

THE CHALLENGE TO ACT

The “American Canvas,” Ned Rifkin, director of the High Museum in Atlanta, pointed out at the final session in Washington, DC, conjures up a number of images. First, it’s the empty expanse on which the painter plies his trade. In its efforts to solicit opinions from a variety of representatives, American *canvass* comes to mind, too. But Rifkin suggested yet another meaning, speaking of the canvas that’s a place of battle, the ring in which wrestlers meet to grapple with one another. Rifkin’s more combative version of the canvas in American Canvas is an apt one. The arts community, long accustomed to crises of one sort or another, is battling back. That its problems are largely economic, chronic, and often beyond the capacity of this beleaguered sector to solve all by itself, however, is reflected in the regularity with which doomsday pronouncements have appeared in the arts press over the years, from the first formal economics-of-the-arts studies of the 1960s—identifying the perennial “income gap” that would forever haunt the field—through the regular red-ink updates that have appeared virtually every year thereafter.

If conditions in the nonprofit arts are to improve materially, however, something more than collaborative efforts, entrepreneurial strategies, and value-added excursions into the areas of social service, education, and civic affairs will be needed. A measure of responsibility must also be borne by those beyond the arts community itself. A variety of sectors—the civic, corporate, philanthropic, reli-

CALLS TO ACTION. *The following Calls to Action, which were endorsed by the full American Canvas committee on 30 January 1997, were written by the American Canvas Steering Committee as a result of the discussions that took place in the several regional forums.*

C O L U M B U S . *The American Canvas calls on civic and community leaders to join together in recognizing America's place among the great cultures of the world through artistic and cultural celebration at the turn of the century.*

L O S A N G E L E S . *The American Canvas calls on all artists and arts organizations nationwide (commercial, non-profit and volunteer) to work together, share resources, and broaden citizen exposure to the arts in order to strengthen, revitalize and promote communities.*

S A L T L A K E C I T Y . *The American Canvas calls on educators, parents and artists to work together to ensure that the arts are an integral part of their education system by recognizing the unique role of the arts as a resource for engaging students and developing skills necessary to compete in the information age that will expand in the 21st century.*

R O C K H I L L / C H A R L O T T E . *The American Canvas calls on business, civic and arts leaders to work collaboratively in designing community development plans which recognize the competitive and cultural advantages that the arts bring to the economic, social, and imaginative life of communities and their citizens.*

S A N A N T O N I O . *The American Canvas calls on all departments of govern-*

ment (federal, state and local) to develop partnerships within government and with the private and non-profit sectors that enhance the quality of the lives of all Americans by integrating arts and cultural opportunities into their decision-making and services.

M I A M I . *The American Canvas calls on government, the private sector and arts organizations to support and develop broad-reaching policy and services that ensure greater access to the arts and cultural heritage for all Americans.*

GENERAL ACTIONS.

1. *The American Canvas calls on artists, arts organizations, civic, business and religious leaders to recognize the unique opportunities that the arts provide America's communities and take responsibility for making the arts part of developing solutions in response to community needs.*
2. *The American Canvas calls on artists and arts organizations, elected officials, business, civic, and religious leaders to expand the description of the arts to be more inclusive of the broad array of cultural activities that the American public experiences and appreciates.*
3. *The American Canvas calls on individuals who appreciate the importance of the arts to mobilize at the local, state, regional and national levels to express the value of the arts to society and to ensure an arts legacy for future generations.*
4. *The American Canvas calls on the American public and government leaders to support the vital part of government in ensuring that the arts play an increasing role in the lives and education of our citizens and the strengthening of America's communities.*

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gious, and educational, for example—need to examine their own practices as they relate to the state of American culture. If we are to create a movement, as Jane Alexander suggests, that emulates the conservation movement that began a century ago, then the circle of those who care about art must expand.

A good beginning would be to undertake a thorough and honest assessment of the arts, to answer the question raised at the start of this report: How do we measure the health of American art? Just as environmental impact studies trace the effects of our actions on the natural surroundings, so might *cultural* impact studies assess the state of the aesthetic environment. If, indeed, the nation is as concerned about the moral climate and the national spirit as it claims to be, should not the condition of American culture be factored into larger discussions of social, economic, and educational policy?

Political leaders at all levels of government, along with the electronic and print media, businesses, foundations, the clergy, and educators might want to consider, even briefly, how they can contribute to improving the climate for the arts in this country. The shoe has long been on the other foot, certainly, with artists and arts organizations being pressed into service in a broad range of social and educational ventures. Far less often have nonarts groups been called upon to examine their commitment to American culture.

The American Canvas forums ended with the creation of Calls to Action (see sidebar), broad in scope and intent, and many of the participants of American Canvas have answered those calls (see the American Canvas section of the Arts Endowment's website, arts.endow.gov). The challenges that follow—to civic and political leaders, representatives of the mass media, the entertainment industry, the corporate sector, private funders, parents, individual citizens, and communities—are a further spur to action. An arts community that fails to look critically at the social, political, and economic structures in which it operates is one that fails to perform one of its primary functions. “The very essence of the arts is to hold the mirror up to nature,” Jane Alexander observed at her confirmation hearing in 1993; “the arts reflect the diversity and variety of human experience.”

THE CIVIC SECTOR. The annals of American democracy are replete with attacks on the arts and culture that later seem regrettable or embarrassing (and often both), from the prohibition of theater in Puritan New England, to the outlawing of the drum in parts of the slave-holding South, to attacks on allegedly

subversive artists as part of the Red Scare. Episodes such as these are far from the proudest moments in American history, and most would agree now that they represent extreme over-reaction on the part of government officials. No one expects any kind of cease-fire in the so-called culture wars, so what can be done to improve the place of the arts in the overall context of civic life.

At the state and local levels, elected and appointed officials might give more consideration to incorporating the arts in the discharge of their duties. The same kind of “percent-for-art” provision that has long applied to capital construction projects in the public sector might be implemented more broadly—not as a percentage of the budget for programs, however, but rather as a guaranteed place holder for aesthetic considerations, including testimony from suitable representatives of the cultural sector, in the planning and implementation of civic activities such as health care, education, and public safety, for example.

Sculptor Mary Ann Mears suggested at the American Canvas forum in Charlotte, this purpose can be served in the old-fashioned way, with the arts community earning recognition on its own. “There have been efforts at the federal level in the past,” Mears recalled. “At one time there was a structure to review pending legislation for arts opportunities which led to highway and Amtrak public art projects, the inclusion of the arts in CETA, USIA arts programs through the State Department, and increased attention to design aesthetics in government building....”

Artists and administrators should insist on their place at the table of civic discourse and government. Rather than complain amongst ourselves about government, we should accept our responsibility and right to engage—to vote, organize, and communicate, to inform, educate and involve government at all levels about the importance of the arts in the daily lives of the citizenry and to demonstrate in concrete ways how the arts impact upon every aspect of civic life. Some artists and administrators may well blanch and say such activity distracts from the making and presentation of art, and it does. But if we wish to improve the material conditions for the arts in the civic arena, there is no choice but to become more involved citizens of our communities, our states, and our nation.

THE MASS MEDIA. “When television is bad,” the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission concluded in 1961, “nothing is worse.” Three-and-a-half decades later, the “vast wasteland” that Newton Minow so justifiably lament-

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ed has not realized its potential to be—at least at the margins—more substantive.¹ Given the round-the-clock programming, might there not be opportunities for quality for the “family hour,” educational programs more in compliance with the Children’s Television Act, and more than the agreed-upon mere three hours of educational programming every week?

Defenders of the medium will explain that the television industry only gives people what they want. Admittedly, on a strictly quantitative level, it’s difficult to argue with a system that captures the attention of the average household for nearly eight hours every day, and which generates over \$36 billion in annual advertising revenues. Only when we’re reminded that the nation’s airwaves belong to the public, and that there are public-service obligations attached to broadcast station licenses does it become clear that we can demand better.

A useful, if not very encouraging, index of the four major networks’ commitment to public service was revealed recently in a survey of prime-time broadcasting, more than one-fifth of which (12.52 minutes of every hour) is now given over to advertising. The bulk of this time is devoted to paid advertising (8.24 minutes per hour on average), and another sizable chunk (4.19 minutes per hour) go to promotions of the networks’ own offerings. Unpaid public service announcements amounted to a fleeting 5.28 *seconds* per hour—a 57 percent decrease over the past two years. A similar pattern, according to the American Association of Advertising Agencies and the Association of National Advertisers, is apparent at the leading cable television networks as well. Broadcasters, of course, are not required to offer free time for public service announcements; they do so as part of their promise to the FCC, and by extension to the American public, to act in the public interest in return for their licenses to use the nation’s airwaves.² The rewards broadcasters reap from the use of those airwaves are not inconsiderable. Collectively, the four major networks took in \$6.64 billion in prime-time advertising revenues alone last year.³ Even as the time devoted to public service announcements shrinks, broadcasters

¹ “I invite you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air,” Minow told the National Association of Broadcasters in May 1961, “...and keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland.” Val Adams, “F.C.C. Head Bids TV Men Reform ‘Vast Wasteland,’” *New York Times* (10 May 1961): 1, 91.

² Paul Farhi, “Time for a Public Service Renouncement,” *Washington Post* (12 Mar. 1997): C10.

³ Network advertising figures come from *The Meyer Report*, an advertising industry newsletter, as reported by media columnist Bill Carter in the *New York Times* 31 Mar. 1997: D7.



PHOTO BY KEN HOWARD

The cast of "Peter Grimes" is up in arms at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis.

have another opportunity to fulfill their public-interest obligations, thanks to the valuable spectrum they have been given at absolutely no charge—an extra channel for each station—to make the transition to digital broadcasting. With twice as much spectrum “real-estate” at their disposal during the transition period, the nation’s broadcasters have a perfect opportunity to supplement their standard, ad-driven fare with the kind of civic, educational, and cultural programming that is so conspicuously absent today.

Changes on television will only occur through the insistence of the community, and here again, artists and administrators have a duty. Knowing our rights concerning the use of the public airwaves is crucial. As consumers and members of the civic community, artists and administrators can organize and make the media listen to their claims, and they will be heard, if the voice is strong and loud.

THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY. On the surface, at least, one cannot imagine a more natural philanthropic fit: the multibillion-dollar entertainment industry, comprising Hollywood film and television, live and recorded popular music, and mass-market publishing, offering a small fraction of its annual income

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to the nonprofit cultural sector, which provides so much raw material—in artistic talent, techniques, and ideas—to the commercial sector. Sadly, that match has not been made. While individuals have risen to the cause, the entertainment industry *as a whole* has not shared its wealth with its less fortunate, nonprofit brethren.

Viewed from another perspective, this lost philanthropic opportunity appears all the more regrettable. The average cost for a single Hollywood movie last year represents 75 percent of the entire grant-making budget of the National Endowment for the Arts. Promotion and advertising costs alone for that average single movie amounted to more money than all but two states devoted to the arts last year.

Or imagine if that ticket for a seat in a movie theater included the same 10 percent excise tax that a ticket for a seat on an airplane now includes: the revenues thus derived would pay for the entire NEA budget. *And* that of the National Endowment for the Humanities. *And* for all of the 56 state arts agencies. With enough money left over for two of those average movies at \$59.7 million apiece. Such a tax on popular culture is an extreme long shot, needless to say, but the entertainment industry, which spent \$6.8 million in PAC and soft-money contributions to federal candidates last year, can well afford to do more than it does on behalf of the nonprofit arts.⁴

Wishing will not make it so. Here individual artists and administrators have a much more difficult case of persuasion. How do we best tap into what seems to be a natural philanthropic relationship between the entertainment and nonprofit arts sectors? Access to the powers behind movies, records, CDs and the like is as limited as access to any sector of business, and in today's marketing-driven ecology of giving, it is risky to ask for donations without offering something in return. Artists and administrators will have to search for ways to meet the entertainment industry halfway—to demonstrate the attractiveness of their creative work and how it can add depth and richness to the content of commercial entertainment, how the talent pool of actors, writers, designers, and other artists is nurtured in our regional theaters, literary magazines, and other small organizations, and that public funders—like the NEA and the state arts agencies—are the “seed money” for this network, if not the major “talent scouts.”

⁴ Based on Federal Election Commission data compiled and presented by the Center for Responsive Politics in its World Wide Web site (www.crp.org/low/cashin.html).

PRIVATE FUNDERS . One of the less amusing ironies of the support of the arts in the United States is the decidedly inverse relationship between the amount of money expended by public and private patrons (in which the private sources outspend their public counterparts by a ten-to-one ratio), and the amount of scrutiny each sector receives for their efforts. A federal grant to a performance artist appearing as part of a major arts presenter's season of activities and calculated to cost some \$150 in taxpayer funds generates several pages of discussion in the *Congressional Record*, while a \$10 million grant for auditorium renovations, awarded to a midwestern symphony by a private foundation, escapes notice almost entirely.⁵

Pointing out this irony is *not* to wish on the private sector the kind of inquisition and guilt-by-association that public funders have had to endure, but only to put the matter in a slightly clearer perspective. For there's a public aspect to the private funds, too, exempt as they are from taxes, subject only to modest reporting requirements. Nor is this to suggest that corporate and foundation support of the arts, amounting to well over a billion dollars annually, has been haphazard. What it has been, however, is uncoordinated, based on a time-honored system of laissez-faire philanthropy that at times, appears to be more oligarchic than democratic:

Twenty-five foundations (or about 0.07 percent of the total in the country) provide some 40 percent of all arts funding.

Fifty arts organizations (or about one percent of all arts grantees) receive 32 percent of all arts funding.

Five states accounted for 65 percent of all arts dollars awarded.

Four states and the District of Columbia accounted for 55 percent of all arts dollars received.

Nearly one-third of all arts philanthropy in 1992 (up from one-fifth in 1989) was parceled out in grants of \$1 million or more, which went to fewer than 100 arts organizations.⁶

Highlighting figures such as these should not be construed as an indictment of the philanthropic community. Indeed, they reflect, to a greater or lesser

⁵ *Congressional Record*, 103rd Cong., 2nd Sess. (1994): H4891- .

⁶ Nathan Weber and Loren Renz, *Arts Funding: A Report on Foundation and Corporate Trends* (New York: The Foundation Center, 1993) 11-13; Loren Renz, *Arts Funding Revisited: An Update on Foundation Trends in the 1990s* (New York: The Foundation Center, 1995) 6-12.

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degree, the admittedly skewed nature of the nonprofit culture itself, with a comparatively small number of large flagship institutions, located in a handful of cities, that dominate their fields, artistically as well as financially. The point in raising these figures is to challenge private funders to adopt, where appropriate, a more balanced, coordinated, systematic approach to the funding of culture.

Consortium efforts such as Grantmakers in the Arts (which commissioned the studies that produced the figures cited above) represent, albeit in a more theoretical than practical level, the kind of coordinated approach that might one day change private philanthropy in this country into a more organized effort, capable of addressing national problems and local needs alike, by sharing information, pooling resources, and admitting more public discussion.

Until that happens, it is difficult to disagree with the conclusion drawn by a recent study of arts stabilization efforts, one of the more promising developments in private-sector arts funding in recent years. The study points out:

*Despite the positive outcomes of many stabilization efforts and the advances in thinking around stabilization programs, pressing questions confront the field. Grantmakers have not examined these questions in a coherent way. The Arts Stabilization study found a largely ad hoc approach to the design, implementation, and evaluation of individual grantmakers' stabilization programs. In addition to a lack of communication at the policy level, the study revealed that consultants providing stabilization-related services have few opportunities to share experiences, and the intended recipients of assistance rarely are involved in program design or evaluation.*⁷

While the public side of the arts-support structure has organized itself to a fare-thee-well—some would say to a fault—with enough associations, assemblies, and confederations to fill a large hotel, private funders often appear more competitive than cooperative. Collaborative ventures with other funders are the exception rather than the rule. In these respects, then, the private sector arts supporters are

⁷ Strategic Grantmaker Services, “Rethinking Stabilization: Strengthening Arts Organizations During Times of Change,” discussion draft, May 1995.

rather like the veteran handicappers at the race track, who tend to share information only after the race has been run. In the cultural context, we're all losers in this regard, not the least those arts organizations who must devote inordinate amounts of resources to a development staff forced to enter the "philanthropy sweepstakes" every year.

CORPORATE SECTOR. The artist and the captain of industry have long been uneasy allies, the latter, even in his most generous acts of patronage, often the subject of suspicion. It's a tribute to such organizations as the Business Committee for the Arts and the Arts and Business Council that the ties between the two worlds of commerce and culture are as strong as they are, with a degree of kinship and mutual support (for the arts contribute mightily to the design and marketing of all manner of goods and services) that is unmatched anywhere else in the world.

And yet the doubts persist. After the American Canvas forum in Charlotte, Donna Porterfield, managing director of Appalshop's Roadside Theater in Whitesburg, Kentucky, described Appalshop's documentary film and theater residency activities in rural Appalachia, efforts designed to overcome some of the social, economic, and environmental problems of a region that was deemed in a recent federal study to be "beyond distress," threatening to fall off the scale of traditional economic measurements. With unemployment running as high as 70 percent in some parts of Appalachia, with a 40 percent drop-out rate among high school students and others, and an adult literacy rate that reaches only around 50 percent, this is hardly the demographic profile that is conducive to the nonprofit arts, but Appalshop has been flourishing for over two decades. "Appalshop makes documentary film and television, theater, radio, and audio recording," Porterfield explained, "on the premise that mountain communities can assume a larger measure of control over their own fate if they can gain control over the definition of their culture and the tools of cultural transmission."

Chief among the projects that Appalshop undertakes are those that highlight the stories of Appalachia: the families on Coon Branch Mountain in West Virginia who lobbied successfully for a paved road so a school bus could finally serve their community; the widow in Ary, Kentucky, who launched a state-wide campaign to end illegal strip mining; or the senior citizens of Clintwood, Virginia, who used a residency by the Roadside Theater as a means of producing storytelling and musical events with the local high school. "These projects were funded by a combination of federal, state, private foundation, and earned income from ticket sales," Porterfield writes.

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Although it has been aggressively sought, corporate funding has not been a significant part of Appalshop's funding equation. Corporations prefer to fund activities in their business locations. Because their driving motivation is profit, they also view giving as a kind of advertising—they want to see a monetary return on their investment...

At the American Canvas meeting in Charlotte, I heard much talk about the wonderful projects American corporations are funding in cities across the south—as well they should. I did not hear one reference to corporate funded projects in rural areas or inner cities. Is the message that the rural and the poor have no cultural traditions worthy of support? Or is the message that only art that produces significant monetary profit for the corporate community is worthy of support?

The challenge to American business, then, is to overcome, with at least a small portion of their charitable contributions, the market imperatives that generally limit such giving to the fields and areas that make the most 'business sense.' Ideally, a consortium approach that would bring the resources of several companies to bear on a particular art form or region might be attempted.

"So often people have described the moment of death as the final breath. We are not at metaphor's funeral. Indeed, we have had the wind knocked out of us, but we are still breathing, we are in the state of inspiration."

ANNA DEVEARE SMITH

Increasingly, companies are shifting their charitable practices away from tax-deductible company-giving accounts to marketing and advertising budgets. In light of the many contributions, direct and indirect, that the arts have made to modern advertising—in sound and imagery, design and animation—that field might be the ideal place to begin building a fund for American creativity that could

serve the nonprofit arts well. Even if only top 100 companies devoted only one-tenth of one percent of their advertising expenditures to this purpose, some \$30 million annually would be available to our artists and arts organizations, not an insignificant amount in these times of diminished resources.

PARENTS . Perhaps the clearest indication of the enormously difficult task confronting parents today can be found in the phrase “at-risk youth.” An awkward phrase at best, eventually rejected by child-welfare professionals as needlessly pejorative, it now seems simply redundant. *All* children are “at risk” in one way or another, and given the myriad educational, social, psychological, and nutritional challenges that parents must face every day, it’s little wonder that something as seemingly arcane as their curatorial responsibilities are not often acknowledged.

Yet parents play a key role in introducing their children to our culture, both implicitly, in the example they set with their own viewing and listening habits, their own cultural pursuits, and intentionally, as they share the songs and stories that are a fundamental part of childhood, as they introduce children to the media, and, ideally, as they expose their children to live performances and exhibitions. For better or worse, television will provide much of the imagery of childhood, with computers playing an increasingly prominent role in that regard, and the shortcomings of these media, both real and imagined, have been well chronicled.

In addition to playing a more active role in both monitoring and sharing their children’s exposure to the electronic media, parents can also work to ensure that the arts are included in their children’s schools. Vartan Gregorian, the new president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, in a recent article in *Parade* magazine, “10 Things You Can Do To Make Our Schools Better,” included restoring the arts as a major element in education as one of the things parents should do, “We’ve made a tremendous mistake in diminishing or eliminating art, music and dance as fluff or frills,” Gregorian maintains. “The arts, like sports, play a vital role in bringing students together and promoting teamwork. Athletics provide stability and a way to release energy. The arts allow children to develop creativity and imagination.... It’s almost impossible to overemphasize the significance of the creative arts in education. Make sure that your own school district recognizes this.”⁸

⁸ Vartan Gregorian, “10 Things You Can Do To Make Our Schools Better,” *Parade Magazine* (23 mar. 1997): 6.

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Many parents, understandably, unsure of their own knowledge of the arts, won't know how best to proceed in providing their children with a richer, more complete aesthetic environment. The public library is probably the best place to start, where a librarian can recommend reading and other material that can expand the cultural horizons of parent and child alike, while a local arts council will have a list of family arts programs in the area. The NEA, finally, recently published *imagine! Introducing Your Child to the Arts*, a collection of essays that offer advice to parents seeking to enhance their child's experience in the arts in a number of areas, from dance, theater, music, and the visual arts to the media arts, literature, folk arts, and architecture. "Parents, teachers, schools and communities invest in the future when they invest in arts education at home and in the classroom," Chairman Alexander observes in the introduction to *imagine!*

Encouraging free imagination and discovery through the arts prepares our children for the challenges of the next century. When we teach a child to draw, we teach him how to see. When we teach a child to play a musical instrument, we teach her how to listen. When we teach a child how to dance, we teach him how to move through life with grace. When we teach a child to read or write, we teach her how to think. When we nurture imagination, we create a better world, one child at a time.⁹

INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES . The American Canvas forums, which brought together leaders from the arts, education, business, government, consumer organizations, civic associations, religious groups, and foundations, were designed both to examine the various roles that the arts play in community life, as well as to highlight some of the innovative ways that communities have developed in recent years to nurture and sustain their artists and arts organizations. Those strategies are outlined on the Arts Endowment's Web site at <http://arts.endow.gov> in the American Canvas section. More than just another professional arts conference, then, the American Canvas forums raised issues that affect all Americans, issues directly tied to the future of our society.

⁹ National Endowment for the Arts, *imagine! Introducing Your Child to the Arts* (Washington, DC: 1997) 11-12.

One basic premise of American Canvas concerned the need for a broad arts advocacy movement, similar to the movement that signaled a new concern for our natural resources at the turn of the last century. This new citizens' movement will seek to ensure the preservation and transmission of America's cultural legacy. While there is no single road map that all communities can follow, there are at least six areas that the American Canvas participants identified as central to the future of the arts, six clusters of challenges and opportunities around which communities can begin to organize their actions in regard to the arts:

- 1. Redefining American Culture**
- 2. Supporting the Nonprofit Arts**
- 3. Working Together**
- 4. Meeting Community Needs**
- 5. Educating the Young**
- 6. Entering the Information Age**

Taken together, these six areas of concern add up to a seventh, regarding our cultural legacy, which in one way or another informed all of the American Canvas discussions. Simply put: What kind of culture do we want future generations to enjoy? How can we ensure that the finest achievements of the past and present will endure in the future? And what needs to be done today to prepare our children—the audiences of tomorrow—both to appreciate and to participate in the culture of their time?

As this century draws to a close, and as the National Endowment for the Arts enters its fourth decade, the arts community finds itself at a crossroads. Faced both with shrinking resources and with increased competition for funds, it needs to re-evaluate the nature of the nonprofit arts infrastructure, to clarify and underscore its relation to other social and economic concerns, and to determine the best means of ensuring that the full range of America's cultural riches will be passed on to future generations. The larger community, beyond the nonprofit arts sector itself, must address the challenges and opportunities listed below. We need to acknowledge, in short, that our "cultural legacy" is not simply a concern for the continued health of the arts, but is in fact a primary factor in the strength and vitality of American society itself.

1. REDEFINING AMERICAN CULTURE. Again and again at the American Canvas forums, the issue of the ways in which we define the arts in America was raised. The narrow, professional, institutional definition that we've used in the past

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must now be replaced with a more expansive view that includes a range of activities—avocational and ethnic, participatory and popular—within its sweep. The health of America's culture depends more on active citizen involvement in the arts than on mere spectatorship, for those who participate in the arts tend to go to cultural events. Just as our fascination with spectator sports is rooted in early participation in amateur athletics, so can a larger, more committed audience for the arts be developed out of a nation of avocational singers, dancers, painters, and musicians.

The challenge is to reach out to the majority of Americans who currently have no direct involvement with the professional, nonprofit arts, to expand the nation's cultural palette to include a full range of participatory activities, without losing sight of the standards of professional excellence that still have a role in providing benchmarks of achievement. The opportunity is to build a much larger, more inclusive base of support for the arts, one that gives all Americans a stake in the preservation and transmission of our cultural legacy.

What artists and communities can do:

Take stock of the cultural resources that already exist, paying particular attention to those pockets of creativity—in the community center, the senior-citizen home, places of worship and the like—that might have been overlooked in previous inventories. In what ways are Americans already participating in the arts, and how can this involvement be increased?

Find ways to provide forums for some of the newer voices in the community. What are the barriers to access and involvement in the arts, and how can they be overcome?

Make an effort to balance the needs of the professional arts sector with efforts to involve citizens more directly in the arts, through a range of outreach, educational, and participatory activities. How can cultural services be delivered in the same way that other community needs—health care, education, and public safety, for example—are met?

Instead of simply inviting citizens to attend the arts, find new ways in which artists and arts organizations can bring art to the people, interacting with the public outside of the concert hall and museum.

2. SUPPORTING THE NONPROFIT ARTS. Much of what we know about the nonprofit arts economy—in particular the delicate balance of public and private support, earned and contributed income—is rooted in older models largely unrelated to the realities of the present, with the sharp declines in public-sector

support and increased competition for private funding. The statistical basis of our knowledge is woefully thin, and what we do know about cultural production in this country is skewed heavily toward the commercial end of the spectrum, anchored by the considerable economic clout of the film, television, and recording industries.

The American Canvas forums represent a significant first step in learning more about the current status of the arts infrastructure in this country—both how (and at what costs to the human capital involved) arts organizations currently operate within their communities, and how the most successful of them have established a network of community support beyond the traditional philanthropic models. The challenge is to communicate more effectively the nature of this infrastructure to a public that is only vaguely aware of the distinction between the nonprofit and the commercial, and between arts and entertainment. The opportunity is to achieve for the arts that same mantle of indispensability that other nonprofit institutions—schools and libraries, churches and hospitals—have long enjoyed.

What artists and communities can do:

Assess how the local arts infrastructure has changed in recent years, and what further changes might lie ahead. What new organizations have appeared (both arts producers/presenters as well as funders)? Which of the existing institutions are struggling financially? What are the primary sources of support and how have they changed? What facilities exist for the presentation of the arts in the community, and how effectively are they shared?

Identify new revenue streams that might be developed in the public sector. Does a designated local arts agency exist (either private, nonprofit or public)? Does the community have a cultural plan? Is there a percent-for-art program in place? A united arts campaign? Hotel-motel tax? Convention and Visitors Bureau support?

Convince the business community of the importance of including cultural activities within their philanthropic programs or their advertising and marketing budgets.

Work with a community foundation (there are now over 400 of them across the country, devoting nearly 17 percent of their funding—more than \$40 million—to the arts every year) to develop a more systematic, community-wide support structure for the arts. Determine how other

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Cellist Ellen Chen is set to perform at Yellow Barn, a performing arts center in Vermont. Artists, and their relationship to the community, are at the core of the American Canvas initiative.

foundations might be collectively approached, to begin to address arts funding needs on a community or regional basis rather than in the standard context of head-to-head competition for funding.

Provide a forum in which both the economic needs of the arts, as well as the cultural and other services that the arts can provide to a community, can be discussed.

Help to open the lines of communication between the nonprofit and commercial sectors, developing the kinds of partnerships that will bolster the nonprofit arts economy.

Foster a “new philanthropy” in the community, with increased emphasis on the exchange of goods and services and less dependence on cash contributions, encouraging arts organizations to bring both their processes and their products to a wide range of community activities.

Work with the local media to begin providing more substantive and inclusive coverage of the community’s cultural resources.

3. WORKING TOGETHER. American Canvas participants were unanimous in their agreement that the future of the arts will depend far more on coalition-building and collaborative strategies, both within the arts community itself as well as among arts and nonarts organizations and agencies. The challenge is making that difficult transition from theory to practice, implementing and maintaining the kinds of alliances that depend on resource sharing, information exchange, and occasionally on the subordination of individual interests to the collective good. The opportunity is to derive in the nonprofit sector the same kind of economies of scale and strength in numbers that the corporate sector has used so effectively in recent years—not through “acquisitions and mergers,” however, but through a shared vision and a shared commitment to serving the community.

What artists and communities can do:

Determine the kinds of partnerships and collaborations that will be most effective, both in meeting the cultural and other needs of the community as well as in protecting and sustaining the cultural legacy.

Find ways, using both public and private resources, to reward the formation of such partnerships, in a manner that genuinely benefits all participants. What can local governments do to foster alliances among arts and non-arts organizations, taking into account their differing goals, expectations, and operating procedures? What can the arts community itself do to ensure that collaborative strategies become the rule rather than the exception in organizational behavior?

Foster partnerships between arts and non-arts organizations in the business, political, social-service, religious, and educational sectors, taking into account the particular needs of the community. Those alliances should include municipal organizations (social services, economic development, housing, law enforcement, etc.), neighborhood/community organizations, school districts, public libraries, convention and visitors bureaus, and chambers of commerce.

Develop strategies to ensure that these partnerships will be sustained beyond the original activity or event that may have initiated their formation.

4. MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS. Perhaps more than any other American Canvas theme, the contributions that the arts can make to a wide variety of civic and community needs were seen as absolutely crucial to the future health of the arts. Arts organizations and artists alike need to become more directly involved

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in civic and community affairs, bringing their talents to bear on a full range of municipal activities: social services, education, youth programs, urban planning, public housing, law enforcement, economic development, and parks and recreation.

The challenge is to “translate” the value of the arts into terms that will be more readily understood in the political and business sectors. The opportunity is to transform the arts in the civic context from their present status as amenities that are added once the necessities are taken care of, into one of the primary means of addressing those necessities in the first place.

What artists and communities can do:

Move beyond the traditional role of the arts, in their formal performance and exhibition functions, to recognize the ways in which the arts bring people together, the opportunities they afford for participation in civic life, and the many contributions they can make to municipal affairs.

Highlight the ways that the arts contribute significantly to the economic vitality of our cities: as a source of cultural tourism, as a stimulus of ancillary spending (on parking, meals, lodging, and the like), and as a key factor in the location decisions of companies seeking the most attractive environment for their employees.

Recognize the two other significant economic contributions of the arts, both as a source of employment and as a key ingredient in the development of vital job skills.

Assist artists and arts organizations to bring the creative process to civic affairs, helping to address the problems that all communities must confront. Make a stronger case for the inclusion of the arts in such basic civic activities as urban planning, social services, and economic development.

5. EDUCATING THE YOUNG. Education in the arts, both in developing the audience of the future as well as in shaping an electorate—and their leaders—who will recognize the values of arts to society, continues as a priority. Equally prominent, though, was a belief in the importance of the arts to education. The arts should become a basic part of the K-12 curriculum, not simply for their intrinsic value as a course of study—to help all children and young adults to interpret their world, better understand history and one another, and effectively communicate their most profound ideas—but also for their contribution to students’ mastery of other basic areas of the curriculum.

For this to happen, however, a persuasive rationale for ensuring that the

arts are made a basic part of a comprehensive elementary and secondary education should be promulgated (see the Arts & Education chapter). The challenge is to overcome the budgetary constraints, time pressures, and other social and political impediments that threaten to reduce the arts to mere extra-curricular activities, available to the fortunate few but beyond the reach of the vast majority of children. The opportunity is to ensure the arts' place in the classroom for all students, not as an occasional treat, but in a sequential, curriculum-based, systematic program that is on par with other core subjects. The results, at a minimum, will be a generation of students who can create and perform the arts, understand the role and importance of the arts in culture and history, and perceive and respond to the qualities of the arts.

What artists and communities can do:

Examine the Goals 2000 legislation and the Improving America's Schools Act and begin working to implement their recommendations for the inclusion of the arts among the core subjects in the basic K-12 curriculum.

Build partnerships among schools, arts organizations, and teacher-training institutes in the interest of developing and sustaining arts education.

Determine which local organizations are affiliated with the national organizations that are a part of the Goals 2000 Arts Education Partnership, and work with these organizations in furthering the interests of arts education locally.

Encourage local school boards to adopt an arts education plan that takes into account child and adolescent development and the multiple ways in which students learn.

Make certain that local schools have well-trained and qualified teachers of the arts as well as artists in the schools who have a command of an arts discipline and/or a deep understanding of its forms, principles and methods and its history and tradition.

Assess the proficiencies of students in dance, music, theater, and the visual arts, using the standards developed for the National Assessment of Educational Progress.¹⁰

Develop a network of education, arts, and cultural organizations and institutions that are committed to arts education.

¹⁰ Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, *Dance, Music, Theatre, Visual Arts: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1994).

6. ENTERING THE INFORMATION AGE. Perhaps more than any other aspect of contemporary life, the communications landscape—the various ways in which we transmit and receive a wide range of information and entertainment—is undergoing a fundamental change. Both in the conversion from analog to digital, and in the gradual convergence of the telephone, publishing, entertainment, and computer industries, the communications infrastructure of the next century will differ significantly from the existing patchwork quilt of mutually exclusive technologies. While the implications for the nonprofit sector of all of these changes are not immediately clear, the arts are potentially well positioned to take advantage of the rapidly evolving telecommunications landscape. As the producers of vast quantities of “content,” artists and arts organizations can contribute significantly to the new system. Already, the arts community has benefited from the enhanced employment prospects of the “Information Economy”—more than 80,000 new jobs in the digital arts over the past two years alone, according to industry estimates—and the future promises to be even brighter. The challenge will be in overcoming the traditional barriers that have separated the nonprofit and commercial sectors, eliminating the distribution bottlenecks that keep most nonprofit fare—in music, the media arts, and publishing especially—out of the commercial marketplace. The opportunity is that of reaching vast new audiences electronically, converting the scattered, niche markets that have traditionally supported the arts into a critical mass, and using the new information systems to attract new audiences online. Nor should the live arts experience have to suffer in this new environment. For just as Americans today who enjoy the arts on radio and television are twice as likely to attend live arts events, so should the new media prove useful as an audience-building tool.

What artists and communities can do:

Work with public libraries and public broadcasters, many of which are already involved in developing the new computer technologies, to incorporate more arts programming within their online offerings.

Form partnerships with local arts organizations to enable them to adapt more quickly to the new communications environment, joining classrooms and libraries, hospitals and clinics as key nonprofit members of the online community.

Insist that those at the forefront of developing new online enterprises—including broadcasters, cable franchises, telephone companies, and newspapers—provide room on their systems for noncommercial, public-interest

programming, including the offerings of local artists and arts organizations. The same kinds of “public spaces” that have long been the province of the arts in the “real world,” in other words, must be replicated in the “virtual world” that is rapidly taking shape.

Just as the American Canvas Calls to Action have elicited a wide variety of public- and private-sector initiatives, there are any number of ways that communities can respond to the challenges and opportunities listed here. If we are to build a citizens’ coalition to create and sustain a climate encouraging the arts, we each have responsibilities. Our artists must stay engaged in community life, for everyone who receives the benefits of society is obliged to re-pay that debt. Our country, as well, is obliged to preserve and protect its cultural resources. As the 21st century approaches, let us make certain that all of the varied cultural achievements of this century are carried safely into the next, and that American artists and arts organizations, and the communities in which they reside, continue to find new ways to mutually support one another. For this, we must take a page from the conservation movement, organize for action, and take care of our cultural legacy.