure state government’s commitment to arts funding.”¹

Robert Lynch, meanwhile, pointed to local governments as perhaps the only part of the public sector in which funding for the arts continues to grow. “Local government leaders,” he noted, “continue to fund the arts (more than \$650 million annually) even as they face an uncertain economy and shrinking support

¹ Sarah M. Dipko, Jill Hauser-Field, and Jeffrey Love, *Supplemental Funding Strategies of State and Jurisdictional Arts Agencies* (Washington, DC: National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 1993) iv.

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Two young children explore the circus arts at the LA Alive! Festival, one of hundreds of community-based arts festivals which have special programming for children.

from the federal government.... [S]tudies show that because of the social, educational, and economic benefits provided by the arts, local leaders consistently increase support for the arts by seven percent in the aggregate annually, often through very innovative funding means.”² Funds derived from those innovative means, according to Lynch, include \$36 million from property taxes in St. Louis, which allow the major institutions to provide free admission to members of the community; \$10 million from the hotel/motel tax in San Francisco, for arts activities that increase cultural tourism; and \$5 million from the gambling tax in Deadwood, South Dakota, to support culture and preservation activities. These and other innovative programs are highlighted in the Institute for Community Development and the Arts’s *Resource Development Handbook: Untapped Public*

² National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, *Building America’s Communities: A Compendium of Arts and Community Development Programs* (Washington, DC: Institute for Community Development and the Arts, 1996) 4-5.

Funding for the Arts, a useful compendium of alternative funding sources in the public sector.³

For better or worse, though, most of the programs that Lovell, Katz, and Lynch described, novel though they may be, involve the taxing power of the state, a power that few legislatures are enthusiastic about exercising in these times of shrinking governments. (It's little wonder, then, that the slogan that carried the hotel/motel tax measure in St. Louis—"You never paid it, you never will!"—emphasized the fact that visitors rather than residents would be footing the bill.) That's one of the reasons that Delaware, in its effort to find new money for its major cultural institutions, came up with an entirely new plan.

"... THE DELAWARE MODEL..." "One thing that you never say in Delaware," laughs Peggy Amsterdam, director of the state's Division of the Arts, "is that three letter word that starts with a 't' and ends with an 'x.'" Amsterdam can afford to laugh now, having overseen the successful completion of one of the most remarkable achievements in all of cultural philanthropy—the Delaware Arts Stabilization Fund. "It was in 1987-88," Amsterdam recalls, a time when she was still the program specialist in charge of major institutions. "The TCG [Theatre Communications Group] report had just come out, about arts organizations on the edge, and we had several arts organizations who were on the edge or about to go over the edge, as it were. They were really having a hard time." Problems tend to stand out more in a state like Delaware, notes Amsterdam. "This is a very small state...everybody knows everybody, and our relationship with the arts organizations has been very close. They understand that they need to tell us things, even the bad things, so that we can help them out."

A few of the largest organizations in Delaware had come forward with rather severe economic problems, but their proposed solution—going to the state legislature for individual line items—was likely to create more problems than it solved. So the arts council organized a meeting with the state official to which the agency reports, the Secretary of State, and invited the organizations to make their case for special assistance. "The Secretary of State at the time was a very savvy political person," Amsterdam notes, "and he said, 'You know what? You can all go in

³ Dian Magie, ed., *Resource Development Handbook: Untapped Public Funding for the Arts* (Washington, DC: National Association of Local Arts Agencies, 1995).

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there asking for your individual money, and you...all have influential boards, and some of you are going to win and some will lose, and you're all going to look like idiots doing it. My suggestion is, put your heads together, come up with a solution to the problem, and I'll support you in what you need to do, to get you the money from the legislature that you need."

Ultimately, eight of Delaware's largest arts organizations—the Christina Cultural Arts Center, Delaware Art Museum, Delaware Symphony, Delaware Theatre Company, Grand Opera House, OperaDelaware, Rehoboth Art League, and Wilmington Music School—met to discuss their mutual problems and concerns, as well as their basic differences, and came up with a plan focusing on their capital needs—debt elimination, cash reserves, and facility maintenance and operation funds. These are among the less glamorous items on the fundraiser's wish list, less glamorous than arts programming and special project costs, certainly, but they are no less crucial to the overall health of an arts organization. One question remained, however, concerning the size of an endowment that would produce sufficient annual income to meet the needs of all eight organizations.

"We got them all to say what they really needed," Amsterdam explains, "and then we took a look at the numbers. We had an independent CPA come in.... We looked at everything, and determined that we needed \$21.5 million to draw off enough income to give these organizations what they needed." That's a lot of money anywhere these days, but in a state the size of Delaware, whose population of 700,000 would rank fifteenth in the country if it were a city rather than a state, it's a small fortune. Undaunted, the eight organizations, now formally known as the Arts Consortium of Delaware (ArtCo), renewed their pitch to the Secretary of State, who vowed to get them exactly \$5 million—\$1 million a year for five years, with the balance to be made up in contributed income.

Eventually, that match was made with the help of nearly 100 private- and public-sector contributors, spearheaded by the CEOs of Dupont, Hercules, and MBNA America Bank, and including a \$750,000 Challenge Grant from the Arts Endowment (the first ever in Delaware, and the largest awarded by the arts endowment in 1995). "We created a partnership that connects the social, cultural and economic development of Delaware with its business, public and foundation communities," explains Thomas Graves, co-chairman of the Grand Opera House and chairman of the endowment campaign. "This campaign was successful because each partner understood it had an equal stake in seeing that the \$21.5 million was in place. We believe this statewide partnership and endowment in Delaware is

unique. We could find no model anywhere across the country to follow, so representatives from the arts, business, government and foundation sat down together and designed the Delaware model.”

Key to the success of that model, Amsterdam believes, is the aspect of leveraging, using the challenge concept to its full potential by creating an interlocking public-private structure of long-term commitments. “We asked the donors to make their pledges over five years,” Amsterdam explains, “and to make them contingent on having the state maintain its \$1 million annual contribution, so that the second year, when the state was looking at saying, ‘You don’t really need a million dollars, we’ll give you \$750,000,’ we said, ‘Oh no, you can’t do that, because then Dupont isn’t going to give us their contribution.’ We had letters that said that. We really leveraged the whole thing on everybody else.”

The other key to ArtCo’s success, one that continues to pay dividends today, is the element of cooperation. “Not only did we bring the arts organizations together, and make them appreciate one another’s problems and what they were dealing with,” Amsterdam notes, “but we also brought in the foundation and the corporate community and laid the cards on the table, and they came along with us. I think that’s pretty unique. We had bank presidents going with us to ask for money from other organizations. We had the three corporate leaders call groups of people in for breakfast and say, ‘OK we’ve got a month to raise another million dollars, how are we going to do it?’”

But the Delaware model is more than a fundraising frenzy, one designed to meet its goal at all costs, with no concern for the larger implications of the effort, or for its impact on other arts institutions in the state. “One of the most important things that we did,” according to Amsterdam, “was that we explained to the funders in great detail why this pledge couldn’t take the place of the current operating funding that they were giving to the arts organizations. Because without those funds they’d still have to close their doors. There wouldn’t be any programs.” Additionally, five percent of the ArtCo funds have been set aside for smaller, nonmember organizations that may be experiencing capital needs of their own. “For the first three years,” notes Amsterdam, speaking of these set-aside funds, “we left our money in the bank to grow, because we didn’t really have a lot. And then last year for the first time, we gave out a little over \$20,000. It was great because we had a couple of small organizations in the southern part of the state who were having some real problems, and it really made a difference. This year we’re going to give out \$40,000.”

Beyond the funds themselves, Amsterdam cites as well a nonpecuniary

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benefit of the consortium effort, one that has allowed the participants to work more closely together in a variety of ways. “I never realized,” says Amsterdam, “that an art museum didn’t understand what a symphony did, and what their needs were and what their concerns were and what their challenges were, and vice versa...the symphony didn’t know what a theater company did. It’s very interesting that our community now is very tight....”

“The collaboration is really the interesting thing,” she adds. “Right now, we’re looking at collaborating on developing Web pages, so that we’re all going into one organization for a grant that will create Web pages for all the arts organizations, and one of the local banks is looking at that as a marketing tool. The other thing that we’re looking at is a cultural tourism program...and things like a 1-800 number for the arts...and a shared box-office operation. So there are efficiencies recognized because of that.”

The “Delaware model,” given the size of that state and the generosity of its corporate sector, might not be easy to replicate elsewhere; but its general principal—a reliance on investment income from a fixed endowment rather than a dependence on either public or private support—is worthy of consideration. Another model, more broadly conceived, is Arts Stabilization (formerly the National Arts Stabilization Fund), an organization based in New York that serves communities across the country. Established by the Ford Foundation in 1983 (with initial funding from the Ford, Rockefeller, and Andrew Mellon foundations), Arts Stabilization combines technical assistance, long-range planning, and multi-year matching grants for participating organizations within a given community. Communities served thus far (involving some 700 organizations and nearly \$50 million in support from over 250 corporations, foundations, and government agencies) include Boston, Kansas City, Seattle, New York City, Baltimore, Columbus, and the state of Arizona.

Arts Stabilization programs are designed to help organizations plan now for future needs, breaking the cycle of crisis management and emergency fundraising campaigns that have long afflicted the arts. “Effective management and financial stability,” former Arts Stabilization President Len Vignola has written, “can provide the optimum environment for creative artistic expression.”⁴ Or, as one

⁴ National Arts Stabilization Fund, *Ten Years of Service to Arts Organizations* (New York: National Arts Stabilization Fund, n.d.) 17.

organizational participant in the Arts Stabilization process put it, “Sound finances make our art better.”

“THE DIFFICULT ECONOMIC REALITIES OF ARTISTS’ LIVES...”

Unfortunately, the only real “stabilization program” that exists for most individual artists today is a steady job, and many times even these prove to be more of a distraction to the creative process than an inspiration. “Today, the American artist is an endangered species,” performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña has observed, “and our cultural institutions, especially the most visionary ones, have been dramatically defunded. This has caused a national conversation regarding the survival of creativity. Throughout the country, arts organizers, funders and artists are desperately seeking new models of survival.” These proposed models, Gomez-Peña notes, “range from the common-sensical to the outrageous. Some colleagues truly believe that we can cross over with dignity into mass media and entertainment. And there is a precedent for this: performance artists like Laurie Anderson, Spalding Gray, and Anna Deveare Smith have been successful to different degrees. And some spoken word poets have found a niche on MTV. But these options clearly can only exist for a handful of artists.”

Gomez-Peña, the recipient of a MacArthur fellowship and one of the busiest artists in the country, is part of that fortunate handful, but he expresses concern for the vast majority of artists who are forced to labor in relative obscurity. “At the moment my main worry is the survival of the next generation,” he explains. “The hundreds of thousands of art students and young and emerging artists now facing a world of minimal options, not that different from any third-world country without the resources to produce and promote the arts. If they develop some computer and animation skills, they might get lucky and find a job at Disney, or a computer firm, or a CD-ROM company. But again, just a tiny percentage will get hired, and certainly not to develop their own projects.”⁵

Fellowships and commissions are available, but their coverage across disciplinary and geographical boundaries is spotty at best. Especially since the demise of artist fellowships at the federal level (all but eliminated by Congress in 1996), individual artists face uncertain prospects. One encouraging prospect in this regard,

⁵ Guillermo Gomez-Peña, “Arts Funding Cuts Commentary,” Latino USA broadcast, 22 Mar. 1997.

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however, is an effort that grew out of the ashes of individual artist support at the federal level, of which only literary fellowships remain among the 12 programs that once accepted individual applications.

“The [United States of America] needs urgently to
renew and reorganize its investment in its people....
A country whose prosperity is based on creativity,
flexibility, and openness to change needs to equip
its people accordingly.”

THE ECONOMIST, 1993

In the fall of 1995, the steering committee of the Artists Project Regional Initiative (an NEA program, also funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and other private organizations, that provided support to well over a thousand artists in its ten years of operation before it was terminated) convened a meeting in Chicago with the National Artists Advocacy Group (a recently formed consortium of more than 20 national arts organizations) to develop “coordinated strategies for the field of artist support.”⁶ The themes discussed at this meeting included (1) the overall need for research, to enhance our understanding of both the condition and contributions of artists; (2) the importance of nonfinancial support, including critical recognition, technical assistance, and organizational support; (3) the need to counter societal misconceptions about art and artists; and (4) the need to build effective coalitions, both within the arts community and among the arts and other interest groups.

⁶ NAAG members include the National Association of Artists’ Organizations, the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression, Atlatl, the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures, and the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture. The discussion of this project is based on a report written by Anne Focke, “Financial Support for Artists: A Study of Past and Current Support, with Reflections on the Findings and Recommendations for Future Action,” Dec. 1996.

Additional meetings followed, and veteran arts administrator and consultant Anne Focke was hired to conduct a study of the existing opportunities and possible future programs for the support of individual artists. Although this effort began with the assumption that a “national trust for artists” was needed, one that would offer financial support across all disciplines and in all states, it soon evolved into a more broad-based inquiry into the varied needs of artists. “Future thinking about ways to strengthen artists’ economic circumstances,” Focke reports, “should consider the whole range of ways that they get a living, not just narrowly designed grant programs for artists.”⁷

Like many long-range planning efforts in the arts, this one began in the midst of crisis, with the elimination of most federal funding for individual artists, and with a perceived need to act quickly to find a replacement for these lost funds. But Focke reminds us that “even when the now-discontinued programs were in place and operating energetically, many artists—artists who were contributing to their neighbors and communities, to the theoretical evolution of their art forms, even to their local economies—were struggling financially. The difficult economic realities of artists’ lives are not a recent phenomenon, but rather are deeply rooted. The work we do now should aim for more than simply getting back to where we were in 1990 before the recent controversies and Congressional battles. We need new perspectives to frame our move forward.”⁸

In making that move forward, Focke suggests six areas of concern. Although these are of particular relevance to the needs of individual artists, they should also be of interest to the arts community more generally—individuals, institutions, and their audiences alike:

Information: building an inclusive database of information about programs of financial support for artists.

Member services: collaborating to make available for artists a range of services and benefits.

Advocacy: engaging in broad-reaching advocacy based on understanding artists as citizens, and aimed at improving economic conditions.

Communication: inspiring each other; communicating and exchanging ideas; establishing loose ties among our initiatives.

⁷ Focke “Financial Support” 4.

⁸ Focke “Financial Support” 5.

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Money: creating new and strengthening existing financial mechanisms and sources.

Research and publishing: studying, publishing, and thinking about artists/culture and economics, and the way forces in each overlap.

However work in these several areas proceeds, Focke offers sound advice for anyone surveying the cultural landscape, regardless of whether one's primary concern is institutional or individual, public or private, or the entire nonprofit arts infrastructure itself: "I strongly suggest that we find an energy that does not rely on a sense of crisis. Running on the fuel of one crisis after another is exhausting, seems likely to foster shallow argument, and probably can't be sustained in any case. We need to base our efforts on a deeper energy with longer lasting momentum. The big things won't change quickly."⁹

"...MAYBE THERE IS A DIFFERENT WAY THAT WE CAN DO BUSINESS..."

The "big things" probably won't change at all, in fact, unless the arts community can mount more of a united campaign, one that reaches beyond the boundaries of the arts themselves into other areas of American life. The call for collaboration is nothing new, of course. Funders have been demanding it for years, arts consultants prescribe it like aspirin ("take two joint ventures and call me in the morning"), and service organizations have hosted conferences based on this theme for decades.

That advice is no less true for having been repeated so often, however, and especially as these coalition-building efforts serve to widen the circle of the non-profit culture, bringing in both new voices and new sources of support, the strategy is a sound one. It's one that funders are finding increasingly attractive, certainly, as Jorge Jackson, vice president of public affairs of GTE California, made clear at the Los Angeles forum. "From our perspective," Jackson explained, "we would rather [support] collaborative efforts where people of different backgrounds in the arts come together in the interest of a community project or a school project. We like to see the interactivity. We find that when we fund programs that are clearly designated for one segment of society, that many times we build walls rather than bridges and so...what is really working for us with our limited resources are those partnership, those collaborative efforts..."

⁹ Focke "Financial Support" 45.

Deena Epstein, program officer with the George Gund Foundation, agreed. Speaking at the American Canvas forum in Columbus, Epstein explained that “what we have tried to do is to work with organizations to get them to think more collaboratively, to think smarter, to work faster and better, if you will.” She cited the example of a school of the arts in a Cleveland neighborhood, where private music lessons were generally beyond the means of most families. Through an arrangement with a near-by music conservatory, which provided its students as teachers, and with the local community college, which offered classroom space on Saturday mornings, the community now has a thriving program of private music lessons. Some of its graduates, in fact, are now entering the community college as music majors, and from there they will be able to enter the conservatory to complete their studies. “Those are the kinds of things that [can be done] with limited dollars,” Epstein observed. “You have to begin to think smarter, to think more collaboratively, to kind of move out of the box, beyond what was your traditional way of doing business, to thinking maybe there is a different way that we can do business and look for new partners.”

In the public sector, Lakin Ray Cook, executive director of the West Virginia Commission on the Arts, spoke at the Columbus forum of a collaboration that has found new partners across another kind of border entirely. “One of the most unique partnerships developed by the commission,” Cook explained, “began in 1995 in partnership with the Ohio Arts Council. Ohio and West Virginia share a border on the Ohio River from Gallipolis, Ohio, to Weirton, West Virginia. Both state agencies saw the need to assist communities along the river in the development of their cultural heritage. This nine-county area in Ohio and eleven-county area in West Virginia is partially a mix of rural and recovering ‘rust-belt’ or heavy chemical plant and manufacturing communities. They all share the influence of the river in their heritage.”

Following a series of planning meetings, the staffs of the two arts councils came up with the Ohio River Border Initiative (ORBI), supported by private, state, and federal sources, as a means of both serving the cultural needs of these communities and creating a “bridge” across the river between them. “The ORBI project is working to bring together arts and nonarts groups to define the ORBI area,” Cook explains, “...geographically, culturally, and on the basis of desired outcome.” The first two years of pilot grants produced a number of examples of that outcome:

“Talking Across the Lines”—a project of oral history, music, and stories of Bridgeport, OH, Wheeling, WV, and Steubenville, OH.

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River Valley Children's Choir—a collaborative project involving St. Marys, WV, and Washington County, OH.

A local river heritage exhibition—a collaboration among the Creel Foundation of St. Marys, WV, and the Washington County and Marietta, OH, area.

A community band and theater program—a joint project of the Riverbend Arts Council, Middleport, OH, and Wood County, WV.

African-American Jubilee Festival—celebrating the heritage of Wheeling, WV, and Belmont and Martin's Ferry, OH.

Within the private sector, Ed Waterstreet, artistic director of the Deaf West Theatre Company, described at the Los Angeles forum a number of co-productions that his company has undertaken this past season, including one with the Sacramento Theatre Company, several hundred miles to the north. "The benefits are great," according to Waterstreet, "both artistically as well as from a marketing standpoint. Ultimately, 'collaboration and consolidation' will have a strengthening effect on each participating organization. As we learn from one another, we will be better equipped to fulfill our roles in the communities we serve."

In the final analysis, though, the point of collaboration within the non-profit cultural sector is more than a matter of increased efficiency, economies of scale, or even the improved community service to which Waterstreet refers. Ultimately, the strength-in-numbers approach has more to do with developing the kind of critical mass that can withstand, however imperfectly, the countervailing forces of commercial culture that threaten to overwhelm all alternatives. Theatre Communication Group's John Sullivan declares:

What we are seeing is the creation of a global market in which capital is unrestrained, and that has led to this remarkable speed-up of our lives. I believe there are things within that economic environment which one can judge healthy from an economic standpoint, but I think it has also been quite devastating on the issues of community. And so therefore I believe that a healthy not-for-profit sector is an essential antidote to the free market. I think they must go hand in hand. I think the free market itself will over the long term be far healthier if it recognizes the need for that balance. We need enclaves where ideas are not driven by capital, we need not-for-profit enclaves where ideas emerge for other purposes than the advancement of capital.



Participants of all ages, shapes and sizes come together in an impromptu dance during a Liz Lerhman Dance Exchange residency at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts in Eugene, Oregon.

Those kinds of nonprofit enclaves, be they literary publishers or composers collectives or community cultural centers, need more than financial support (although they certainly need that, too). They also need strong advocates, in both the public and private sectors, precisely at a time when the public-interest perspective is least popular. “It’s tough territory,” Sullivan concedes, “because we don’t have the language to talk about these things that doesn’t put us in a sort of ‘leftist’ corner.... We have to find language that we can use in speaking to a broader audience about these issues. And that’s the challenge.”

“...A SIMPLE MESSAGE ABOUT CREATIVITY...”

The arts community, Ohio Arts Council Executive Director Wayne Lawson urged at the Columbus forum, must find a way to simplify and clarify its message, if it hopes to compete with the simple, straightforward message of those opposed to government support of the arts. Somehow the competing interests of institution

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and individual, of private freedoms and public responsibilities, of cultural ideals and legislative realities, must all be reconciled, according to Lawson, in the process of arriving at a positive message that can counter the attacks. “Let us define it,” declared Lawson, “and put it on that table where we are, so we can win the same kind of battle that they are winning.”

Speaking in Los Angeles, meanwhile, Aaron Paley of Community Arts Resources cautioned against adopting an adversarial stance, or one that assumes that neither the public nor their political leaders have any understanding of how important the arts really are. A more politically astute approach, Paley believed, would be an arts advocacy that demonstrates the many contributions that artists can make to their communities. For Los Angeles arts writer and consultant Romalyn Tilghman, finally, the arts need a simpler, more persuasive message that will attract a much larger following, a crusade similar in size and commitment to that of the conservation movement. “Everybody [who] has ever seen a tree,” Tilghman observed, “feel[s] like they’re behind conservation, that that’s their cause.... [We need to] get a message which is truly simple.... I think that the message we have to take out to the American public is a simple message about creativity and about the importance [of art] in our lives, and I think people do know it in their hearts.”

Tilghman’s invocation of environmentalist principals is not a new one. It has been strongly suggested, by Chairman Jane Alexander and others, that what the country needs is a new citizens movement, one that will do for the cultural environment what the “green revolution” did for the natural environment. At a recent symposium in Washington on arts and business, for example, Robert L. Johnson, chairman and CEO of Black Entertainment Television, suggested that the arts community needed its own *Silent Spring*, a reference to Rachel Carson’s enormously influential 1962 exposé of the looming ecological disasters that awaited the country if it did not change its ways, and which galvanized a generation of Americans in the process.¹⁰ The roots of the environmental movement in this country, as Alexander has pointed out, extend back at least a hundred years (John Muir organized the Sierra Club in 1892, for example, and his beloved Yosemite Valley had become a state park 28 years before that), but as a model for the arts, the environmental legacy is a complex one.

¹⁰ Johnson participated in “The Arts Make America Rich,” a panel discussion on 11 Mar. 1997 at the Library of Congress sponsored by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, Inc., as a part of Arts Advocacy Week.

As a consciousness-raising enterprise, certainly, no one can deny the environmental movement's impact on both popular and political thought. In 1965, only 17 percent of Americans regarded the "reduction of air and water pollution" to be a national priority, according to a Gallup Poll that year; just five years later, that figure had more than tripled to 53 percent, and by the 1990s, well over 80 percent of Americans could identify themselves as "environmentalists." Rarely has a social movement taken hold of the nation's imagination so thoroughly and so swiftly. Nor have the legislative triumphs of the movement (including the Clean Air Act of 1963, the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Water Quality and Solid Waste Disposal Acts of 1965, and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969) been trivial. And yet any number of scientific assessments of the environment reveal how little progress we've made in realizing the goals of those acts: in reversing the trend of environmental degradation, in restoring air, water, and soil to safe conditions, in developing renewable energy systems, in implementing sustainable-yield forestry.

As a model for arts advocacy, moreover, the environmental movement raises some troubling questions—concerning the depth of popular commitment, the strength and ferocity of the opposition, and the danger of placing too much emphasis on Washington—questions that should be all-too-familiar to an arts community that has run aground on these identical issues in recent years. In his thumbnail sketch of the history of environmentalism, in fact, Mark Dowie has uncovered some of the very same stress points that threaten to undermine the support structure for the arts in this country. Tracing the movement back to the "remnants of an organized conservation initiative that began a hundred years ago with great promise," and which "became the organizational infrastructure of a movement that broadened both its definition of environment and its agenda," Dowie describes a movement that is far older than organized arts advocacy. And yet both environmentalism and the nonprofit arts have experienced similar growth patterns over the past three decades. Following the initial Earth Day in 1970, Dowie observes, the movement "grew exponentially in numbers of followers, energy, skill, and financial resources. By Earth Day 1990 the American environmental movement had become a vast, incredibly wealthy complex of organizations dominated by a dozen or so large national groups centered, if not headquartered, in Washington, D.C. Together, at times in chorus, the 'nationals' (as they came to be called) crafted an agenda and pursued a strategy based on the civil authority and good faith of the federal government."

Dowie faults that top-heavy organizational arrangement and its preoccupation with Washington—"dangerously courting irrelevance," he believes—as the pri-

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mary reason for environmentalism's indifferent record in recent years. "The nation-als...made two other, near-fatal blunders," Dowie declares: "one was to alienate and undermine the grassroots of their own movement; the other was to misread and underestimate the fury of their antagonists."¹¹ Both issues—the absence of grass-roots support for the arts, and the dogged persistence of the opposition—were raised at the American Canvas forums. If there were no immediate solutions in sight, the stage was set for a more general re-evaluation of the place of the arts in American life.

"...THE CRUCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARTS..."

Sherri Geldin, director of the Wexner Art Center, began that process at the Columbus forum:

Over the last decade or so arts institutions have increasingly been called upon to address and fulfill societal functions that may previously have been considered somewhat tangential to their primary purpose. Throughout the country and spanning all creative disciplines, one can cite countless examples of community collaboration and partnership in which the arts have been the principal catalyst. Arts institutions have become necessarily adept at engaging civic, cultural, educational, social service and business partners in a host of mutually beneficial endeavors. Obviously, this represents a healthy phenomenon on many levels, particularly with respect to introducing new and expanded audiences to the arts—sometimes through unexpected channels. It does seem ironic, however, that as we ever more effectively demonstrate our ability to forge synergistic links with diverse and multiple constituencies, often adding considerably to our budgetary commitments, both public and private support for arts institutions is on the decline.

Geldin's sense of irony is understandable, reflecting a growing concern among those in the arts that as the twentieth century draws to a close, the cultural

¹¹ Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995) xiii.

community finds itself at the mercy of a number of forces beyond its control:

a growing distrust of government programs and a preoccupation with eliminating the federal deficit.

a narrowed focus on what is perceived to be “essential” issues—including crime, drugs, the economy, education—in which the arts, if they are mentioned at all, are often viewed as peripheral.

Mounting social problems that demand a greater share of both public and private resources, and which have been exacerbated in recent years by the increasingly skewed distribution of wealth in this country.

None of these precludes the kind of expanded role for the arts in social, economic, and educational affairs that were repeatedly identified by American Canvas participants as crucial to the future health of the arts in this country. Nor was Geldin alone, however, in issuing the warning that we must not lose sight of the essence of the arts in our efforts to meld them into so many other activities. Or, as sculptor Audrey Flack insisted at the Rock Hill forum, we must not forget that the real value of culture is neither in its contribution to economic development nor its impact on tourism, but is rather the sheer magic of the creative process itself, a power that can affect all of us. That’s the “spiritual value” of the arts, architect Ray Huff agreed, which should not be overlooked.

“Perhaps, then, it’s time to reexamine and even reposition our claim on the public weal,” Geldin concluded:

It remains true that the arts can—and do—help educate the young, bolster business and economic growth, attract tourism, provide a virtually endless image bank for media and advertising, fuel social relationships, and promote civic pride. However, it seems vitally important that we equally affirm the essential and intrinsic value of the arts in their own right as the lasting creative legacy of any society and culture. As we seek to build a stronger infrastructure for the arts and culture in this country, we must do more than enumerate and elaborate on all the ways in which the arts promote community welfare and understanding. We (and our elected and appointed public officials from the highest office down) must find ways to proclaim and underscore the crucial significance of the arts as a fundamental means of creative expression that speaks to our senses, our intellect and our emotions in a way no other language can.

Seeking New Solutions

Just as we cannot expect the nation's educational, environmental, and social challenges to be solved by teachers, naturalists, and social workers acting on their own, nor can our artistic culture reach its full potential solely on the strength of artists and arts organizations alone. The commitment of many others is also required to hand down undiminished to those who come after us, as was handed down by those who went before, the *artistic* wealth and beauty which is ours.