

ArtsJournal Forum

Is there a better case to be made for the arts?

A collaborative weblog, hosted March 7–11, 2005

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This is the transcript of the reader commentary to a collaborative online blog conversation about the arts hosted by the online arts news website ArtsJournal.com. We asked 11 American arts luminaries to discuss “Is there a better case to be made for the arts?” over the course of a week. Participants included:

Ben Cameron

Executive director, Theatre Communications Group

Adrian Ellis

Managing consultant, AEA Consulting

Bill Ivey

Director of the Curb Center, Former Chair, NEA

Joli Jensen

Professor, University of Tulsa, Author: "Is Art Good for Us?"

Jim Kelly

Director, 4Culture, Seattle, WA

Phil Kennicott

Culture critic, Washington Post

Glenn Lowry

Director, Museum of Modern Art

Robert L. Lynch

President, Americans for the Arts

Midori

Violinist

Andrew Taylor

Director, Bolz Center for Arts Administration, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Russell Willis Taylor

President, National Arts Strategies

The blog was moderated by Douglas McLennan, editor of ArtsJournal.com. The following is a transcript of the 102 reader comments posted during the course of the discussion. Also available at ArtsJournal is a transcript of the 54 posts by our invited participants. Special thanks to The Wallace Foundation for underwriting this project.

Is there a better case to be made for the arts?

Ever since the Culture Wars of the late-80s, arts advocates have touted the economic, educational and social benefits of the arts in a flood of arts-impact studies designed to quantify and promote the arts' measurable benefits to society.

As a strategy, it seemed to work. Between 1993 and 2001, state public spending on the arts more than doubled in the US, from \$211 million in 1993, to \$447 million eight years later. The National Endowment for the Arts, which had been threatened with extinction, was stabilized. And the 90s saw an unprecedented boom in arts construction across America, with billions spent on new museums, concert halls and theatres.

But is it possible that the intrinsic benefits of the arts - those effects inherent in the arts experience itself - got lost in some of these arguments? A new RAND study, commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts*, argues that basing so much of the case for the arts on their claimed external benefits - their utility in addressing public issues and concerns - has drawn us away from the true power and potential of the arts, and weakened the long-term position of the arts in the public mind.

Recently, the social good and economic impact arguments may have begun to wear thin, and government support has not recovered from sharp cuts made in the last few years. At the same time, much of the arts community is so focused on bottom lines that some argue that in some cases art and creativity have suffered in the struggle to grow and keep up. Indeed, some might argue that basing so much of the case for the arts on economic benefits has made it more difficult to make a compelling case for the arts.

Has the emphasis on practical benefits warped our arts infrastructure, and caused us to neglect the need to strengthen demand for the arts? Have we neglected what *Gifts of the Muse* terms the "missing link": the individual, private experience of the arts that begins with early engagement and intense involvement, and that is the gateway to other, more public benefits? Is there a better case to be made for the arts?

Blog Comments (in chronological order)

RE: Welcome

posted by Peter Ellenstein | 03/07/05

The Art World, similar to the Democratic Party, abandoned its most important arguments during some temporal defeats in the 1980s and 1990's. We allowed our detractors to define us, and rather than looking at this challenge as an opportunity to re-invigorate support of the Arts as necessary to a healthy world, we attempted to justify our existence on our enemies terms. Namely, we attempted to justify the arts, which exist in an artistic currency, into an accountants' financial currency. Thus, we lost before we began to respond. This society has abandoned many of its currencies to the bean-counters: Artistic, Philosophical, Political, Spiritual, Educational, Quality-of-Life, Environmental. All of these have become subservient to, rather than co-existing with, the financial currency.

The societal body, like the human body, has a variety of systems whose interactivity are necessary to the health of that body. For many years now, the societal body has been trying to reduce all activity to the judgement of one currency, and while it's true that without a healthy economy the the societal body doesn't work, that is merely enough to keep it alive, even if it is in a vegetative state. It is simply not a full life without the senses operating; without electrical activity in the brain; without the ability to think and feel and taste and digest and hear and respond.

It is certainly not a life any of us want to live.

I believe a portion of the RAND report was correct; we have stopped focusing on Arts purpose: to provide the artistic currency of life, without which, life is incomplete, less worth the living. That is surely something we can explain to people in terms they understand. In fact, I believe that they have innate understanding of it. We just have to stop trying to justify ourselves by somebody else's standard.

Peter Ellenstein, Artistic Director, William Inge Center for the Arts, Independence, KS

RE: A Matter of Relationships

posted by Rafael de Acha | 03/07/05

As ever, insightful and fair, Ben Cameron helps us in the non-profit arts world keep our sanity. By extension, my thanks to all the other bloggers in this dialogue.

Rafael de Acha, Artistic Director, New Theatre, Coral Gables, FL

RE: Music is the Best Advocate for Music

posted by Tyler Green | 03/07/05

"The case for music can be most effective when presented at the highest level (which is not quantifiable with numbers or adjectives) and granted maximum accessibility"

Amen. This is certainly true of other fine arts as well. Given that maximum accessibility is imperative, how can people who head arts non-profits say things like that or support them when they charge exorbitant admissions fees that price out many people, particularly young people?

I'm reminded of a story the sculptor Martin Puryear tells about his childhood: He grew up in Washington, DC, a few blocks south of the National Mall. When he had free time (as kids do!) he wandered up to the Mall and made his way through a museum. He was able to do this because the museums were free and accessible.

As I look around New York, in particular, this is not even remotely the case. Non-profit managers should be working to make their offerings more accessible to a wider cross-section of the population, not less accessible (or only accessible to the middle classes and the tourist hordes).

RE: Welcome

posted by Chris Patton | 03/07/05

In a recent, brilliant cartoon in the Washington Post, (Richard's Poor Almanac: "Whither Classical Music," 5/5/05), Richard Thompson postulates: "Maybe the trouble started when people tried to quantify classical music's 'therapeutic benefits,' reducing it to dietary fiber for the brain." This succinctly goes to the heart of the problem: until a person has been touched by the arts, you cannot convince them through argument that the experience will be good for them (implied: but unpleasant). Trying to convince the world of the benefits of the arts, educationally, financially, or even culturally, is a waste of time and resources, which could be better directed towards creating the art itself.

Most of us can trace our commitment to the arts back to a single experience, an awakening brought about, not by arguments touting the benefits of the arts, but by an actual arts experience. Only by reawakening people's souls, so many of which been lulled into passivity by tv, computers, video games, muzak, etc., can we re-establish true grass roots support for the arts.

RE: Welcome

posted by Glenn Weiss | 03/07/05

As usual, we will discuss the public value of the arts by ignoring the public arts. Where are the arts of the daily public realm - graphic design, product design, fashion, architecture, urban design, landscape design and even the official public art? All the arts discussed require someone to go inside a box - classroom, theater or museum and usually pay for the opportunity.

Everyday in South Florida, I work with very sincere people in all walks of life. Directed by planners, elected officials and citizen volunteers, they strive to enhance the visual and pedestrian quality of their community. Every city has discussions of design guidelines, signage ordinances and streetscape

programs, to name a few. These are active, passionate civic discussions about the value aesthetics in their communities.

Now what about the weekend attendance of 100's of thousands (maybe millions) of people in Florida attended street fairs in which the broad definition of the arts is the ONLY reason to visit. Every city in Florida supports these events as a regular part of life. All smart cities know that activating the city requires a diversity of arts from high to low and loud to quiet.

The community branding concepts from New Zealand and other places focuses on the recognition of the aesthetic qualities of a place and then reaches community consensus on the attributes to reinforce. The community aesthetic awareness becomes public policy through discussion and implementation by each citizen.

Every city government in the USA spends gobs of money on aesthetics, but not on the black boxes. Why? Because nobody but the government can pay for roads and police. The arts have other possible sources, so it has a lower priority for government cash. But the arts have connections and make a good fight for money anyway.

OK so I agree that the finest aesthetic experiences of my life have happened in a black box, quiet chair or an empty landscape. And I agree with RAND that only that experience persuades someone to join the lovers of the black box experiences.

But we live in the USA where putting down the arts can be a public sport. Concentrate on utilizing the public agreement on the aesthetics of the public realm to slowly push the art haters into the background. As has happened in many, many communities, make it embarrassing, foolish and even stupid to be publicly against the arts. Fight for money for black boxes and support every public discussion on the aesthetics of the public realm.

RE: Making the Case...

posted by jonsson | 03/07/05

Last week I noticed and scanned the article about the RAND Corporation's recent study on The Arts. It's a good thing to focus attention on the arts, yet perhaps the real problem hasn't been and isn't being addressed. "The arts landscape" is definitely in need of help, but I think the problem has less to do with presentation (this show at that place earns 'x' amount of dollars) and more to do with education (creating interest and desire in the public - for whom artists create in the first place). By focusing on education people will become less intimidated by art (i.e. visual, performing, etc.), and so they will want to experience the art because they will understand and connect with it. I say educate the public (build it) and they will come.

real job of educating is to create interest.

RE: It's not about the spinach

posted by Sam Bergman | 03/07/05

Joli's point about the language we use to promote the arts is very well taken and, I think, central to the problem many arts groups face in attracting the attention of an entertainment-saturated public. Whereas Hollywood relies on glitter and action to draw moviegoers, and rock bands promote themselves with attitude and in-your-face bluster, we in the performing arts have adopted an all-too-refined pitch centered not around the enjoyment of the experience, but around such whiny entreaties as "You'll be transformed," or "But it's [ugh] good for you!"

We spend a lot of time bemoaning the anti-intellectualism that seems to have taken hold in the US over the last few decades, but in my view, this issue is simply a red herring distracting us from the larger problem, which is that arts groups have been left in the dust by a finely honed science of marketing/branding which has been embraced by nearly every other profession. The good news is, this sorry condition ought to be completely reversible, if we can just get over our own profundity and start acting like the entertainers we are. The public doesn't give a damn about the difference between a for-profit baseball team, a for-profit movie house, and a non-profit theatre or orchestra. They care about

having a good time on their night out, and if we make our first priority the promotion of our product as enjoyable (as opposed to the cultural spinach Joli describes), there is no reason that we can't give people that transformative experience without having to beg them to embrace it.

RE: Separating ourselves

posted by David | 03/07/05

It seems like there are two parts to this issue of making a case for the arts. On the one hand, any of us who are directly involved in creating the work need no justification for continuing to do so. We already get it. And the same goes for the core audience, those that really love painting or music or books, etc. They probably developed this connection on their own (or through their friends), and don't need to be convinced that the arts are good for them. Do we really need a larger audience, made up of a bunch of people that show up for the nutritional value? Is more really better? I'm not sure that it is.

If the goal of coming up with a case for the arts is to convince the government and business communities to support arts organizations, then I think the best approach is to just tell them what they want to hear. Businesses want to know how supporting the arts will help them make more money (PR value), and elected government officials want to know how supporting the arts will get them re-elected. For any case that's made we should keep in mind whom we're trying to convince, and why.

RE: It's not about the spinach

posted by David | 03/07/05

Sam, I agree, and I think that along those same lines it's good to keep in mind the social aspect of what draws initially draws people to the arts. At art and museum openings here in LA, for example, I've noticed that a lot of people, especially among the young singles scene, will show up more for the party than specifically to look at the work. Which I think is great. Because along with having a night out with their friends, they also are exposed to the artwork, they'll talk about it, and some of them will come back again on their own.

RE: Separating ourselves

posted by Jodi | 03/07/05

I am fascinated by this debate, and how all the different bloggers each bring his/her own unique experience and perspective to the table. It's a great example of how art impacts each person differently, as Midori says.

I am looking forward to the exploration of the chief recommendation of the RAND report; that certain forms of funding should be shifted to supporting access to art.

This is a huge can of worms that has yet to truly be opened. What would happen if we shifted our language to talk less about why art is good for us, and more about how to get more people to experience art? Would our creative engine stall? Would our advocacy efforts stall? Or would we find a more receptive audience?

RE: Welcome

posted by Marie Acosta | 03/07/05

The recent discussions of how to increase public value for the arts is motivated by the monumental challenge our administrators and boards face on a daily basis. How do we earn more money to pay our bills?

That's the wrong motivation. We can not argue that the public has little appreciation for the arts when art is a part of everyone's lives, some more than others. By assuming that there is little appreciation for the arts because the public is not buying tickets to the opera, symphony, or ballet is wrong minded.

Perhaps we need to look at why these art forms are appreciated by a thin sliver of the public and looked upon as elitist by a wider margin. As well, we should explore why traditional art or art reflective of a specific groups experiences are often undervalued in discussions about art.

If we limit the discussion to "fine art", then many of us have little reason to engage. Instead of asking how to make the case for the arts, we should be asking, how art is relevant to the public, particularly in troubled times. How does it speak to people who we perceive as having little value for the arts but are moved by Judy Bacas "Great Wall" that is on view everyday at no price to the viewer. Why does El Teatro Campesino attract audiences that most US theaters never see and can't seem to bring into their houses? Why do exhibitions of Latino art in US museums draw large numbers of visitors who don't attend otherwise?

Perhaps shifting the discussion might bring about a deeper discussion about who is defining art and from whose voice do they speak.

Thanks for this opportunity to dialogue with others about this and other questions.

Marie Acosta, Director, California Latino Arts Network

RE: Separating ourselves

posted by Keith Donohue | 03/07/05

To paraphrase the RAND report, the "intrinsic" values include captivation (rapt absorption!); pleasure; expanded capacity for empathy; cognitive growth; creation of social bonds; and expression of communal meanings. And, as Andrew points out, "existing studies of 'benefit' or 'value,' ... ignore all the other things in society or in life that might provide a similar benefit." Look at that list again and see how many other facets of life bestow the same intrinsic values. You really ought to get more sleep, exercise, good food, sex, religion, conversation, join the bowling league...

Intrinsic value arguments are something to try out on the kids. Try a little art, son, it will make you a better person.

When it comes to convincing legislatures, organizations, or individuals to give more money to the arts (or any other enterprise), some more quantifiable measures might strengthen your case.

The RAND study's "key policy implication is that policy should be geared toward spreading the benefits of the arts by introducing greater numbers of Americans to engaging arts experiences." It's this kind of solipsistic and circular thinking that brought us to where we are today.

We need both kinds of arguments all the time. Art is inherently beneficial to individuals for it engages the imagination in particular ways with measureable physiological, psychological, cognitive, and social benefits. That's a good old-fashioned elitist (in the best sense) argument. One we ought to proselytize at every opportunity.

But, when asking for money, it takes more than our own faith and goodwill. The nonprofit arts, in general, have some demonstrable impact as part of socioeconomics of the cultural and/or creative sector, the community, the country, business ... something.

RE: A Matter of Relationships

posted by Bob Yesselman | 03/07/05

Ben makes one very important point that is often overlooked in these conversations-although I'm not sure that my take on it was his intention. The movies spend millions or billions of dollars in advertising and marketing. The arts, chronically undercapitalized, spend ridiculously little. And when we do bestir ourselves to advertise we announce, we do not sell. We show our prettiest picture and we print our best quote. We say, "Here we are, take us or leave us." Since the Medicis and the Czars are, alas, gone we must look at butts in seats as our lifeblood. Living as we do in a society totally influenced by marketing, we MUST learn to market. We must not change the art to fit the market (the "Joey" parallel is a good one) but we must find ways to communicate the experiential quality of art - what are those regular attenders seeing and feeling - and how do we let those not attending know about it? To my mind, this is the essential question we face in this society at this time.

RE: The public view

posted by Ed Noonan | 03/07/05

The skill that we don't have in engaging audience is a deep sense and methodology for collaboration. We are trained and know from experience that great art is often made in spite of obstacles like "Angels in America". Our methodology as artists and producers grows out of that experience, but it often fails in the fact that we don't know our audience and potential audience well enough to engage as collaborators in the creative process. In bringing our work to them, we have to also bring to them the potential that we will allow them into our process, that we will see them as an equal shareholder in what we can create. Since collaboration is a secondary value in the American artist ethic even between artists, we have a hard time even discussing what it would mean to be in a collaborative relationship with the public that are or could be audience.

RE: Welcome

posted by Robert Moskowitz | 03/07/05

With all due respect, Mr. McLennan has got it totally wrong, just like hundreds of others I've talked to in the theatre "business" here in L.A. You seem to feel that worrying about the money side is beneath you, not worth thinking about, beyond the pale, declassé, and generally not something you ought to be doing.

Maybe that explains the inadequate budgets you're mostly dealing with and the constant need to scrounge for favors and make-do's and volunteers, etc.

The point is: you're leaving readily available box office money in people's pockets, or worse, in their wallets at home on their nightstands because they even haven't left home to come see your shows. Why? Because you're simply not doing most of the very easy and basic things you ought to be doing to bring larger audiences to your shows. Like reaching out to all the people who have already proven they enjoy theatre. Like incentivizing and motivating them to come to more theatre, and to bring their friends. Like fostering an environment -- in your lobbies and in the general culture -- where a wide range of theatre information is readily available and easily taken home for noting in a calendar. Like rewarding people who come to your shows -- of course with a good performance -- but also with additional experiences and opportunities that are free and easy for you to provide but are perceived as extremely valuable by the people in your audiences. Like maximizing the revenue from your available empty seats (which, as soon as the curtain goes up, become worthless), just like airlines and hotels have learned to do.

I'm not stupid, of course. I realize that if it were easy for you to be doing this kind of thing, you already would be doing it. That's why I'm not asking that you do it. That's why, instead, I'm organizing a Theatre Co-Op to do it for you. I'm not asking for any money up front. I'm not asking for any effort on your part. I'm not asking you to do anything different from what you're already doing. I'm certainly not interested in telling you what shows to put on or how to cast them or to mess with anything else that might fall under the "artistic" umbrella.

All I'm saying is that, if theatre-makers cooperate, a Theatre Co-Op can be operated that will bring larger audiences to the very same shows you are putting on now in the very same theatres in which you're presenting them. And of course, once there's a co-op, it can begin to provide more resources for larger purposes and improve your theatrical lives in lots of different ways that don't intrude on, but rather facilitate, your artistic vision.

To me, the bottom line is: why should anyone exhort theatre artists to become marketers -- particularly when you have shown an aversion to it -- when there is a huge body of knowledge about theatre marketing, along with people eager and willing to help you by doing what they know how to do and enjoy doing?

It's totally not a question of only "followers" generating the big bucks (along with some negative overtones or connotations) while people at the other end of the "artistic" spectrum must endure their destiny and survive on tiny budgets. Reframe the situation and you can see that the greatest writers, greatest artists, and greatest producers (read: most talented, most skillful, most daring, most ground-

breaking) can easily attract larger audiences. What you're doing is already great. Lots more people would want to experience it. All you gotta do is tell the right people about your shows at the right times and in the right ways. And you don't even have to do the telling. All you have to do is allow the Theatre Co-Op to do it for you.

But no one is forcing you to join the Theatre Co-Op. If you'd rather work your a-- off for a night's revenue that doesn't even half pay the rent, please go right ahead. You wouldn't be the first. When "humans" first climbed down from the trees those many millions of years ago and started walking upright on that ancient savannah, I'm sure there were plenty of their friends and family hanging back and dissing them for compromising and abandoning their values and their heritage. In a sense, they were. They were throwing away the old, outdated, worthless parts of their history and their tradition in order to reach for something they thought might be better, more fruitful, more worthwhile.

I'm glad they did. Are you?

Robert Moskowitz, Venice, CA

RE: Making the Case...

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/07/05

Stewardship- the foundation of a nonprofit charity seems to be lost in the desire to gain audience. I remember overhearing an arts manager discussing with a pier about who was "grantable." If the "arts" world is judged by who can fill a room or will look good on an application then we have lost the whole game. The "sports" world has many success' because they offer the best of their game. The public may not know all the reasons why an artist made something but in the end they sure will figure out what interests and excites them.

Is it not important to let the market decide what it wants? If a show fails then try something else or find a different audience.

RE: The public view

posted by Louis Torres | 03/07/05

The plan to perform a site-specific "theater piece" in a department store furniture showroom as a means of exposing people to the arts is an ill-conceived gimmick at best—especially if it is thought that it might cause some people to exclaim, "Hey, that was fun; let's go to the theater Friday night!" People go to the theater to see a play because they have reason to believe that its setting, plot, characters, and theme will engage them. They go for the heightened sense of psychological reality that only a well-crafted play can provide. They may legitimately wish to be entertained as well, but never that alone. They do not ordinarily go to see plays to have "fun"—an important part of life, to be sure, but one that for good reason is more likely to be found in such locations as amusement parks and playgrounds.

RE: The public view

posted by F. Lennox Campello | 03/07/05

I think that the KEY, as you eloquently discover is "we have stop talking about the arts and start doing art."

As far back as the late 1970s, when I was an art student in Seattle, there was already a "divide" and not just rural but also urban (the most famous example of which was that Wallingford neighborhood that "rebelled" against the Seattle Arts Commission "mandated" public art in their neighborhood and erected their own).

Inviting and having the public participate in the arts is indeed the road to bridge that and any divide. In other words, we have stop talking about the arts and start doing art.

RE: The public view

posted by Maureen | 03/07/05

Louis Torres comments:

"People go to the theater to see a play because they have reason to believe that its setting, plot, characters, and theme will engage them. They go for the heightened sense of psychological reality that only a well-crafted play can provide. They may legitimately wish to be entertained as well, but never that alone."

I would argue that Louis goes to the theatre for those reasons, even that I often go to the theatre for those reasons-- but not always. Sometimes I go because a friend is in the show or works for the theatre presenting the play, sometimes I go because my job requires it, or because I'm starting to feel ashamed that everyone has seen this show and I haven't. And I'm a "theatre person"

Until we stop assuming that our reasons for loving, attending and participating in the arts are the only valid reasons for loving, attending and participating in the arts, we will continue to miss great opportunities to show people what the arts can mean to them-- on their terms.

RE: Separating ourselves

posted by James Catterall | 03/07/05

I don't quite know where to insert a topical comment into this discussion -- what with the good principal commentators standing front and center and offering their intertwined streams of thought. I'd like to comment on the intrinsic/extrinsic benefits chapters of the book. And I've chosen Andrew Taylor's discussion stream as a place to speak. Andrew is not responsible for any of this.

My reactions to Gifts of the Muse come from my world of research on learning and child development. "Gifts of the Muse" spawns much to think about, and this blog-fest may be good fun.

A close reading of "Gifts" raises three puzzles for me. First, the chapter on extrinsic benefits is held up as a literature review; it is clearly accepted as such, judging by the words of the invited panelists. However, it's not. Only four specific studies are cited and actually discussed in the review of research on extrinsic benefits; and these four studies, the authors state, in fact reach valid positive conclusions about important extrinsic benefits. The arguments critical of research on instrumental benefits are not based, as reported, on the reviewing of research studies by the authors; they are drawn entirely from a study of studies by Project REAP (2001). REAP remains highly controversial; this is because every one of the academic effects reported in their good research syntheses was positive. This is curious -- how could RAND get this wrong? I think they got it wrong by reading and quoting only REAP's Executive Summary -- not through an independent review of the underlying studies. Any conclusion that REAP found no instrumental effects of the arts simply doesn't stand up to scrutiny.

Second, the authors of "Gifts" argue along the following lines when introducing their chapter on the INTRINSIC benefits of the arts: "In the previous chapter, we rightly downsized the overblown literature on the academic and social effects of the arts; thus we largely disavow the existence of such effects. In this chapter we turn to the intrinsic benefits of the arts. However, we must admit that we have no research to support the assertions we make about intrinsic benefits -- these are things we simply all know." (My paraphrase.) So, at work are two very different standards when it comes to preferred and less preferred benefits. Nonetheless, I found the intrinsic benefits chapter engaging; it seems likely to find its way into a future of cheering, musing, and vilifying -- perhaps to debut this week.

Third, in the chapter of "Gifts" explicating the intrinsic benefits of the arts, children are not mentioned; nor are intrinsic benefits said to come to anyone involved in artistic learning, age 1 to 100. I think the authors just forgot. Because a surely unintended conclusion of "Gifts" hangs in the balance. Since there is scarce documented extrinsic benefit related to learning in the arts, and since there are no intrinsic benefits to children, then why support arts education at all?

"Gifts of the Muse" will either advance debates about the "benefits" of the arts, or (as some commentators suggest) leave readers a bit tired of it all. To me, artistic learning plays well on both sides

of the argument. Learning to draw, play the violin, dramatizing Romeo, or dancing Juliet all promote cognitive and affective growth that is bound to impact the way children think, learn, and feel.

I'm in the profession of sorting this all out in sometimes-painful detail. At the same time, I'm glad there is way more to the discussion than this.

James Catterall, Professor of Education, UCLA

RE: The public view

posted by David | 03/07/05

Perhaps Jim's choice of "Hey, that was fun; let's go to the theater Friday night!" wasn't quite what Louis would hope for in terms of drawing an audience, but what if the furniture shopper's response was "Hey, I just experienced a heightened sense of psychological reality - let's go to the theater for more"?

I don't think there's anything wrong with using gimmicks to expose people to the arts. The reason that some people aren't interested in the arts is that they don't know what they're missing. Giving them a sample is a much more effective way to expand your audience than trying to convince them that the arts are good for them.

RE: Welcome

posted by Tobi Tobias | 03/07/05

No case, old or new, for the arts can afford to neglect W.H. Auden's simultaneous warning and celebration, "Poetry makes nothing happen."

RE: It's not about the spinach

posted by Louis Torres | 03/07/05

I must take issue with the notion advanced by Joli Jensen that the arts "allegedly [satisfy] personal needs." Satisfying personal (cognitive) needs is, as a matter of fact, the primary function of art. I am deeply touched, for example, by Thomas Eakins's "Portrait of Susan Macdowell Eakins" ("Mrs. Thomas Eakins") at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC. In that work, Eakins selected, isolated, and stressed qualities he perceived in his wife that he obviously valued. My response to the painting can only be explained by reference to similar human qualities that are important to me, and the fact that I need to be able to experience such traits—of character, sensibility, and so on—as if they were percepts. Eakins's portrait of Susan allows me to do just that in a manner not possible in real life. That is the kind of thing the arts—including fiction and dance, for example—do. (For an image of Eakins's portrait, and others by him, as well as further discussion of the issue in question, see my "Thomas Eakins: Painting Pure Thought" in the August 2003 "Aristos.")

RE: Copernicus vs. the Blues Brothers

posted by William Osborne | 03/07/05

This comment is addressed to the entire panel.

Among the industrial countries, the United States is unique for its extremely low public funding for the arts. In all of the countries of Europe, the vast majority of arts funding is provided by the government. These policies are under assault, but it is unlikely that they will significantly change.

In France, one percent of the national budget is spent on culture each year, and this year's package is up 5.9 percent -- three times inflation -- at 2.79 billion euros. The US cultural budget, by comparison, is about 140 million dollars. The French cultural budget is thus well over 20 times higher than the NEA, even though France has less than a fourth the population of the United States. On a per capita basis, the French cultural budget is approximately 90 times higher.

The 2005 US budget is 2.4 trillion dollars. If the US spent one percent on culture like France, cultural funding would be 24 billion instead of about 140 million. That would make the NEA budget 171 times higher.

Europe's forms of public funding allow the arts to flourish in ways that are hardly imaginable in the United States. Germany, for example, has 23 times more full-time year round orchestras per capita than the USA. Even allowing for the most generous estimates, Germany has 28 times more year round opera houses per capita than the USA. (Actually we don't have any year round opera houses, but I added up the partial seasons to make an overall estimate.)

Europe's public funding is also tied to a similar *consistent and long term commitment* to arts education.

[For much more on the comparison of European and American arts funding models, see my article "Marketplace of Ideas" on the ArtsJournal.com website at: <http://www.artsjournal.com/artswatch/>]

Why do American arts administrators and advocates for the arts so seldom mention these differences? Why do we remain so silent about our poor record in comparison to Europe's?

Some comparisons are considered relevant. I just read about the Supreme Court's recent ruling that the execution of juvenile offenders is unconstitutional. The court said it was influenced by a desire to end the United States' international isolation on the issue. Commenting on the ruling, Justice Kennedy wrote, "Our determination finds confirmation in the stark reality that the United States is the only country in the world that continues to give official sanction to the juvenile death penalty."

We are also the only "first world" country that has no national health insurance. And we are the only "first world" country that doesn't provide public funding as the principle source for supporting the arts. The death penalty for children became an issue due to its extreme gravity, but I wonder if other comparisons with Europe, such as national health insurance and public arts funding will someday become relevant.

Will we ever have levels of culture like Europe's without a similar system of public funding? Is our own cultural identity somehow less important than theirs? Will our arts ever really flourish and be secure with a system of funding based on donations from the wealthy? Why do we often avoid discussing the fundamental problem America has of an equitable regional distribution of the arts that public funding could help provide? We have used our private donor system for decades. Will we eventually admit that it often doesn't work very well and that the long term commitment to public funding used by the Europeans has shown far better results?

Will this panel once again remain largely silent about America's unique and embarrassing lack of public arts funding?

William Osborne, <http://www.osborne-conant.org>

RE: Copernicus vs. the Blues Brothers

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/07/05

We are part of the fabric of our communities. Sons, daughters, brothers and sisters, the creators. What seems disconnected is the relationship between the famous and the average artist. How many average citizens, the public, understand the artistic life? I worked the board of a local "art center" that failed because there was no will in the community to support it. No one wealthy benefactor was willing to invest in the start up art center. The artists kept waiting for someone to come forward while they set unrealistic goals. After years of talk it faded away without notice.

It seems that there needs to be a real education about how and why art is made and why some artists deserve to be thought of as more than "art workers." Those who don't become super stars might be the main audience for many non-profits.

RE: The enemy?

posted by Ravi Narasimhan | 03/07/05

"The problem is art, with its invitation to independence, ambiguity and vulnerability."

I agree with many of Peter Ellenstein's points about hostility to artistic endeavors in the present day. The response quoted above, though, doesn't necessarily mesh. A lot of great art is unambiguous and highly charged. People with opposing political and/or religious views can and will be turned off. Others may be against the concept on general principle. It is likely arrogant to assume that these two categories

of people just need to be educated. Perhaps they've heard the arguments and not been moved. A sound triage strategy would be to accept this and focus on the people who might be receptive. No one seems to know how large this group is, though.

Another more frustrating question is what we mean by making a case for "The Arts" in the first place. Art galleries, museums, dance companies, small to large theatres, and major symphonies may have superficially the same problems of low and graying turnouts. But, do they necessarily have the same solutions? Their motivations, goals, methods of dissemination, and economics are not the same.

Ravi Narasimhan, Redondo Beach, CA

RE: Common Sense

posted by Franklin Einspruch | 03/07/05

"I believe fundamentally in [the arts'] intrinsic value and would argue that any other value that can be attributed to them is secondary and, ultimately, not all that interesting."

Glory hallelujah. I agree completely, but I'm an artist. Do the funding organizations feel this way? And if not, what would convince them to change their criteria as per paragraph #2 above?

RE: It's not about the spinach

posted by Ravi Narasimhan | 03/07/05

Sam Bergman writes:

"The public doesn't give a damn about the difference between a for-profit baseball team, a for-profit movie house, and a non-profit theatre or orchestra. They care about having a good time on their night out, and if we make our first priority the promotion of our product as enjoyable ... "

I'd be interested in your ideas of how to bring the (sports?) entertainment experience into, say, a concert hall or theatre. My recent experiences with sports is that the game is now less the issue than all the hoopla and hypela crammed into every square inch of space and into every potential bit of silence. My friends in athletics and/or the athletic promotion business say that their job is to control and manipulate the experience by any means necessary. Promotion doesn't end when the game begins, it starts well before the event, runs through it, and continues long after. And this means not giving the fan any time in which to think about what s/he is seeing. Can this, should this, be taken into the arts world? Schickele did a hilarious job with the play-by-play to Beethoven's Fifth but is that a blueprint? Something tells me I'm misinterpreting Mr. Bergman's point. I desperately hope so.

Ravi "My God, he thinks it's an oboe concerto!" Narasimhan, Redondo Beach, CA

RE: The public view

posted by Jane Deschner | 03/08/05

Yes, you're exactly right. I find people are often "afraid" of their own creativity and imagination. If they can become engaged in some way (whether by performance in a furniture store, embellished fiberglass animals on the street, musical performance in a hospital lobby) in a quality experience, they may develop an interest and gain the confidence to participate. But it has to have substance, be good. Who said art has to be on in a theater or museum or concert hall?

RE: Reader Comments & A Note For Ben

posted by Larry Scripp | 03/08/05

In what ways are the creation, experience, performance, investigation into, or reflection on art and artistic processes not about learning? And since when have the arts not made good use of content knowledge in other disciplines? I think James Catterall and others are making the point as respondents that a large array of cognitively diverse and emotionally charged forms of learning are intrinsic to the arts-whether or not they fall within the boundaries of what we might currently define as arts learning.

Many of us in the field of arts education and arts education research are growing weary of the arguments for or against the so-called secondary learning values of the arts when a wide range of learning outcomes is the inevitable outcome of any highly engaged arts experience. It is especially troubling to see that those who do testify or investigate arts learning outcomes that draw attention to phenomena out of alignment with some arts organizations' notion of primary values of the arts ostensibly become "the enemy" of the best case for the arts. It would just as nonsensical to state the reverse, that is, making the case for the intrinsic values of the arts should be secondary to – or is the enemy of - making the case for the intrinsic value of learning. Neither point of view works if learning values are inseparable from the arts.

Yet, however the case for the arts is framed from these discussions, the success and stature of the arts in our society most likely will depend on an expanded provision and assessment of learning experiences for the millions of children, youth and adults who deserve high quality arts learning experiences as a basic component of our public school and higher education system. Therefore our case for the arts is best directed toward educational leadership responsive to the need for excellent and equitable arts programs that document and provide evidence for broad learning outcomes beneficial to all constituents of public school communities. –Larry Scripp

RE: The Big Begged Question

posted by Sally Everhardus | 03/08/05

I suppose this is a bit of a digression but it has long been my belief that the arts in general could benefit from the sort of national advertising campaign the United Way crafted with the NFL. Seeing an athlete better known for his blocking and tackling prowess interacting with small children not only humanizes the athlete, it puts a face on and brings health and human services into our consciousness.

Approximately half of my school's income is derived through fundraising, but without advertising there would be no programming to support. Effective arts fundraising utilizes both economic and educational impact studies as well as the experiential enrichment gained from participation in any arts activity -- whether as a "do-er" or an observer. Think what the power of a national multi-media campaign could do in raising the level of consciousness of the necessity for the arts in a balanced, multi-faceted society. If we believe that the arts are the keepers and perpetuators of our society, we should ensure their success in the same way for-profit organizations do -- through strong marketing and advertising.

RE: Let's Get Real...

posted by Garth Trinkl | 03/08/05

Bill Ivey writes "Americans are deeply engaged in art, but it's North African hip-hop on satellite radio, vintage jazz on an I-Pod, a cool new suit, a CD from Starbucks, the hot new band at the local pub, some nice looking dishes from Pottery Barn, a Saturday afternoon rehearsal of an amateur bluegrass band, and an argument at the water cooler about the relative virtues of "Sideways" and "Million Dollar Baby."" Mr Ivey also writes "Let's Get Real...".

OK, let's get real. During the duration of this public blog between "people who care", the public radio station in the nation's capital, WETA-FM, will, for the first time in approximately 30 years, no longer feature "NPR News and Classical Music", but will instead feature "24/7 news" from NPR, the BBC, and the "World". While NPR's weekly "SymphonyCast" program (delayed broadcasts from "the great concert halls" of Europe and America, and features "about the personalities behind the classical music world") and weekly delayed broadcasts of the New York Philharmonic (including this week's planned broadcast of Beethoven's Symphony #9 [that's the one with the "Ode to Joy"] coupled with John Adams's Pulitzer Prize and thrice-Grammy Prize winning September 11 memorial "On the Transmigration of Souls") have now been scrubbed, stays of execution have been granted for a popular Folk Music program, "Traditions", and the Metropolitan Opera's Saturday afternoon "global" broadcasts. Excuse me, Mr Ivey, but did the Metropolitan Opera broadcast even one American opera last season, or have plans to broadcast "globally" one American opera next season? I think not.

Satellite radio and iPod's (and those nice plates from the Pottery Barn) might encompass your idea of the place of art in American life in the 21st century; but, as William Osborne astutely points out here, it does not encompass the European idea of art and classical music in the 21st century (or the Chinese and Asian ideas of art and classical music in the 21st century, as witnessed by the high-quality public broadcasting of classical music in Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, and elsewhere in Asia. [Singapore, with its stunning new performing arts center shaped like two durians, now aspires to be the "Switzerland of Asia" both through its wealth, and as a haven for artists -- including classical artists -- from around the world]).

Remember team, "a great nation deserves great art". Just don't expect American citizens, old and young, to hear the musical component of this creativity on public radio stations. Or maybe the foundation world and the U.S. Department of Education can begin to distribute satellite radio receivers and iPods to inner city public students across the nation (beginning, of course, in select communities), as well as Concert Companions to middle-class teenagers. Or maybe Sony Entertainment, under its new Irish CEO, will be the first to develop a combined iPod, cell phone/television, and Concert Companion classical music hearing aid. (Concert Companions are a god-send to American executives and professionals attending classical music concerts, because they can now more easily sneak peaks of their television-cell phones while pretending to be consulting their Concert Companions.)

Tonight, instead of WETA-FM's Choral Masterpieces evening (including American choral masterpieces), perhaps I should try to find some North-African hip-hop on WPFW, before WPFW, a Pacifica station, also goes "news 24/7". [I will grant that WETA-FM, during its day-time hours, did use pre-21st and 20th century music as a drug to help listeners "get through the day when you're having one of those days". "Thank you" WETA-FM, for the abuse, of classical music].

Happy International Women's Day.

RE: The Big Begged Question

posted by Jack Bradway | 03/08/05

Alien vs. Art

Perhaps we are too critical of the public because we perceive their motivations to be the same as ours. While I will not disagree with Ben Cameron (the acting was awful and the script was even worse for Aliens vs. Predator), no one is asking why the film was a hit. This was not a coordinated effort by anti-artists to detract value from other films. In fact, I would be willing to bet that most of the audience for the movie was let down by its dramatic aspects, but captivated by the visual. H. R. Giger's Oscar award winning work designing the aliens and their spacecraft has endured two decades of scrutiny by the public for the very reason that it is quality art. The movie companies are simply milking what was once artistically daring as a source of continued revenue. This is not too different from how Bill Ivey characterizes much of the nonprofit community.

Implying that people who pay money to see a movie such as Alien vs. Predator do not appreciate art only creates a division and the sense that the self-proclaimed artistic community is truly elitist. No one learns to run before being shown how to walk. The practical arts advocate takes the positive and does not spend time bemoaning the artistically uneducated status of the populace. Introduce the visually-oriented Alien vs. Predator fan to the full body of Giger's work, segue that into other surrealists, show them the full collection of your local modern/contemporary museum, ask them to volunteer at the next function, become a member, then a donor, etc...

The point is this: In today's society, most people are inundated with pop culture and receive little exposure to that which is not market researched. Sometimes, nay most of the time, we are better off working the audience backwards from the commercial to the uniquely daring. Moreover, if it seems impossible to figure out why people value an experience, you are probably not experiencing it in the manner. We are all idiot savants in our own way; aliens to each other.

P.S. I agree that we are suffering from "wag the dog" when it comes to governmental policies. Here we are discussing philanthropy and individual involvement when political policies such as tax reform and Sarbanes-Oxley extended to nonprofits may make these all moot points for many organizations.

RE: Let's Get Real...

posted by David Pausch | 03/08/05

Or perhaps you could tune into Minnesota Public Radio's KCMP 89.3 The Current, which recently went through a programming change, but not to all news. To an eclectic blend of independent pop and world and folk music. Music that is not readily heard on commercial radio. Exactly, in my opinion, what public radio is intended to do; provide a gateway and plug to a kind of artistic market gap, to art we couldn't find otherwise, because the market won't bear it as a consumer item.

And, yes, I would readily acknowledge my iPod, Satellite radio, and public radio as gateways to all kinds of creative expression, as are locally funded community radio stations like WORT 89.9 in Madison Wisconsin. The staid and canonical view that the lack of classical music on the dial indicates some kind of cultural gap or slide is exactly the kind of high brow snootiness that increases the gap between the non-profit arts and the general cultural consumer. Yes, sure, Mozart was a great artist, but so are Bill Frisell, Dr. Dre, and Tom Waits. And the latter three, arguably, as speaking more loudly and strongly to the general cultural consumer than our old friend Wolfgang is.

RE: It's not about the spinach

posted by Rory Turner | 03/08/05

Joli Jensen's points are very important I think. I wonder if rather than guarding the particular genres and contexts that are part of the loose rubric of "the arts," those that care for engaged, playful, disciplined, transforming aesthetic experiences could embrace a cultural policy calling for a more broad stewardship?

We want, I may suggest, a more vibrant public culture in all its dimensions. Arts, sports, folklife, many of the other recreational genres, humanities, public sciences, they are all about individual growth and public engagement. Looking at the broad sweep and cultivating public and private strategies to give us more and better cannot help to serve the interests of those committed to those practices that move us the most...

RE: Packaging, Zeal and Varieties of Aesthetic Experiences

posted by Levi Bandanna | 03/08/05

The effective case for the non-profit arts may not, in the end be made by what we say or even write, but by what we do---our actions toward our communities, and our behavior with our fellow cultural workers.

The latest study about outcomes and impact; the newest forms of audience enrichment; and the neatly packaged "vision 2010" are mere surrogates for one simple step.

To turn to one another and explore a few simple questions together...

1. Why are my ushers poorly informed and inconsiderate?
2. Why do my Board members abdicate the very responsibilities I need so desperately for them to accept?
3. Why do we spend more than we have, and then expect others to endorse the practice by giving even more?
4. How did 'zany' enter our vocabulary and creep onto the poster and the self mailer, and why must every drama we do have to 'explore the human condition?'
5. Why should I expect my staff and artists to stay with the company...and become better and better at what they do... without my appropriating resources for their professional development and training?
6. How does being not-for-profit let me off the hook from being adaptive, nimble, and entrepreneurial?
7. Since when is thinking creatively relegated to the artists, and not an expectation of us all---artists, administrators, and trustees alike?
8. When will the doing of art return as our core purpose, and changing communities, fixing education, and altering the local and national economies be relegated to the periphery---or better yet, be assigned to others who are better equipped?

9. When will we learn that true leadership for the new century is found in the authority we give away, and not in the power we hoard?
10. How might we better understand and move through our internal conflicts together, as shutting everything down seems somehow beneath us both?

Whatever the cause, whatever the worth of that cause---and support for the arts is deemed by most to be worthy---it is action that ultimately persuades the fence sitter. We continually self-sabotage our organizational and field-wide credibility by ignoring these and other, even better, questions.

RE: Let's Get Real...

posted by Garth Trinkl | 03/08/05

David, I guess you don't care that WETA-FM, in the nation's capital, also jettisoned "Creators from Carnegie Hall", "Music from Washington", "Music from the Hearts of Space", and "Millennium of Music"? (Love that "Car Talk", huh?) Or that Wayne Horwitz's new oratorio "Joe Hill" (featuring guitarist Bill Frisell, as well as Robin Holcomb, Danny Barnes, and Rinde Eckert) will join Raphael Mostel's and Stephen Paulus's new memorial works for the 60th anniversary of the Allied and Soviet liberations of Europe and the Central European Nazi Death Camps in not receiving broadcasts on public radio in the nation's capital. As for any forthcoming memorial works to U.S. service personnel killed in service overseas, those classical works, too, will not be broadcast on public radio in the nation's capital.

I stand by my staid and canonical view that classical music, especially the world premieres of newly composed American classical music -- whether full-evening works; symphonic works with electronics, non-Western instruments, or experimental acoustic instruments; concertos; orchestral song-cycles; overtures; and children's and family oriented works -- deserves exposure on our national system of public radios.

And at least Amadeus, unlike Dr Dre, kept his obscenity to his private letters.

RE: Let's Get Real...

posted by Louis Torres | 03/08/05

For good reason it is commonly understood that public sectors such as transportation contribute to the quality of our lives and serve everyone's interest. After all, a bus is a bus and a train is a train, and everyone knows perfectly well that both are modes of transportation that enhance our daily lives. But what of art? What is it, and what role does it play in our lives?

Who can blame policy makers, not to mention ordinary citizens, for not fully appreciating that the arts are worthy of support when virtually any object or activity is considered art just because someone in the art world declares it to be?—which is what Bill Ivey does, in effect, when he implies that purchasing a “cool new suit” or “nice looking dishes from Pottery Barn” are among the ways people “engage art.”

Should not the present discussion on making the case for “the arts” be based on an understanding of the term “art” that is rooted in logic (not to mention common sense) so that we all know, really know, what it is what we are talking about, just as we do when we use the term “transportation”?

RE: Nice Thoughts...

posted by Joanne Merriam | 03/08/05

I don't know if it's entirely correct to say that "literary publishing [is] organized for profit." Literary publishers still adhere to all sorts of practices which don't lend themselves to making money: the most obvious being, allowing bookstores to return product they fail to sell. You won't catch manufacturers in other industries doing that.

(This isn't meant to detract from your main point, with which I agree; just an aside.)

RE: Since the hand grenade pin has been pulled...

posted by Jonathan Gresl | 03/08/05

I've been a bit surprised at some of the mention of for-profit artistic products during this fascinating discussion. One comment mentioned Bill Frisell, Dr. Dre, and Tom Waits, suggesting that they are more useful in our 21st century society than Mozart. I might disagree, but the important thing, is that those three artists DON'T need our help. They don't need the non-profit sector. As for the Alien vs. predator reference, the problem is not that the AVP audience doesn't care about 'the arts' It is that the "sideways" and 'hotel rwanda' audience doesn't care about us.

On the subject at hand, I think we should all acknowledge that we are ALWAYS making a case for the art we make. everyday. WE do it when we program Beethoven or Meyerber. or play Chen Yi or Babbitt. We do it when our lobby has a coffee bar hour before the performance of Beckett. We do it when the city puts up banners all around the city about the 'Treasures of Ancient Egypt' at the museum.

We do it when our season brochures tell what we are playing, with our slogans, (the Colorado Symphony's recent slogan "the sound of your life" is one example which makes no sense to me) We can't NOT make a case for ourselves. We can not retreat from the community.

I think one important solution revolves around the audience we have now. The subscribers, the museum pass holders; if we can harness the power of our current audience, and make them feel part of our mission, we can leverage their social contacts into a bigger audience, more funding, and just maybe, some magnificent Art.

RE: Nice Thoughts...

posted by David Pausch | 03/08/05

I think it's useful to point out that, and I'm speaking for Mr. Ivey here, that he means they are incorporated in a for profit model, rather than a non-profit one. An LLC rather than a 501c3.

It's also useful to point out that non-profits are not restricted from making profits, and in fact most will strive for a surplus, like any company. It's just not that easy to accomplish.

RE: Since the hand grenade pin has been pulled...

posted by David Pausch | 03/08/05

As the person who referenced Bill Frisell, Dr. Dre, and Tom Waits, I feel the need to clarify. I did not say that any of those 3 were more useful than Mozart in our 21st century society. I did say that they are resonating more strongly within that society than Mozart. I was not making a value judgement, but rather an observation.

But I do think there is a strong case to be made that popular music, and other popular art forms, now wield the same power to most people as Mozart did in the past. Lest we forget that HE was a popular composer. But often those in the arts (and I am one of them...Ben might even recognize my name...) seem to be of the opinion that the only REAL art is the European-styled "High Arts" or "Fine Arts". And I think this opinion is not only elitist and arrogant, but also harmful. Because, as we hold these opinions, they effect how we program and present, and, I think, how we are then perceived by the public. And the perception is a turn off to some potential consumers. I simply don't think it's our job to make anyone like or appreciate Mozart. It's our job to create meaningful artistic and cultural experiences that audiences can engage with (note I didn't say relate to) in a meaningful way. And if Mozart is not longer doing that for some folks, then it's our job to recognize what is, and why. Not to give them what they want, but to better give them they will engage with positively and meaningfully. And hopefully love. We should strive to be neither didactic or condescending. We should strive to be aware.

RE: From Midori: Returning "Results"

posted by Peter Ellenstein | 03/08/05

When we talk of changing, or even budging, the culture, we realize it is going to take time... a lot of time. I think we need to challenge some of the existing and ridiculous myths that abound in America. For instance, the idea that the arts and education and services are in competition for dollars; they aren't! They are all being squeezed by an outrageously bloated military budget and prison system, both of which have been built on a steady stream of lies that spending more and more money in these areas will actually make people safer. Yet people feel less and less safe all the time. And spend more and more money. How do we combat that kind of illogical thinking, and reclaim a small percentage of the resources that are spent in those areas.

Well, asking people if they've gotten what they paid for, namely safety, is one.

Extended arguments about art and culture are only listened to by those who care about art and culture already. What we need to find is a way of reaching the average American and getting the message across in bite sized chunks.

But knowing that the Iraq war could have funded the National Endowment for the Arts for 1500 YEARS, or helped resolve the Social Security "crises" might help get the point across to some. Many of the people at the grass roots level that we need to convince don't like polysyllables.

Perhaps a few slogans that can help a society raised on sound bites and catchy phrases the opportunity to latch on to some of ours. Here's a few:

1. Make art, not bombs. (apologies to www.girlchef.com)
2. Good art never killed anybody.
3. Would you rather buy an H-Bomb or a thousand symphony orchestras?
4. Land mines can ruin your day, wouldn't you rather have a museum on your block.
5. Prisons separate people, Art brings them together.

I'm sure there are much cleverer ones out there.

Peter Ellenstein, Artistic Director, William Inge Center for the Arts

RE: From Midori: Returning "Results"

posted by Ralph Ivy | 03/08/05

What I'd like is Christo to make me three huge/tall balloons of letters spelling "I V Y" and hoist them over NYC - Manhattan preferably - as a welcoming sign - and then send me a bus ticket. Plus keys to a fifth floor loft down in Tribeca or over in Williamsburg or somewhere similar. No one would have to welcome me. Actually, I'd prefer no one did. It would be supportive, however, if Mayor Bloomberg announced a moratorium on anti-smoking for the length of my stay.

This is off-the-top-of-my-head of what the Public might do to show support for me as an artist. Give me a month or so there, I'm sure I could come up with some projects.

One, it'd be fun to set up of couple blocks of connecting blackboards and several buckets of waterproof color chalks and turn a hundred or so 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders and let 'em draw. Cowboys. Cinderellas. Camels kicking cigarette butts. Whatever. It'd be fun. Maybe more than one adult would join 'em. I would.

I'm 66 years old now, entering "cooter-hood", but I enjoy drawing as much today as I did as a first grader learning how to draw a Flying Tiger shooting down a Zero. (This was 1944) And Wonder Woman. With her magic lasso. Catching the bad guys. She'd make even the Big Bad Wolf run. I liked that too. Still do.

Ralph Ivy

RE: From Midori: Returning "Results"

posted by William Osborne | 03/08/05

I have seen a few comments that prioritize the arts behind more essential social services like health care and transportation. I have lived in Europe for the last 25 years. I have noticed that the societies that

spend the most on things like public health and transportation are also the societies that spend the most on the arts. It is not a question of either/or, but a different philosophy about the use of wealth for the common good.

Show me a country with excellent mass transit and national health insurance, and I will show you a country with adequate public funding for the arts. Show me a country every major city is plagued with massive, neglected ghettos and an almost complete lack of mass transit, and I will show you a country with perennial arts funding problems. The difference is not a matter of wealth, but a difference in concepts of social responsibility.

In Europe, people who are strong advocates for the arts are not called "missionaries." They are called good politicians and responsible citizens.

We will never really solve the problems of arts funding until the core of the support is based on public funding -- as opposed to random gifts from the wealthy. Adequate public funding for the arts will require a significant change in the political and social culture of the United States. I know this is a daunting task, but the arts organizations must unite and develop a long-term strategy for this cause.

Who could organize a genuinely strong national coalition of organizations for the arts? Who could lead this organization in way that would eventually transform our understanding of the arts and the common good of society? In the long term, this is the only real solution.

William Osborne, www.osborne-conant.org

RE: From Midori: Returning "Results"

posted by Margaret Koscielny | 03/08/05

I am an artist from a family of professional musicians. I studied the violin for 12 years, and made the choice to be a visual artist for then past 40 years.

For the past few years, ironically, I have been asked to serve on three boards, sponsoring music activities: Prelude Chamber Music, Inc, which has been operating for 4 years for the primary purpose of coaching young people and adults in a two week summer camp; the music advisory board of the Cummer Museum which offers (and has offered, since 1961) concerts by world class artists, free, to the public; and, a 115 year old music society, Friday Musicale, which offers free concerts to the public, featuring concerts by international, national, and local accomplished artists and local students. (Rachmaninoff, Schnabel, Kresler, for instance, were some of the artists of our illustrious past.)

In my various roles on these boards, I have met people who range from professional musicians, to gifted amateurs, to socialites and business people. Money is always a problem, but it doesn't stop any of the activity of these groups.

In this discussion, there is too much focus on justifying something which doesn't need it. Someone mentioned the defensiveness of the arts community, trying to prove its worth to the general public. The greatest effort should be made with public school boards and civic leaders to make the arts mandatory (as it is, under the "No Child Left Behind Act), using people who are successful in business to advocate; businessmen/women who have had arts experiences in their schooling. A perfect example of such a person, is Robert Jacoby, who, because of having studied the violin for 9 years, remembered the pleasure of it, participates in music by attending concerts, and gave the money for the building of the Symphony Hall in Jacksonville. No one had to sell him on the value of anything, musical.

The three symphony musicians who started Prelude Chamber Music did it because of the pleasure of playing chamber music and the thought that they could share this with youngsters and amateur adults who wished to practice ensemble playing. So simple, and yet, so successful.

It may sound trite to say it, but joy, pleasure, and spiritual nourishment is the basis for these activities, the financial support of businessmen, the free gift of time from volunteers on arts boards. The "problems" come from professional arts administrators who use money which could be going for the programs, to promote themselves. They create a need for support staff for all the fundraising activities, taking money from the product: the art, and putting it where it doesn't create anything but more personnel. A museum where I once worked, which put on 6 exhibits a year, two of them originating from our institution, using only two members of the staff to research, write, and design the exhibits, now has a staff of 56, and only

has two exhibits a year. Misplaced priorities. The money for exhibitions now goes to salaries and building, and the reason for the museum is lost in the flurry of fundraising.

My argument is for simple, small, excellent, and reasonable expenses and salaries. A few people of taste and experience on a board can make the best case for a prospective donor. It's also more efficient.

RE: From Midori: Returning "Results"

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/08/05

I am a past president of a regional visual artist association. Our members want opportunities to exhibit their work and earn a living. Many of those have advanced degrees and have worked for years to maintain their love of art. Most work other jobs to self fund their passions. What we give up with this model is an amazing amount of creative potential.

The "arts" are a basic human form of expression no different than writing or talking. I find it strange that the discussion has found differences between libraries and museums or concert halls. The form of art is less different than the manner that we choose to immortalize it. Free libraries were conceived to provide the "public" with knowledge. Much of their holdings are in the literary art category. Museums and concert halls have seldom had that motive. This seems to be rooted in the idea that collections were private and exclusive. I would think that a Monet should be part of the human heritage not the property of a board of directors in some museum.

Children learn to make art because they are drawn to be expressive, part of their nature. Those who excel are rewarded with praise and advance with their gifts. Like the sports world some succeed while others become admirers or get filled with jealousy or self doubt. We train all our students with this reward system in our schools. Those good at math go into fields that need those skills. We divide our interests and find little common ground or understanding.

Finding support for the arts might be impossible in a democratic society. Where individual self interest is the prime political motivation (social security reform) where the common good is replaced with a individual with wealth, makes it hard to form a consensus on what is of value.

RE: A Matter of Relationships

posted by Thom Pease | 03/08/05

"I must take exception with our host about the worry of attendance as a harbinger of artistic failure. The not for profit was granted its status precisely because there was a visionary sense that there were worthy activities that the market could not support--hence the government's willingness to allow the charitable donation."

This statement for me struck a sympathetic chord in light of the recent changes of format from classical music to news/information among several mixed format public radio stations. As an employee of a public radio station, and a former arts management student, I (and many others) have been asking similar questions about how classical music will sustain itself on-air.

But that is the wrong question for our guiding purpose.

We program classical music not to win audiences, grants, or even increased pledges. We do it to serve underserved audiences that cannot benefit from having a full library of CDs, or subscription tickets to the world's finest musical organizations. Our non-profit status is predicated on the belief that we can offer our communities something unique and valuable, no matter how many or how much patrons or listeners can give.

Like performing arts organizations, public radio stations face many of the same issues, but also many different ones including the fact that music itself is not implicit in the public broadcasting charter.

A true sense of mission, in my opinion, comes from within. What should be offered to the community should come from a direct reflection of an organization's values, and not simply from the largest market share or dollars donated. Those are environmental indicators, but not the reason for being -- especially in the arts.

Thanks for having this wonderful discussion.

RE: More Reader Comments

posted by Colby Chamberlain | 03/08/05

The RAND Report does a disservice both to non-profit cultural institutions and, more importantly, to the art those institutions celebrate. Clearly, arguments for public funding that overlook art itself in favor of its extraneous effects are justifiably troubling, but it is far more distressing that we now find ourselves weighing the merits of an argument dependent on a phrase as amorphous and dated as “intrinsic value.” At best, the phrase suggests that art is dedicated to the preservation of eternal yet benign values (creativity, tradition, spiritual uplift, etc.). At worst, the phrase confirms all suspicions that art’s value consists of hidden qualities that the well-bred have been trained to appreciate as a method of social differentiation.

In its attempt to “reframe” the question of arts funding, the RAND Report stands to distract us from the real issues that the current funding structure presents. Our cultural institutions’ current dependence on government funding, the private sector, and various foundations makes explicit what should have always been obvious – art’s role in political, economic, and social spheres – and no examination of arts funding is complete without acknowledging that this relationship moves in either direction. Rather than simply bemoan the necessity of practices such as corporate sponsorship, it is time for cultural institutions to address these realities head-on – a process that will no doubt shed new light on art’s function and potential in our society.

Since this conversation’s official participants seem at a loss to identify how non-profit cultural institutions differ from their for-profit counterparts, I submit the following proposal: 501c3’s are distinguished by their educational purpose. While for-profit cultural producers are tied to the logic of the market, non-profit cultural institutions adhere to an ultimately intellectual mission and are among the few institutions run by scholars and thinkers where the cost of inclusion runs well below \$30,000-a-year. These institutions are expected to expose the public to artworks, movements, and ideas in a thoughtful, critical, and thorough manner.

Clearly, this is a great responsibility and a worthy role, one with tremendous and manifold significance to our society. Let us never think otherwise.

RE: It's not about the spinach

posted by Tzila | 03/08/05

Thank you for creating this blog. I'm not very involved in the arts, but I always valued my opportunities to see a play or hear a concert. If you are wondering how things can be changed, imagine mixing presentation. Each piece of music has a story. Can you show it in the background, on the ceilings, on the walls, in the air in 3D? Can you give the audience the story at the same time that they hear it played? Can you create a concert that involves the audience in some way besides presenting them with the most perfect sounds? Yes, in Disneyland, they give music and 3d presentation over the water and people flock to it each summer night, and stay for the entire show sequence. I believe that people need to be able to relate to the art, and understand it, in order to get excited and wish to spend an evening with you. I think that most people growing in the USA have very limited exposure and understanding to the classics. Having a concert narrated might not be so bad, like in Peter and the wolf, it helps people imagine the sounds as real, to understand and relate to what they are presented with. I think that the second piece to greater sponsorship by more people is accessibility. If you want people to know what it is they might experience, offering sound bytes on the webpage, and pictures. Advertising it as a party as someone mentioned might help. It could well be a music and wine tasting evening. Maybe advertise these on radio channels that people who listen to popular music listen to instead of advertising it in mostly classical channels. Letting people win free concert tickets by answering some funny questions might help generate excitement about these events. Theme parties like Halloween with very ghoulish music from different types might work, and even offer a haunted house through the lobby to draw people to hear you. What I'm trying to say is, you need to give people who know nothing about this art a way to relate to it, so they can

begin experiencing it as real and hopefully seek it again once they have experienced the beauty of it. There is nothing quite as good as in person experiences, and you have the talents and venues to do it.

RE: Since the hand grenade pin has been pulled...

posted by Andrea T. | 03/09/05

"pitting the arts against other causes IS a trap. For a healthy society, it should be a both/and and not an either/or. "

Exactly. In my professional life I'm advocating and raising money for the arts. In my social life I'm raising money for a 2-day breast cancer walk. Both are valid and yet, no one ever died or lost a loved one from lack of the arts. I love the arts and wouldn't be in the industry if I didn't. My arts organization recently held a bowlathon and I had to decide if I could go to the same people twice for money.

On one hand, my fundraising minimum for the walk is \$2000 and that fundraising effort has global implications. On the other, my professional reputation is affected- and my loyalty measured- by how much I raise for the company.

Unfortunately, people don't have the financial resources and neither does the government.

RE: From Midori: Returning "Results"

posted by Andrea T. | 03/09/05

It's sad that people create art because they have a vision and yet have to compromise their vision for funders.

Fear of biting the hand that feeds us sometimes results in butt-kissing and putting one's vision on the back burner. I'm thrilled when experimental stuff gets made.

RE: A Matter of Relationships

posted by Andrea T. | 03/09/05

"I know no manager who wouldn't rather be in the performance hall or the rehearsal room than in a meeting with a corporation, pleading for arts support."

Maybe I'm misinterpreting, but as an arts manager, I disagree. There are people who create the art and the people who manage it. From an early age I knew that I wanted to be "behind the scenes" rather than on stage. Being on stage confirmed that. The first play that I acted in as an adult reinforced that I possessed the theatre bug, not the acting bug. The more I worked on the production side and in advocacy, the more I wanted to.

In the case of individual artists who must be their own manager, yes, I agree. I see this more in the context of visual arts or literary arts, or maybe even with musicians in bands, than in performing arts. The field of "Arts management" or "arts administration" exists so that there are people to do the fundraising, government advocacy, foundation meetings, etc., It is our (poor paying) job to make a case for the arts. That's why we're managers and not artists.

I was recently in a room of over 300 people arts managers from Ontario, in which Andrew Taylor made a keynote speech. Seeing that many in one room reinforces that we are part of something big and there's enough to make change.

I agree with everything else you said. Well put.

RE: From Midori: Returning "Results"

posted by Beata Moon | 03/09/05

I agree with Midori's suggestion that more artists need to get involved with advocacy and fundraising efforts. As a musician who is deeply involved in aesthetic education, I witness the affect on children when they are introduced to, in this case, classical music, by a living, breathing, composer. I believe that a long term solution in garnering support for the arts would be to make sure that every child is exposed to arts education in the schools. Current marketing practices in this country target children because they know

they are building relationships that can last a lifetime. Nostalgia plays an important role in consumers' loyalty to certain brands. Children who have had creative, hands-on artistic experiences in the school will more likely become advocates as an adult.

RE: More Reader Comments

posted by Garth Trinkl | 03/09/05

Jonathan Gresl: "It is that the "Sideways" and "Hotel Rwanda" audience doesn't care about us."

Agree. In my view, it is a major problem when college-educated Americans do not participate in the higher (more complex than buying plates from Pottery Barn) art-forms. I think that this is an issue that should be addressed by the foundation world and its think-tanks, as well as University and College Presidents. And maybe the President of the United States could attend a symphony concert.

David Pausch: "I simply don't think its our job to make anyone like or appreciate Mozart".

David, I really don't think that this a problem in American culture. All-Mozart and all-Beethoven concerts continue to be very well attended, and the earned incomes from these presentations help to offset lower earned incomes from programs including newer works, including the world premieres of classical works by American composers. In my advocacy work that American orchestras perform five or six world premieres by American composers each season (by composers including such artists as Tom Waits, Bill Frissel, and Eileen Ivers), I have been careful never to criticize orchestral managers' all-Mozart and Beethoven programs (or even their more problematic, all-Wagner and all- R. Strauss programs).

William Osborne: "The difference between [Europe and America] is not a matter of wealth, but a difference in concepts of social responsibility."

Strongly agree.

Thom Pease: "We program classical music not to win audiences, grants or increased pledges. We do it to serve underserved audiences that cannot benefit from having a full library of CDs, or subscription tickets to the world's finest musical organizations."

Strongly agree. Thom, perhaps you could contact C. Ulrich Bader, the progressive Director of Artistic Planning of the National Symphony Orchestra, and Sarah Lutman, the progressive leader at Minnesota Public Radio (I will guess that you know both of them), and see whether the three of you could interest the foundation world in developing a series of tightly focused educational programs, for public radio, on the subject of classical music in the 21st century, which could then be marketed to Sharon Rockefeller and other executives of our nation's public broadcasting system. I think that these programs would need to be closer to Michael Hall's and Simon Rattle's series on 20th century music, "Leaving Home", for the BBC and Channel 4, than to the more specialized "American Maverick" series, produced with the San Francisco Symphony (and which was never broadcast in the nation's capital).

Colby Chamberlain: "non-profit cultural institutions adhere to an ultimately intellectual mission"

Agree. Would that this could be more true in America! Do you think that as the century continues more non-profit cultural organizations will need to partner with educational organizations? (as the Washington Project for the Arts did with the Corcoran Gallery and College of Art, and Orchestra 2001 does in Philadelphia. That is, do you see a time when such groups as Michael Morgan's superb Oakland-East Bay Symphony becomes an adjunct of the University of California at Berkeley, in order for it to maintain its intellectual vitality and commitment to new works of American composers?)

Tzila: "Imagine mixing presentation. Each piece of music has a story".

Tzila, I agree with you that much more could be done by musical organizations in this direction. However, I hope that you are thinking more of Murry Sidlin's multi-media and lecture presentations on music by Verdi, Holocaust-era composers, Shostakovich, and now Britten; or the Théâtre de Complicité's show "The Noise of Time" (based upon Shostakovich's String Quartet #15); and not the San Francisco Symphony's joint appearances with the rock band Metallica. [When I performed in Britten's "War Requiem" with my high school orchestra, on the work's tenth anniversary, we projected the Latin and English texts on a scrim, in different text faces; and projected images by George Grosz and Otto Dix.]

RE: The Big Begged Question

posted by Art Hennessey | 03/09/05

Yes, I agree with you Jack. For-profit films that succeed artistically and commercially have, as of late, found an ingenious way to engage and educate their consumers and audience.

The fully loaded DVD has made rather good film critics out of a large segment of the society. The director's commentary, deleted scenes, and the "making of" featurettes engage people to an incredible extent on just what filmmaking is.

It gives people an expanded lexicon and a way of constructively talking about how films are put together. Some of them are amazingly in depth.

RE: One additional thought..

posted by Doug Borwick | 03/09/05

I have been trying to decide where to wade in and this looks like a good spot. Why is it that a case must be made? If the arts on which this discussion is focusing were a vital part of the lives of the majority of our population there would be no need for this weblog.

In my consulting work, I challenge arts boards with the question, "How are the lives of the people of your community made better by the work you do?" The arts have incredible benefits to offer, giving voice and hope, as Ben says, to communities traditionally ignored by the arts.

However, this is a mode of thinking that is, by and large, not taught to artists and generally unthought by arts boards and management. And, it is threatening to those (like myself) whose training and life-work lie in rarified artistic expression that may not readily translate to those with whom we might hope to relate. To me, the question is not about the "case" to be made for the arts. Rather, it is what are the arts *doing* to make themselves vital to their communities. Good answers to the latter question make the former superfluous.

RE: Expressive logic, and the garage band sensibility

posted by William Osborne | 03/09/05

It is interesting how we refer to arts groups as "non-profits," as if the arts can only be described for what they are not. In Europe, most orchestras, opera companies, theater troupes, and ballet companies are owned and operated by governments. I've seldom heard Europeans refer to arts groups as "non-profits." It's a curiously American way of thinking. We view the arts as if they were something inherently crippled, like one-winged birds.

Most of our arts administrators rise in the profession because they are especially adept at working with these crippled, one-winged birds. Under the American system, which will always be ineffective and underfunded, it is inevitable that capital funds will have to be used for operating expenses. It is inevitable that "periods of contraction" will be recurrent, because the arts will always be starved.

Experimental arts forms will inevitably be problematic, because there will never be adequate funds for even traditional genres. In Europe, funding experimental art is not considered a significant problem, because money is at hand. Many opera houses have dedicated experimental studios. New music groups, such as the Ensemble Intercontemporain in Paris are, owned by the government. The Ensemble Modern in Germany is owned by its members, but is largely subsidized by the state.

Do American arts administrators actually contribute to the long-term problems of funding because they cannot admit that the American system itself is fundamentally flawed? They have developed their careers as doctors for one-winged birds. If the system changed, they and their expertise would no longer be as relevant.

We need these administrators for now, but we might consider eventually getting a bird with two wings -- an adequate system of public funding.

In the meantime, let's watch the doctors for one-winged birds at work.

William Osborne, www.osborne-conant.org

RE: Expressive logic, and the garage band sensibility

posted by Joe Patti | 03/09/05

A week or so ago, Artsjournal linked to a Wired article that talked about people almost having an intrinsic need for art/beauty/meaning/purpose in their lives. I quoted the following bit in my blog:

For companies and entrepreneurs, it's no longer enough to create a product, a service, or an experience that's reasonably priced and adequately functional. In an age of abundance, consumers demand something more. Check out your bathroom. If you're like a few million Americans, you've got a Michael Graves toilet brush or a Karim Rashid trash can that you bought at Target. Try explaining a designer garbage pail to the left side of your brain! Or consider illumination. Electric lighting was rare a century ago, but now it's commonplace. Yet in the US, candles are a \$2 billion a year business - for reasons that stretch beyond the logical need for luminosity to a prosperous country's more inchoate desire for pleasure and transcendence.

Liberated by this prosperity but not fulfilled by it, more people are searching for meaning. From the mainstream embrace of such once-exotic practices as yoga and meditation to the rise of spirituality in the workplace to the influence of evangelism in pop culture and politics, the quest for meaning and purpose has become an integral part of everyday life.

And just recently I saw a great illustration of this as Target Stores rolled out their "Design for All" campaign. They know they can't compete with WalMart on price, but they are plugging in to this craving people have. You can probably buy most of the same stuff at WalMart, but their message is, you will feel better about yourself if you shop here.

Now how the arts can manage to position themselves in the same manner against the convenience of cable TV, DVDs mailed to your home and all the rest, I don't quite know.

If you think back to Maslow's Hierarchy of Need, you know that safety issues like infant mortality will never be superceded by self-actualization activities like the arts, and it is silly to try as has been pointed out. At the same time, those needs Maslow cites are sort of hard wired into the human brain.

While I agree with Phil Kennicott that the current political/social environment may be making people who might have previously been just unfamiliar with the arts into people who are predisposed to view the topic with hate, they too have these deep seated needs. The closest they may ever come to supporting the arts is by attempting to fulfill the need by buying products at Target which in turn supports the arts. (I believe that was one of Ben Cameron's jobs prior to joining TCG.)

I hate to engage in idealistic speculation that implies the utopian theoretical can be translated into the practical so here is what I think might be a doable suggestion which extends Joli's thoughts-

Perhaps the entree for answering this need for potential audiences is the garage band approach rather than the massive performing arts center. Maybe organizations should be putting their money into storefront theatres and stand alone black boxes where insecurities about dress code and etiquette aren't as big an issue because everyone is wearing jeans. (We tell people they don't necessarily have to dress up, but then they arrive at the venue and the veteran attendees are looking snazzy which gives a contradictory message.)

Once people feel comfortable and good about themselves, then you point out that if they enjoyed this, maybe they want to try the mainstage over on 6th Street--or just keep coming back.

The alternative venue doesn't necessarily need to be run by one organization. All the arts organizations of a community might go in and share the costs and use it as sort of an outreach facility. Theatre companies the first two weekends of the month, snippets of opera on the third, chamber music on the fourth.

RE: Expressive logic, and the garage band sensibility

posted by terry cheney | 03/09/05

Re Arguments for the arts: nothing is better than the arts.

"My superiority to nothing has often been remarked upon." A negative assessment the arts often fail to achieve. Why? As more of us are believing it is: first that the arts have been conceived wrongly in public

discussion, and; second that research has been wrongly focused. Asking the wrong questions; delivering predictable answers; and achieving status quo results.

Many people I have talked to recently concur that the old arguments for the arts have not worked. But when stressed, the old arguments surface again: arguments which central agencies (ie treasury departments) can deflate, and which the man in the street finds unconvincing if not irrelevant.

The momentum to a new research universe is welcome. What is art, what does it mean, to whom, and, why, if at all, does it need extrinsic support. I like (some) art. My emphasis as a personal and social observer is on not what art is, but what art does, and what art does is to me the place of 'culture' in society: culture in life is the impact ("consumption") of art. In Canada at least culture bureaucrats are not responsible for impact, they are responsible for supply (typically in response to American supply). This may have to do with art, it has nothing to do with culture.

I think you cannot (or should not) fiddle with art. What I sense someone should be studying is "culture" – the consumption, the role of art, which does involve public policy, public policy not just as direct or indirect financial support, but recognition, endorsement, if not exhortation.

The role of arts and arts participation is a focal case in point. The 1970s were full with the projection of the age of leisure and the promise of the age of culture. A more educated populace was to leave sports and movies and run to museums and performing arts. In light of the decline of the baby boom baby shampoo was history!

Instead, twenty years later, movies are booming, baby shampoo has been rebranded, and the arts are seeing stagnant audience figures. In some cases the old arts with the old arguments are bailing a sinking ship. Per capita public spending on museums and art galleries in Canada has increased three-fold in real terms over the past generation: per capita attendance has increased not one iota. My conjecture is the role museums might want to play is being played, just not by museums. The culture policy research world has been reflecting, I guess, the rear-mirror approach to seeing the present and the future.

Art may still be significant to people, "the arts" are increasingly less so. This raises a key evaluation factor: for how many people do the arts have to be important, for art to be important? Why, as is reflexively raised by those from the arts, do the arts have to be uniquely important? (If so, can you demonstrate it: if not re-formulating the arts in society with other partners would seem the logical consequence.)

My personal belief is it is not bums in seats but brains in motion that matter, and these do not have to be all brains in motion, let alone the spurious indicator of value of lots of bums in seats.

I also conjecture the affiliation with other humanistic services, while needed, is also irrelevant. Health assures life; education assures a job; police assure security – they all work to guarantee a physical life exists. Culture works to make that life worth living. Not on the same spreadsheet in my view.

P.S. taking your book to Italy!

RE: From the "media" perspective

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/09/05

If one size doesn't fit all then we might look at the consumption of art as a spiritual need. Target and the big box stores test their products with focus groups. I am tone deaf so my spirit is not moved as much by music. When a child I was called "eagle eye" because I could spot a pin in a lawn. The gifts we have as humans might lead us to the arts.

Logic tells me that while many like what I make few can afford to pay for the time it takes me to produce a painting or sculpture. When I show in an exhibit at a non profit I am proud to be included. The affirmation wears thin when I return home and have to pay my bills. If more people see my art it still doesn't change my income.

When artists were shamans they were cared for by the community. Today one seems to need a product line to market. Twenty paintings of the same look to fill a space....

This discussion has been terrific. I've been challenged to try and follow all the threads.

RE: At a Turning Point?

posted by Bitsy Bidwell | 03/09/05

And speaking of Coyote.....What would Coyote do(WWCD)? You can insert your favorite mythical jester figure in my question, but it remains a good question. The jesters of the world have provided wisdom, but with cleverness and humor. They have made things work, but sometimes without paying attention to the prevailing laws or rules. Usually they switch the point of view. In short, Coyote is a creative meddler, given to surprise approaches and solutions. Let's pretend to be Coyote as we talk about this issue. We have facts, and research, and data. Now all we need is the twist, the spin, the message that suits the various audiences we need to address. We are 'artistic', after all. The other thing that Coyote does is get different viewpoints working in competition, but toward the same goal. Why isn't there a common thread to the fine arts and the not-so-fine arts, and community building and philanthropy and public funding and market-driven economies discourse? What, exactly, are we arts folks all 'het-up' about, anyways?!

Yesterday I watched Dr. Phil (yes, I watch Dr. Phil even though I love the arts)explain to a controlling husband that underwear on the floor is not major issue in a good marriage. Well, intrinsic or extrinsic or however you want to put it....what is the public benefit of the arts that even John Q. Public can and should understand? What IS the major issue? Are the arts too powerful or too destructive of the public good or too something else? Or are they simply pocket-lint (like our budgets) that has no virtue?

We need to hone this discussion to find some new jumping-off places that will explain our evangelical fervor about the arts. Then, maybe, we can craft (yes, craft or create...but, not necessarily document or validate)a compelling message that can be adapted to various audiences. We're all on different pages. As Jim Kelly says, parks as a public benefit are rarely questioned. What's the message that will give the arts this kind of acceptance? Maybe what we are seeking is not a definitive case for the arts, not THE case for the arts, but some new suggestions for presenting multiple cases for the arts. Some audiences need a brief-case, others a train-case, and a few a makeup-case. What do these look like?

RE: At a Turning Point?

posted by Louis Torres | 03/09/05

Since Bill Ivey mentioned the NEA, I would like to raise an issue about the Endowment that has long concerned me. First, some relevant observations.

In his introduction to this "public conversation" (an apt phrase), Doug McLennan asks: "Have we neglected what 'Gifts of the Muse' terms the 'missing link': the individual, private experience of the arts that begins with early engagement and intense involvement, and that is the gateway to other, more public benefits? Is there a better case to be made for the arts?"

For many years—first as a public school teacher of English, as well as of art and music appreciation, and for the past two decades as an arts critic, editor, and independent scholar—I have argued that the terms "art" and "the arts" (as in the present context) properly refer only to the traditional major forms, and that the individual, private experience of the arts is the only reason the arts deserve support.

Jacques Barzun's thoughts are worth noting here. In a 1978 lecture delivered before the National Art Education Association, he urged art teachers to trust their common sense in considering "the idea of art." "What do you think it covers?" he asked, before suggesting music, painting, sculpture, dance, and literature [i.e., fiction, poetry, and drama]. (Two decades later, another speaker told the annual meeting of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, that the National Endowment for the Arts was "charged with bringing [guess what?] music, dance, theater, literature and painting to the American people." That speaker, by the way, was none other than Bill Ivey, NEA's chairman at the time.)

Barzun went on to say that the arts should be taught in the schools, but he implicitly excluded such activities as film, journalism, broadcasting, photography, weaving, and pottery-making (all among the spurious art forms often supported by the NEA). More germane to this discussion, he was critical of what would now be referred to as the "instrumental" benefits and slogans of arts education, such as "transmit the cultural heritage . . . supply an outlet for self-expression. . . acquaint the child with foreign cultures . . . engender general creativeness . . . build ethnic identity [and] enhance problem solving." Sound familiar?

"It is all Inflation," Barzun concluded. "It inflates the plausible or possible into the miraculous." (For a fuller discussion of these points, see *What Art Is*, the book I co-authored. Interested readers might also want to consult the full text of Barzun's address, "Occupational Disease: Verbal Inflation," reprinted as Chapter 8 of his book, *Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning*.)

If there is a case to be made that the arts deserve government support (and I do not think there is), then at least there ought to be a better "definition" of what qualifies as art than the one that the endowment has operated under since its inception. And there ought to be more forthright representation of the sort of contemporary work it often funds. Much of it would not be recognized by most ordinary people as having anything to do with art, or the arts.

Just last year, for example, the NEA supported the making of an experimental "documentary film and installation work [entitled 'Milk'] that will examine the controversies surrounding the many uses of this fluid food." The film explores such topics as the health of children and the relationship between consumers and industry. Still other documentaries on topics ranging from stem cell research to the death penalty have been funded in recent years by the NEA—whose slogan, ironically, is "A Great Nation Deserves Great Art." The number of grants made by the endowment, in every category and discipline, to support projects unrelated to art—i.e., the "fine arts"—is astounding. If the general public, and Congress, only knew.

Louis Torres, Co-Editor, *Aristos* (www.aristos.org), Co-Author, *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand*

RE: Music is the Best Advocate for Music

posted by cory jaeger-kenat | 03/09/05

The topic of accessibility is indeed the crux of the issue. Let me give you an example that just happened to me this month.

I am a professional artist who has been working diligently in the field for the last decade. I've shown in various cities around the nation, compiled a hefty resume, (yada, yada). I even had a solo show in my hometown's museum, which is quite substantial in the region in which I live.

Although I had been represented by galleries, I must confess that I got sick and tired of the whole system and last year decided to represent myself. I wanted to bring my work to an entirely different audience, not the typical "art-going" public. I also wanted my prices to go down in order to encompass a younger, more passionate audience.

Well, I had my first sell-out show this month. I placed my work in a coffee-shop--the same shop where I'd had my first show as a young art student. I couldn't believe the response. Because of the price scale, young people snapped up the pieces, and I was pleasantly shocked to see that even some young men purchased my most biting feminist works. It was even more flabbergasting because many of these people had never seen my work or heard of me--even though I had received ample newspaper coverage for ten years and had shown in the most prestigious galleries in the area. I cannot tell you how refreshing it was to converse with people who were just fired up about what they saw, in an environment devoid of cocktails and conversation that required an MFA to understand.

I make it my policy as an artist to communicate warmly and clearly with those who view my work. I believe it the job of my art to communicate, but I also encourage questions. So many people don't go into galleries and museums because they think they'll make an ignorant comment or that their opinion of the work will be looked down upon. I think artists have forgotten that a primary part of their job is to establish connection and clear communication with their audience. Abstract and mysterious art is great, but I expect an artist to be able to speak about it clearly and thoughtfully.

I think we also need to get art out of the designated "art area" of town. Let's get rid of some of the stuffiness. I live in a moderately sized city, and I think it's interesting to note that this coffee shop was only a couple blocks away from the chic galleries--yet these people had never seen my work.

How about an art piece in a WalMart parking lot? Or in the median of a freeway? I wonder if art would start becoming important in our society if it was something that we truly lived with, rather than something only to be approached in a rarified gallery or museum.

RE: So let's get real - continued...

posted by Peter Linett | 03/09/05

Kudos to Adrian Ellis for bravely turning some of the blame for the arts' current justification struggles back on the arts themselves. After all, it's not just the success of those instrumental arguments with funders that has led to the overbuilt, undercapitalized situation he observes—it's also the mysteriously widespread conviction among trustees and leaders of arts organizations that the right move is always, if you can somehow pull it off, to expand.

The museum building boom of the last decade or so may be the most visible sign (see Eric Gibson's piece this week in the Wall Street Journal), but theater and dance companies have also been adding spin-off spaces and moving to larger houses, and orchestras continue to press their musicians for longer seasons even as they struggle to sell the tickets to the current ones.

Adrian and the RAND report note that demand hasn't kept pace with supply, and the audience literature cements the point: the NEA's 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts found that the percentage of adults attending the arts held pretty steady over the last 20 years ("no statistically significant differences," except in literature). It's just that that audience is being diluted in our ever-filling cup of culture. But we still hear arguments, even from this terrific cyber-assemblage, which locate the problem outside the arts (extrinsic benefits, why not extrinsic blame?): that the decline in government and corporate support and private donations has left arts orgs on shaky ground and forced them to take the battle to earned revenue, and that the "demands on leisure time and discretionary expenditure" (this from Adrian) have taken their toll on arts groups' balance sheets.

Is it possible that it's simpler than that? If we take Adrian's own point seriously, don't we have to ask whether the growth of the arts is, in a sense, the only problem? If the funding sources which fueled (but perhaps didn't motivate) the tremendous growth of "product" in the arts marketplace over the last few decades hadn't done so—in other words, if growth had been constrained by, or at least proportional to, audience demand and earned revenue—then the arts today wouldn't need to worry about how to make the best case for themselves in order to attract even more support.

I'm sympathetic to the obvious point that nonprofit arts organizations shouldn't have to wait for audience demand to validate their plans. And it's only natural to get excited about the expansion of a sector we all love. But Adrian reminds us that sustainability matters too, and in the long run matters more.

Meanwhile, to the wish-list of research called for by some of the panelist-bloggers, let's add that somebody ought to quantify the growth on the supply side and try to put in a historical context. Where's the foundation willing to support that?

RE: At a Turning Point?

posted by Ravi Narasimhan | 03/10/05

Bill Ivey writes:

"And, at the same time, the expanded reach of copyright, mergers in art and broadcasting industries, and the loss of independent book and record retailers have narrowed the gates through which most artists build careers and through which most citizens consume culture."

I hope I am not taking the term 'consume culture' too literally. I think the general goal is to have more people consumed by 'culture' the way so many are consumed by, say, sports. If that is true, we would do well to see how the sports world does it. It isn't just having great players achieving at incredible levels. When the equipment is on the hands and feet of the fans, their hearts and minds follow. This is especially true of the young. The problem is that there are two jobs to be done: Getting meaningful participation in art, drama, and music back into the lives of young people _and_ making sure that there will be a generation of artists ready to engage them when they grow into adulthood. The problem becomes maddening because there apparently isn't enough money to do either well. Corpore sano is taken as a fundamental right - no justification is necessary. Mens sana takes the back seat - no justification seems sufficient.

Ravi Narasimhan, Redondo Beach, CA

RE: Looking For Solid Ground

posted by William Osborne | 03/10/05

In his summary of yesterday's comments, Doug asks, "And if things are so bad, where are the wide-scale failures? Where are the orchestras and theatre and museums going out of business?" And he adds, "Maybe that's the real sign of distress - that we'd rather allow persistent artistic declines than an honorable death."

Of course we want to maintain high standards, but we hardly have an over-supply of genuinely professional orchestras and opera companies. And I think it is absolutely ridiculous how many of our best orchestras have had to go out of business, only to regroup and start over after having lost many of their best musicians and base public. A few recent examples have been the San Diego Symphony, The Florida Philharmonic, and the Kansas City Symphony.

We only have about 20 orchestras that have genuinely full-time, year-round seasons and with salaries that musicians can actually live from. International comparisons show this is an extremely low per capita ratio. (As I mentioned earlier, the ratio in Germany is 23 times higher.) Bill Ivey mentions that we now have 350 orchestras, but what he doesn't tell us is that about 250 of them are part-time community orchestras that do not even approach professional standards.

Let's look at a mid-range example. The New Mexico Symphony is a fairly good orchestra. Even though it is based in Albuquerque, which has a metropolitan population of 500,000, and serves the whole state with a population of about 1.2 million, the base pay for musicians is around 15 thousand a year. The tutti string players often receive considerably less, which means that the sections, to put it frankly, are often actually filled with amateurs and semi-professionals. The orchestra can't even have daytime rehearsals because most of the musicians have to have day jobs to support themselves. And touring is a problem, because it means many of the musicians have to leave their "real" jobs for a few days. The orchestra has had recurrent financial problems, and the musicians have had to go through long periods without being paid at all. The New Mexico Symphony is hardly an exception. In fact, this abysmal situation defines the norm for many, if not most regional US orchestras. Naturally, the artistic standards are deeply affected, even though these orchestras serve a very large part of our population.

And even many of our better orchestras often have grotesquely low pay scales. Here are some examples.

Buffalo \$36,280
Charlotte \$30,000
Colorado \$36,246
Florida \$26,454
Honolulu \$26,400
Jacksonville \$31,664
Kansas City \$33,675
Louisville \$32,268
Nashville \$30,768
New Jersey \$38,772
Phoenix \$33,680
Rochester \$36,490
San Antonio \$33,150
San Diego \$25,750
Virginia \$22,802

How are musicians in San Diego, one of the world's richest cities, supposed live on \$25,000 a year with California's real estate prices? Why do all of these musicians worry for their job security because the bankruptcy of the orchestra is always a real possibility? Why do we take our most gifted artists, who are graduates of our most elite music schools such as Curtis, Juilliard, New England and Eastman, and pay them salaries that not even a car mechanic or truck driver would accept? All of these orchestras serve very wealthy metropolitan areas of millions of people and have tax bases that could easily pay decent salaries.

This situation is ridiculous and shameful, and yet even here among the people who are supposed to be representing us, we are told we need to go through yet another period of “contraction.” Are you telling us that the San Diego, Florida and Kansas City Symphonies went bankrupt because they were mediocre? These are top-tier orchestras with our best-trained and most gifted musicians that draw excellent conductors and famous soloists.

And let’s not even begin with our lack of opera. Even cities like Philadelphia with a population of 4 million, or Los Angeles with a metro population close to 15 million, have operas with only about 6 week seasons. And in other large metropolitan areas like Phoenix, Toledo, or Knoxville, the best we can hope for is an occasional slap-dash production with pick-up musicians in a rental facility. Compared to Europe, it is so hokey it boggles the mind. Every European city with even half the populations of Philadelphia and Los Angeles has a full-time opera house.

This lack of work and respect is why American musicians, as a matter of course, look abroad as a possibility for employment. American orchestra musicians even turn to countries like Mexico, Singapore, South Africa, and Venezuela to find work. There is not another industrial country in the world that treats its classical musicians this way – not even Canada, the UK, South Africa, Spain or Greece.

Maybe it’s time we realize how low our overall standards really are, and how badly we treat our artists. I guess that will take some time, when even the members of this panel seem not to understand.

But I don’t want to be entirely negative. I’ve been watching the activities of Americans for the Arts fairly closely. I loved their ad campaign and the merger with the Arts & Business Council seems promising. I think their ideas and long-term strategies are excellent, especially in the public sector. I wish them all good success, even if it will take a long time to reach their ultimate goals.

William Osborne, www.osborne-conant.org

RE: Looking For Solid Ground

posted by Doug Borwick | 03/10/05

The total of available arts events **is** ample. Even in the hinterlands, the issue of availability has been vastly improved by forty years of grassroots-oriented national arts policy. The question is what arts and for whom. While all generalizations are inherently false, the bulk of the arts about which we are speaking here have their roots in a social and economic environment that are foreign to most residents of the U.S. They do not connect with people because of the cultural language barriers that must be overcome to appreciate them. (Yes, of course the connections can—and should—be made, but the expenditure of time and money to do so is considerable.)

What there is a lack of is reflective art—a term of my own devising, think “art that feeds the soul” (see www.nfpv.com/artsarticles/reflectivevisceral.html)—specifically designed to speak to the person on the street. Much wonderful work is being done—see www.communityarts.net for examples. Americans for the Arts is bravely advocating for more community-based arts activity. However, our arts infrastructure and funding mechanisms are tightly tied to “establishment arts” of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. If our arts are not sufficiently speaking to the American public perhaps we should stop blaming the victim—the public—and consider what we might be doing differently.

RE: Looking For Solid Ground

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/10/05

Change will come and this forum is part of the solution. What were the chances that an artist from a suburb in America could join a discussion with national leaders in the arts ten years ago?

Going to museums and concerts one gets lost in the crowd, if you had a friend in high places you might be seen. While the internet has transformed our world it will still be years before we feel the impact. Shopping patterns have changed and news reading has changed. How will the new medium change the way the Arts connects with audiences? GPCA in Phila. started offering discount tickets on their web site. Has it made a difference?

The museums have cut back staff and numbers of shows. Is that a failure? With the widening gap between wealth and poor where is the middle ground. Cities and suburbs, red and blue are we not divided by the hold on to the past? The cities want to maintain their cultural center while the suburbanites spend their nights watching HDTV.

When I was in elementary school there was a program that brought paintings to the school. Good but not great art. I remember going to the museum once or twice, that's all. I did have a great aunt who was an artist who taught me how to draw. It seems that all things important happen on a very personal level.

My suggestion: help artists make art, trust that some good will come of it. Have faith that people will find something to love if given the chance. A Creative Capital Fund would be nice.

Today I'll be sanding and finishing an old salt box to pay my bills.

RE: Looking For Solid Ground

posted by William Osborne | 03/10/05

There are a couple problems with the logic of Doug's argument.

1. We give people no opportunity to hear live classical music, and then blame them for not appreciating it. The fact is, Europeans would also not bother with orchestras and operas if they did not have an educational and cultural system that supports these forms. People appreciate the arts when they are a living part of their communities and educational systems.
2. I am all for newer, more modern, more American, and more relevant art forms. (I am, after all, a composer devoted to experimentation.) But I have noticed that the societies that support the most innovations in the arts, are also the societies that invest most strongly in traditional forms. Innovation is best supported when it comes from an infrastructure that supports the arts as a whole, both new and old.

The best alternatives to opera, for example, are coming from the countries that most support traditional arts, because they have funding structures that also finance artistic innovation. A good example is the Munich Biennale for Music Theater.

William Osborne

RE: The public view

posted by Briana Flinchbaugh | 03/10/05

On the contrary, I only ever go to the theater, concert, opera, ballet, or museum because it is fun - and I am a regular subscriber to all of the above. Perhaps a "heightened sense of psychological reality" is what is fun about the experience in the first place. I don't think fun and entertainment need to be divorced from the other intrinsic benefits discussed - I think they enhance them. I don't think we will ever convince new audiences to experience the arts because it is enlightening, spiritually moving, etc. if we can't also say "by the way, it will be fun."

RE: Looking For Solid Ground

posted by Garth Trinkl | 03/10/05

William, thank you for representing working artists so articulately in your postings here this week. Given that Douglas McLennan knew of your scholarly and advocacy work (if not your creative musical work), I was surprised to learn, when I found out about this conversation on Tuesday, that you weren't included by Mr McLennan as a prime, rather than as a secondary, participant of this American foundation sponsored discussion. Your voice, as is Midori's voice, is exceptionally relevant here. Maybe Mr McLennan felt that having twelve prime participants would have been too many, and that one working artist and thinker was enough.

I too was struck by Douglas McLennan's comment about how "Maybe ... we'd rather allow persistent artistic declines than some honorable deaths." I wonder whether he is referring to the "honorable deaths" of some American artists, as well as the "honorable deaths" of some American non-profit orchestras, opera companies, public radio stations, ballet companies, regional theater companies, and "multi-cultural

arts centers". (Weren't American Broadway houses and opera companies, historically, "multi-cultural arts centers"?) I hope that we do not read about a rash of "honorable deaths" of American artists commencing with the completion of this discussion.

Thank you for pointing out that working, often impoverished, American artists do not appreciate American policy leaders, at the highest levels, first taking away fellowships to individual American artists (but not to individual American scholars or scientists), then using scarce American foundation money to plot the "contraction" of the American arts "industry", and then musing on, from their ivory towers, persistent artistic decline of, and honorable deaths within, American culture.

I wonder whether Mr McLennan considers the Metropolitan Opera to be in persistent artistic decline, or the National Symphony Orchestra (in Washington, D.C.) to be in persistent artistic decline, or the national public television and radio systems to be in persistent artistic decline?

[A Metropolitan Opera Biennale for New Music Theater? Now there is an idea that you don't hear talked about in the New York foundation-world, or by the NEA!

And I agree with Charles Hankin that a Creative Capital Fund would be nice, and might prevent the "honorable deaths" of American individual artists.

["I am certain that after the dusk of centuries has passed over our cities, we too will be remembered not for victories or defeats in battle or in politics..."]

RE: More Readers...

posted by Derek | 03/10/05

I believe there have been many excellent points and insights from the panelists and commentators, but what appears to me to be more present than ever is a lack of consensus regarding what the "the arts" are and what exactly it is we are trying (or should be trying) to achieve. How can we possibly be advocates of the arts and communicate their value to the public and government, if we can't be clear and consistent in describing what "the arts" are?

If we want to move forward, the arts discussion needs more focus than ever before. We all need to take a step back and work towards defining what "the arts" entails, as one of the panelists mentioned. Without a more clear and consistent definition of "the arts," the arts will remain enigmatic as will their place in society.

Once we figure out what "the arts" are, then the task is to evaluate where the arts currently exist in American culture, because the arts, depending on how we define them, are not the be all and end all of culture in this country (in fact, I would argue they are currently a shrinking part of American culture).

We can't move forward if we don't where we're starting from. If we know our starting point, we can more easily set an optimistic, yet achievable goal(s) for the arts, be it more funding, accessibility, whatever. It is then from our starting point that we can define the problems (I personally prefer challenges) the arts face in reaching our goal(s). Clearly (Specifically) defining the problems will allow for more effective solutions.

For example, if we say the arts need more funding, we will get a broad array of solutions with more than one focus, so how do we choose one and do we get any effective solutions upon which we can act?. And what resources are wasted looking for so many solutions? If we say the arts need more government funding, the list of potential solutions will narrow in focus.

We can take it a step further, to specify local, state, or federal government, and then to which department do we make the case, and so on. The more specific we get in defining the problems the arts face, the more specific the possible solutions we get will be; increasing ability to create and implement plans of action and affect change.

RE: Looking For Solid Ground

posted by Charlie Rathbun | 03/10/05

From the trenches; Taking a break from preparing legislative profiles to contribute two cents. Legislative profiles, incidentally, are something we do to provide a summary of awards and funded projects, by legislative district, so that our legislators can see the direct impact of arts funding on their constituents.

Each profile is a slim folder which includes some nice photographs and a featured project or two with an indexed history of awards in their district.

To hand one of these to a unfamiliar legislator is to see, more often than not, a dramatic change of demeanor and an enthusiastic request for MORE. We greet each of our new council representatives with such a packet. Not only is this important information to share with our leadership, it has served to win us advocates in every corner of the county (our world). If we are speaking about public support of the arts, then we are speaking about winning over our elected officials one by one, and working proactively with their community to stimulate cultural involvement.

We have reached out in every way we know how, through education programs, community arts initiatives, a touring network, a local arts agency consortium, coalition building in all geographic areas of our county, involving our councilmembers whenever possible, engaging their interest and participation. We don't expect every councilmember to be an advocate. We do try to move each along the relative scale of awareness so that at least the oppositionists are comfortable deferring to their advocate colleagues.

We have found that our most effective advocates always make their strongest case when speaking from their personal experience with art, always. It is hard to argue against informed passion.

RE: Looking For Solid Ground

posted by Jan Yager | 03/10/05

Ask An Artist

As a professional artist (and stakeholder), I am profoundly concerned with how the issues facing artists and the arts community are tackled. Clearly, it will take more than generous funding and earnest, methodical, well-intended scholars to unravel and pose solutions to the problem of the arts in America.

RAND Research in the Arts' "Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts," exposes the challenge all text-biased scholars face as they attempt to translate and interpret visual and visceral concepts into words and numbers. Art is a unique language, and requires the translation skills of native speakers (artists). And, I resent the fact that artists – even within the arts community itself – are not valued enough to be considered "experts" and consulted on such critically important issues.

For me the Missing Element in the acknowledgements and bibliography are the intuitive visual thinkers able to read between the lines of the literature. A snap survey of actual artists would quickly disprove the hypotheses that submersion in the arts results in higher test scores. And looking for better (or worse) behavior, physical and/or mental health, and/or economic or community benefit is just as lame.

Ask an artist, if the uniquely compelling power of art is transmitted through brief, passive and/or virtual encounters? Yes, performers and their audiences – be it baseball or violin – grow out of consistent, sustained, early exposure, with lots of "hands-on" practice. But to be fully engaged (some say "hooked") at the deepest level – the level of art –requires that it spark creativity through as many senses as possible, and quench the insatiable human need to make sense of oneself. Without that visceral "high" there will be no buy in and no repeat customers.

Bill Ivey refers to arts advocates as "missionaries." Indeed, the notion that a case can be made for the arts without asking professional artists (the aborigines)– is colonial. Let's stop wasting precious time and money churning up the same old words. Let's all put our minds together to solve this once and for all.

I can think of countless very measurable benefits in fostering a visually, artistically, and mechanically literate society.

We all know in our gut that it is of urgent national importance, and essential for the health and well being of this country. Everyone benefits when healthcare workers can see subtlety in x-rays, and ultrasounds, companies design to compete internationally, soldiers redesign armored vehicles, and policy makers see their way out of a box. Each of us benefits, when all citizens, are trained to see what's there – and trust their instincts about what's not there.

Our children instinctively demonstrate that linking our minds, our eyes, our hands and our hearts is a basic human drive, and essential survival skill. The arts, craft, and design are powerful tools for peace, prosperity, diplomacy and an enliven democracy that belong in every American home.

- Jan Yager lives in Philadelphia, PA. Her work was recognized with a solo show at the Victoria & Albert Museum, and numerous grants and awards including a Pew Fellowship in the Arts.

RE: Looking For Solid Ground

posted by Nancy Levinson | 03/10/05

My latest post on Arts Journal — "Cases and Effects" on Pixel Points — has been inspired by this conversation. The profession of architecture isn't really part of the non-profit arts community (although a lot of firms are de facto non-profits), but it's certainly been confronting the question of whether to make "intrinsic" or "instrumental" arguments for the value of the work. The "Bilbao Effect" — which has insidiously underscored the idea that Frank Gehry's Guggenheim is valuable less for its architectural achievements than for the tourism it generates — is a good (or bad) instance of an instrumental argument for a building. As such it's also, I think, a symptom of the extent to which market culture has become the pervasive culture of our era. But to get to the point here: I agree wholeheartedly with what many of the conversation participants have been saying: that the strongest and most convincing arguments for the arts concentrate on their intrinsic benefits.

RE: Looking For Solid Ground

posted by Derek | 03/10/05

As I believe was mentioned earlier in the week by one of the panelists, I think one of the strongest solutions presented for the arts is a serious marketing effort, working to shape and/or shift perceptions of the arts. Even if the arts had significantly greater funding levels and support, and there was a symphony, theater, opera company, and museum in every major city in the U.S.; I cannot be convinced that we would see more people in the theater, concert hall, at the museums, or even involved with the arts at all. Availability is one thing, Involvement is another.

It seems the American public is responding to that which is flashy, hip, modern, new, unique and different (the next big thing), after all modernization has been part of the forefront of the evolution of the United States. And the majority of the entertainment industry is providing exactly that. The traditional arts, in a society that pushes modernization, has quite a challenge. So, do we want to have more support and participation from the public? If we do, we must be aware of the not just our own views of the arts, but societal perceptions and the messages our competitors in the entertainment and other nonprofit industries are sending to the public about the traditional arts as well. Recently I saw an MTV ad on television that, to me, portrayed the arts as the opposite of "cool" and hip, and extremely formal and snooty. Is this the way we want youth to see the arts?

I've noticed I haven't yet addressed Doug's question about suggestions/strategies regarding the arguments we make. All I know, is that the easiest way to make the case is to try to think like those to whom we are making the case; learn what their reservations are about the arts, what arguments are being crafted against the arts, who is influencing the gatekeepers and what do these influencers think and what arguments do they use about the arts. If we can't identify arguments being used against the arts, and focus on overcoming them, the only way we'll get anywhere is if someone accidentally stumbles on the answer; and that will obviously not provide a long-term solution. The success and proliferation of the arts depends not only on our ability to be creative and express ourselves through art, but just as importantly, on our ability to listen and be proactive.

Let's question ourselves and our logic, find potential holes in our arguments and work to fill them before we make the case. A strong case upfront will have more impact than a one needing a major second, third, or fourth revision.

RE: Greg Sandow Weighs In...

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/10/05

General Motors was very smart, with the help of General Eisenhower. They destroyed a whole transportation industry.

I feel the "arts industry" needs to look at all the parts and get beyond the competition that will lead to a blood bath. Artists are a part, the foot soldiers if you will, who take the direct shots. The competition for support, a small part of the battle field, leads to all kinds of atrocities. Greed for the small handouts leads some to loose all ethical values. Back stabbing, cheating and stealing is nothing new. Art is part of human intellect, a basic human characteristic, not an acquired taste.

Both Hitler and Churchill made art, one seen as right and one wrong. Was art making a determining factor. Some have mentioned Dewey and the conflict that seems to linger is one of high art and low art. I return to the personal because my experience teaches me. When I was an art major in high school I, like many teens, loved cars. My goal was to build a better car then a Ferrari. In college I met an art professor who helped me see, right or wrong, that what I loved was the form. I therefore was lead to make sculptures not cars. Was this a good decision? Part of the reason I chose sculpture was the fact that I didn't want to spend twenty years designing door handles. GM might have had some cool ones if I hadn't followed the other path.

We as artists can choose to work together or we can choose to act like a bunch of sharks in frenzy.

RE: The public view

posted by Misti Hickling | 03/10/05

I'm quite pleased Jim Kelly's organization focuses on increasing audiences exposure to and participation in the arts. Living in Seattle, I see the results of his labor every day. And I'm thankful to live in a vibrant and cultured community.

RE: Does milk do a body good?

posted by Misti Hickling | 03/10/05

Nice comparison. Art needs a national ad campaign similar to the "Got Milk" launch. The primary objective should be to change the perception of the target audience from 'art is for elitists' to 'art is for every day man'. It should allow the audience to experience art in their own way.

RE: From Midori: Returning "Results"

posted by Michael Newberry | 03/10/05

Midori suggests that more artists advocate for the arts, but how about taking it a step further? Instead of just lobbying for support, shouldn't artists aspire to positions in political offices and funding entities where they can make these decisions themselves? It is not enough to try and convert our Senators and foundation officers into full-blooded arts enthusiasts. If we're distressed over the state of arts education in our schools, then we should choose one of our own to sit on a school board and represent our interests. Some of us must answer a call to become policymakers and shape our communities in a manner influenced by our time spent creating and producing art.

RE: Beginning to Wrap Up...

posted by Bitsy Bidwell | 03/10/05

Here are a couple of elements of my vision for the future. First of all, I desire comprehensive, sequential arts education K-16 that results in EVERY student being at least minimally competent in one art form. This provides future artists and future audiences.

Secondly, I embrace the formation of a working coalition of the arts that ranges from the banjo player in the kitchen to the sculptor in Central Park; from the pow-wow grounds to the concert stage. Right now we cordon ourselves off into splinter groups, then tend to shoot at each other. Just as the word 'business' includes everything from home-based industries to giant corporations, 'arts' should include a large continuum of styles, qualities and methods. Inherent in this idea is that we should, then, think in this larger framework and act in ways that are good for the entire field.

RE: Continental drift

posted by William Osborne | 03/10/05

Adrian Ellis writes that the European funding model, which he admires, is being dismantled. He notes that, "All the issues addressed in this blog are pretty well global in their application and indeed as much thought is being given to them abroad as in the USA. Public funding in Germany, France and Italy is retrenching, and the stresses on the cultural sector readily apparent."

It is true that global capitalism, particularly in its American form, is challenging the Social Democracies of Europe. But it is much, much too soon to say the European system for funding is being "dismantled." That is simply not true at this point.

This year's Federal cultural budget in France is up 5.9 percent -- three times inflation -- at 2.79 billion euros. How can you say the French are dismantling their funding system when its appropriation is rising faster than even inflation?

An article listed in today's ArtsJournal.com notes that the British government has subsidized the arts this year with 412 million pounds. That is over 200% higher than the budget only eight years ago! That doesn't sound like dismantling to me. For the details see: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/image/0,12073,1373409,00.html> (There seems to be an error in the article. All of the numbers are listed in billions, not millions. Or is that correct? Perhaps Adrian can explain, since I think he might be British.)

Germany has had economic problems due to unification and has had to tighten its belt, but it has not at all dismantled its cultural funding, nor is there any indication it plans to do so. Some smaller orchestras have been consolidated with the nearby neighbors, but a large part of the impetus for this has been to eliminate redundancies created through unification. When the wall came down, Berlin ended up three full-time opera houses. After a long debate, they decided to preserve all three even though the city is deeply in debt and unemployment in the region is about 18% (again a result of unification.) How can you say they are dismantling arts funding when they decide to keep three major opera houses in Berlin under these dire circumstances?

And even if Germany reduces by a small amount its number of orchestras, it still has 23 times more full-time ensembles per capita than the USA.

Spain's economy has grown at an astounding rate since it joined the European Union. It is using some of these funds to invest heavily in culture. It has even founded some new orchestras, and it has turned Barcelona into one of the most culturally active cities in the world. Even the Europeans are astounded by the growth in its cultural sector.

On the other hand, Berlusconi in Italy has worked hard against the arts because he is probably more sympathetic to America's "neo-con" economic philosophy than any other European leader. And, of course, he just happens to be the richest man in Italy, and owns --all- of its private television stations.

Given that the political divide between America and Europe is probably larger than it has been since the Second World War, and given that the EU is growing stronger and more confident by the year, I think it is unlikely that America's goal of dismantling Europe's social democracies will succeed.

America's neo-cons, and their "Republocrat" friends, like to discredit Europe's economic system at every opportunity. This includes phony predictions of doom for its generous funding of the arts. Don't buy it. It's not true, and the claim is largely ideological propaganda. The American's are not going to give up their attacks on Europe's Social Democracies, but let's hope the Europeans prevail.

Europeans will never use language like American administrators who refer to artists as "entitlement seekers." Europeans will hold to their centuries old belief that genuinely qualified artists are workers who deserve good jobs just like everyone else.

William Osborne, www.osborne-conant.org

RE: The Nonprofit Dilemma

posted by Harry Philbrick | 03/10/05

The simple statement "No modern nonprofit could tolerate the failure rates accepted in movies, TV, or record business" is startling. Of course this does not mean that the corporate arts world is full of bold risk takers, but it should give pause to those of us who feel the not-for-profit world is the place to nurture risk taking. And it reiterates the need to build endowments, which may be the single dullest thing a not-for-profit director can say, but it is true.

More importantly, we need to be creative about searching for totally new economic models to finance our enterprises. The record companies didn't get it when Napster, etc., arrived. I sense that we (museums, my field) could be in a similar position to the recording industry five or ten years ago, content that our economic model is intact. I suspect we would be better served anticipating seismic change before it becomes cataclysmic. Our reliance on a particular set of donors, membership as it now stands, gala fundraisers, etc, are all somewhat bizarre and quaint mechanisms upon which to base an institution.

RE: Beginning to Wrap Up...

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/10/05

This discussion has been great. There are some questions that I have been wondering about.

1. Where are all the Arts managers that one might have expected to be reading this web-log?
2. Does anyone know what the economic impact of working artists is? I have tried to find studies and the few that exist are for NY and show incomes of \$15,000 on average. Artists that enter exhibits in non profits or play for small fees in local parks don't seem to be counted. While there are reports of high auction sales there is little known about the economic impact of the gallery sales. Public mural programs have a large impact on the art economy. Are they counted.

I respect the hard work local art centers do for arts. How are the fees they collect from artists accounted for on a national scale?

About the respect for artists in europe that was mentioned in an earlier post. The only time I was able to visit Florence I went to the Medici Chapel and after sketching for about ten minutes the attendant asked me if I wanted a chair. He then later allowed me to visit a cellar room, alone. This level of trust and respect would never happen here.

The value of non profit arts organizations like museums and concert halls are the major league flagships. What we need to do is promote the players and develop the minor leagues. Artists may end up being some of the few who "work with their hands" left in America one day. Craftsmanship may disappear in this faux world along with illuminated manuscripts.

RE: Expressive logic, and the garage band sensibility

posted by Peter Linett | 03/10/05

I think Joli's onto something profound and maybe radical in her call for a more passionate, expressive approach to arts advocacy, even if it wasn't quite clear yet whether she was talking about advocacy or the practice and presentation of art, or both (advocacy by infectious example). In a meeting last week with an art museum director about audience development, I suggested that the curators be brought into the conversation about how the museum hopes to be experienced and how it might work to engage a broader range of people in the aesthetic experiences it offers. No dice. The institutional responsibility for engagement has been marginalized in the museum hierarchy to the education and marketing departments. The underlying assumption, I guess, is that the art itself is what's supposed to do the engaging, not the personality of the museum.

But in fact the people who find the typical art museum somehow uninspiring or academic, and who therefore don't make the effort to go often, much less join or donate, might respond very differently to a more palpable, human passion on the museum's part about what it displays. Something similar can be said of orchestras, where in most cases the musicians barely acknowledge the audience, wear

anachronistic dress (but without the theatrical flair we associate with costumes), and evince few outward signs of enjoyment. At the risk of reading Joli's post reductively, we might say that "expressive logic" can best be understood in light of its much more common opposite: professionalism.

Maybe that's why I can't get Schiller out of my head this week, reading you bloggerati. In his "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man," the poet-playwright-philosopher describes the impulse toward art, or at any rate toward beauty, as a "play drive," an attempt to harmonize the competing modes of sensual and rational experience. Through this kind of play we experience a more complete intuition about ourselves and achieve, if only temporarily, freedom from some of the tensions that make us most human. (Okay, now I'm reading Schiller reductively, but you get the idea.) Talk about intrinsic benefits--how did the RAND authors miss, or dismiss, Schiller?

Along with Joli's thoughts about expression and passion, this play idea gives us another context for thinking about how the arts present themselves to both audiences and funders. If the arts don't think of themselves as a species of play and enjoyment, as a special class of fun (and this blog suggests that they don't, at least not in the current anxious climate), then it's going to be an uphill battle on both fronts. It may seem counterintuitive, but I would bet that the task of convincing a congressman to support the arts would be easier, not harder, if that arts community presented itself as providing a worthy or even necessary human pleasure instead of trying to prove its value on the basis of the current, deadly-earnest social science grounds. I say this for two reasons: first, the chances would be much greater that the congressman would already be a fan of the arts himself (which several postings have noted is rarely the case these days), and second, the arts advocates would be able to point to audience engagement and maybe even demand for access to the arts. In other words, to borrow Joli's painful metaphor, art wouldn't be spinach anymore.

How do you get a principal violist or a Renaissance art curator to become more expressive and communicate her passion more directly and immediately to her audience? And what would have to change about the concert or the gallery (not the music itself or the art itself)? Real questions, but worth answering, if only as a thought-experiment. We'll never know whether there's a larger audience for the arts, or a larger role for it to play in society, until we get it out of its own way.

Peter Linett, Slover Linett Strategies

RE: Retail Advocacy

posted by Beata Moon | 03/11/05

I think Jim Kelly made an important point about personal connections. Regardless of what you are pitching to prospective supporters, making personal connections with those potential backers can only benefit the dialogue. As Midori also pointed out, we need to be open to what others have to offer as well and not only focus on what we have to give.

Regarding a reader's comment about artists becoming politically involved, that has happened and continues to occur. The pianist and composer Ignace Paderewski was considered one of Poland's greatest statesman. Currently, composer Phillip Kent Bimstein serves as an environmentalist mayor for Sprindale, Utah and the English soprano Suzannah Clark is ending her music career to run for Parliament.

RE: Final Thoughts

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/11/05

How many Americans are educated in the arts? If one wants to construct a model of what the cultural landscape is I would think that a good place to start might be with people. My estimate is a simple one, not having had statistics in art school, here goes.

1. Over 3000 art schools are listed by some on a quick Google.
2. 500 seems like a fair average per year taking classes.
3. 30 years, a conservative guess to balance the growth in art centers.
4. Result: 45,000,000 trained art lovers.

How many musicians and writers could one add to this number to get to the real Cultural Mass Potential?

How do Americans for The Arts or other groups bring together a cultural society? Most artists ask the simple question of advocacy groups, what are you doing for me?

How did soccer become the most popular suburban activity for children? Parents are given an activity for their children that is close to home, they participate in it as coaches, and it is fun. I taught art in an after-school program run by our local community college. The middle school children loved it. It would be good if there were more programs that went to where the people are. There is a roving nature camp here that goes to the parks. Why not develop an art version?

I know there are people here who have never been in the city. It seems foreign to them. Like many parts of our society trust seems to be lacking. Individual acts of art make culture.

RE: Doug's Request - Strategies

posted by Garth Trinkl | 03/11/05

Strategies for Institutional Outreach of our Flagship Public Cultural Institutions.

Speaking of Renaissance art curators, why can't Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, and the San Francisco Performing Arts Center be more like Washington's National Gallery of Art, or Los Angeles's Getty Center, in offering free weekend cultural experiences to Americans and foreign visitors of all ages? Since tax-payer funds subsidize these institutions indirectly, if not directly, why can't major institutions offer free cultural and educational activities every Saturday, Sunday, and public holiday, to complement their ticketed programs at other times? Let's simply call these free cultural activities by their true name, "public goods", and consider them America's gift to ourselves, our children and parents, and foreign visitors to America.

Every Saturday and Sunday, the National Gallery of Art offers free Family Activity Workshops from approximately 10:30 AM to 2:30 PM. At approximately the same time, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, with its huge U.S. Department of Education funding, is offering ticketed events for families.

On Sundays, public culture at the National Gallery of Art hits its stride, week-in week-out, with a full menu of gallery talks complemented by free Lectures at 2:00 PM, Art-related Movies and Films at 4:00 PM (children's movies are in the morning), and concerts, classical or jazz, at 6:30 PM, ALL FOR FREE! This Sunday, the National Gallery of Art is even fulfilling a function that the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts fails to perform by offering a free screening of a film on hearing-challenged Scottish percussionist, Evelyn Glennie, entitled "Touch the Sound", and a free, full classical program by the National Gallery of Art Chamber Wind Players -- again, the type of regular free cultural outreach programming that the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts fails to provide. (Two weeks ago, the National Gallery's Sunday free concert featured LatinJazz with L.A. artist Bobby Rodriguez and his Quintet, and featured, as guest artist, the percussionist's 6 year-old grandson for two extended solos).

On the other hand, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, named after America's most idealist Presidential advocate for the role of arts in the life of all Americans (seen those inscriptions on the back wall of the Center?), largely limits its free performances to the fairly recently instated "Millennium Stage" one-hour events at 6 PM each evening. This weekend, it is an hour of Mexican Jazz on Saturday (compared to the two-hour concert, two weeks ago, at the National Gallery of Art), and a Indian tabla player, for an hour on Sunday. Where is the FREE children's activity every Sunday at 11 AM, the FREE performing arts lecture every Sunday at 2 PM, the FREE performing arts film every Sunday at 4 PM, and the FREE performing arts, full-length concert every Sunday at 6:30 PM? Nowhere to be seen, because apparently the corporate and private individual backers of the Kennedy Center, or the U.S. Department of Education, do not believe strongly in culture as a "public good", as does the National Gallery of Art, or the Getty Center in Los Angeles (to a more limited degree).

I know that this comment will bore the arts as pottery, or amateur bluegrass, or Laotian folk crafts audience, but I thought that one last mention could be made to the arts as a form of "public goods" -- like

the libraries and parks which grace America (anyone seen the beautiful NEW and FREE Maritime Museum in waterfront San Francisco?).

My point is that every "overbuilt" Museum and Performing Arts Center in America, in big cities and small cities and medium size cities, could and should offer full and free weekend cultural programs -- and not limit their free offerings to inconvenient free "Target first - Mondays", or "Ford Motor first-Tuesdays". I suspect that there could even be "extrinsic" values to doing so.

And America can also revive a nationally-broadcast Saturday young persons' classical music introductory television program, perhaps hosted by Midori and her associates; as well as weekly "Introduction to Classical Music" radio programs for public radio. (Sorry, Sharon Percy Rockefeller, we may have to insist that the reruns of "Car Talk" be bumped in favor of a year-round, weekly "Introduction to Classical Music" program on the national public radio system. ... And why the hell am I having to do this ham-fisted advocacy here, rather than smooth radio spokespersons such as Ted Libby?)

Lastly, I will agree with musicologist and composer William Osborne that culture in Europe (and Asia) is less "tattered" than economist and consultant Adrian Ellis states. And despite the obvious international subsidies and gifts (largely private gifts from the super-super rich), is it the Kirov Opera that tours to the U.S. every year performing its repertoire of Russian operas, or the MET that tours to Russia and Eastern Europe each year performing its

repertoire of American operas? (Can the Age of the Gates, the Waltons, and the Buffets, like the age of Pericles, Elizabeth I or the Medici's...?)

Garth Trinkl is a Librettist, Composer, and Economist.

RE: Final Thoughts

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/11/05

I am glad to see that the BLS lists artists as a category. How many trained or self taught artists are not listed because what they do is a "labor of love"?

The same could be said for all the other arts.

Suggested citation: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2004-05 Edition, Artists and Related Workers, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos092.htm> (visited March 11, 2005).

RE: Final Thoughts

posted by Barry Hennesius | 03/11/05

Thank you to Doug and all of the participants in this fascinating and engaging discussion. We could use a lot more of this kind of exploration of the many issues we face in the arts.

I make no comment on the serious questions raised by the RAND Report, including its' disturbing flaws. And while the participants raised numerous important issues, I would like to comment on just one aspect of the overall picture of advocacy and making the case for the arts.

The studies we have done are unquestionably valuable in trying to convince foundations and other funders to increase their support for the arts, and valuable to the long range goal of convincing the public that the arts ought to be a core investment for society; thus far, however, their primary application has been in support of arguments to convince government decision makers to increase funding.

Government decisions about funding are "choices"; more often than not, difficult choices between competing benefits. Those decisions are historically, and today, increasingly, impacted by political considerations. The arts community makes a critical error by assuming that all we have to do is make the best possible case, and we will then be victorious. It just doesn't work like that. Sometimes it doesn't matter how good a case you make, or how worthy and beneficial your cause is; it doesn't matter how much value you add - the decisions are political. Those interest groups (and that's what we are, an interest group) that raise the necessary funds to support major lobbying efforts (including contributing to campaigns) have access and an advantage we do not, and, as often as not, they succeed in getting more

of what they want than we do. We simply don't bring to the lawmaker's table the same potential benefits that they do.

I am not disparaging the extraordinary efforts the thousands of people in the arts field have made in past advocacy efforts - volunteers all of them - and I acknowledge and salute their success and effectiveness in making the case. Nor am I dismissing or marginalizing the growth of countless organized efforts - from the leadership of Americans for the Arts to scores of other organizations. And I am not suggesting we abandon efforts to make the case as we have been (and as this panel has so insightfully noted, as we might yet do).

But until the arts community accepts advocacy as a core management function, and digs into its own pockets to pay for professionally run, full time staffed advocacy / lobbying efforts, AND avails itself of all of the tools and options (lobbying firms, candidate support etc.) that the private sector uses, we will remain at a distinct disadvantage and find ourselves more often than not on the short end of the stick.

The more arrows you have in your quiver, the more you increase your chances of bringing home food, and so we should, of course, continue to make the case, and we should continue to lobby the public, organize ourselves and do whatever else we can, but we need to play the political system by the rules that exist, whether we like them or not (and yes, 501 c 3 nonprofits CAN do all of this if they will incorporate 501 c 4 structures, establish PACs and Section 527 organizations / funds and abide by the rules just like the private sector does).

One final point - we need to somehow strengthen the connection between arts administrators and artists. If artists were more involved in the struggle to make the case, if they were, for example, willing to do benefits to help fund real advocacy, the arts could raise literally millions of dollars and fund a formidable national, state and local advocacy / lobbying presence that would help us to protect what we have, and to meaningfully engage in all those areas Bill Ivey and Bob Lynch suggest (and more) as part of our strategy to achieve our victories.

This subject is far more complex than the space allows here. Thank you again to all of the participants in this blog.

RE: Final Thoughts

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/11/05

It is a mistake to ask artists to give their work for good causes when they are at the bottom of the heap. While some artists are wealthy many live and work at or below the poverty line. An engineer graduates with the expectation of earning \$70,000 per year. Artists are told "get a job."

I look forward to reading the RAND report on the visual arts to see how truthful we can be about the needs of artists.

The Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation has a book "On the Needs of Visual Artists" that should be read.

I love Arts Journal because it opens the arts world to all.

RE: Greg Sandow Weighs In...

posted by Andrea T. | 03/11/05

That was one of the best entries I've read yet. Or at least, it captured my attention better than most (no offense to the other bloggers who have done a fantastic job, it's a testament to my attention spam).

I agree completely with this, and there are a few points to which I want to give my 2 (Canadian) cents. Be forewarned that my bias is theatre:

1. "Does art create social bonds?" and art as a communal force:

Independent of your own sports reference, I've always believed that sports creates social bonds more than art does. People are enraptured by competition and conflict. It's the "good guys" vs. the "bad guys". Maybe this one of the reasons why reality TV does so well.

People are bonding as much over the LACK of (NHL) hockey as they were over the sport itself. What I find interesting and a bit sad (because it should be a selling point) is that theatre is now more financially

accessible than sports, with "pay what you can" performances and half price same day tickets and it's easy to find cheap museum/gallery days. It would have been nice if theatre [and other arts] marketers had stepped up to try to fill the void that the NHL left this year. Different audience, yes, but why not try to bring them over to "our" side?

2. "The idea that art can make us better people"

How does one define "better"?

3. "Another way to facilitate early arts involvement would be to tap into young people's involvement in the commercial arts"

Agreed. In many ways it's up to parents to expose their children to the arts and art early on, and up to educators to either take their students to the art or have the art come to them. The organization that I work for facilitates this, coordinating school tours and supplying curriculum materials for every performance so that a dance, theatre, music, storytelling or puppet show can be integrated into the curriculum. We know that it leaves a lasting impression.

I have more thoughts on this but it's more verbal/dialogue-y stuff.

RE: Retail Advocacy

posted by Andrea T. | 03/11/05

I work in an arts organization that arranges school performances, supplying related curriculum materials for the teachers to use. The amount of positive feedback that we receive in the form of artwork and letters from students of all ages, and letters, phone calls and repeat business from teachers and parents is incredible. I always say that potential funders and government representatives need to be out there seeing the shows and talking to the audience, or at least reading the letters.

How can a grant application capture the affects of the arts on young minds?

In a fundraising course I learned that building fundraising and sponsorship relationships is like a courtship. The fact that face-to-face communication is key has since been reinforced. If you truly believe in your cause then it should be an easy sell. Foundations and arts councils receive a huge number of funding requests. You have to make them share your vision in order to stand out in the crowd.

RE: Doug's Request - Strategies

posted by David R. White | 03/11/05

I caught up with this blog late, and only want to add an epigraph borrowed from the light artist Robert Irwin - "seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees." When one scans down the thread of informed experience and commentary that everyone has provided over the past days, it is still remarkable to what degree the discussion of artistic practice has been hijacked, and an awkward institutional vocabulary imposed on its bones. If we could only begin to recognize that the arts are simply one of the convertible currencies of citizenship, a tool among others for both participating in and repairing the landscape of the social contract, we might think about their values and quantitative application in a different light. We may not be able to hold up other societies (or their patronage, if they have it) as a cultural mirror to our own, but we should usefully learn from the proximity of their artists to the central, community-building concerns of daily life.

RE: Continental drift

posted by Derek | 03/11/05

Mr. Osborne, whether he realizes it or not, has identified a crucial point in comparing European arts and arts support to American arts and arts support.

He writes, "Europeans will never use language like American administrators who refer to artists as 'entitlement seekers.' Europeans will hold to their centuries old belief that genuinely qualified artists are workers who deserve good jobs just like everyone else."

"Centuries old belief." As a nation, the United States has existed for only slightly over two centuries, and not even half a century in its current composition of fifty states (if one recalls, Alaska and Hawaii were

admitted to statehood in 1959). If we try to project European beliefs on American citizens, we will quickly discover how erroneous and highly miscalculated such an attempt is. The U.S. is not Europe and Americans are not Europeans. Traditions in the U.S. are still in a fledgling phase. The concept of government funding of the arts didn't happen until a one and a half (approximately) centuries after we declared our independence. The wealthy were the primary supporters of the arts then and they still are now. For a comparison to have significant value it must be meaningful. Looking at the broader picture of societies (American vs European), we have different histories, structures, economic development, and most importantly, cultures. To compare the two is like comparing apples to oranges. We cannot escape the fact that the arts are a part of a much larger American culture (and not the focus of it either).

Perhaps the European funding model is the ultimate ideal for the arts in the U.S.; it certainly is a model with significant merits. If we want to get there, we obviously have a long way to go. And in the process to affect that change, or any change on any level, hopefully we are beginning to accept the fact mentioned now by several, including two excellent posts by Jim Kelly and Barry Hessenius over the past two days, that both arts administrators and artists will likely have to play the game that is American politics if we truly want to see change. I don't believe American administrators truly think of artists as "entitlement seekers" (if this is their perception, then we have a fundamental problem greater than support issues). However, if we use the "In Europe..." argument with policymakers we will only create a rift, and give policymakers a reason to think of artists as "entitlement seekers" (or complainers). I know, as was mentioned in an earlier post, that a good portion of artists don't appreciate policymakers, but let's be honest, apparently there are also quite a few policymakers who don't appreciate artists and/or arts administrators either. This won't be good enough to win more support for the arts. Artists don't have to appreciate policymakers, but they do have to be actively involved in the discussion with them and the public and listen too, approaching the conversation not from the stance that policymakers and the public are the enemy, but as potentially invaluable partners to see through the drive for more support for the arts; not just financial, but also in regard to copyright law and media regulation as mentioned by Bill Ivey, or in education in our schools. And the same holds true for arts administrators. This may require a full-time effort and the creation, as Barry Hessenius suggested, of 501 c4 entities to lobby for the arts (A very intriguing idea), since I doubt many artists and administrators could feasibly, or even legally, get involved in such an endeavor given our current work and time constraints.

RE: Final Thoughts

posted by Louis Torres | 03/11/05

To Bill Ivey's "final thoughts" in this stimulating discussion (for which I thank Doug McLennan), let me add a few of my own regarding the key term of the question guiding it—"the arts." Most will agree that we are not talking about the culinary arts here—or the martial arts, industrial arts, or graphic arts. We are discussing the "fine arts," as I noted in my post of March 9. One of the problems in making a case for "the arts" is that the term has become so debased that it no longer has any real meaning.

The American Society for Aesthetics (the professional association of philosophers of art), for example, begins its definition of "the arts" by citing some of the traditional forms, then a few "[postmodern] additions," plus "various aspects of popular culture." "Aspects of popular culture"?—how did that get into a purported definition of "the arts"?

These days, "the arts" can refer to virtually anything. But don't take my word for it. In the words of Thomas McEvilley, a noted professor of art history at Rice University: "It seems pretty clear by now that more or less anything can be designated as art. The question is, Has it been called art by the 'art system' [the artworld]?" And Roberta Smith, a senior critic at the New York Times, has declared: "If an artist says it's art, it's art."

Speaking of the Times—one would expect its daily section entitled "The Arts" (especially the front page of that section) to be devoted to the forms traditionally subsumed under that term, and to the (bogus, in my view) modernist and postmodernist forms that have been invented in the name of art. Well, one would be wrong. How about articles and reviews on non-fiction books, documentary films, and television programs covering such subjects as history, politics, sports, business, and science (with no connection to

the arts)—in particular, on baseball, child molestation, Hitler, and cystic fibrosis, among other topics? (For further examples, search for "Appendix C" in *Aristos*, at www.aristos.org.) "The Arts, Briefly," a recently instituted column in the *Times*, also includes coverage of such non-arts topics.

Then there is the legislation that established the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965, which began with the phrase "The term 'the arts' includes, but is not limited to"—an "open-sesame" if ever there was one—before citing a laundry list of such "major art forms" as costume and fashion design, television, radio, and video, in addition to the traditional arts.

In 1950, when defining one's terms was still somewhat in vogue, the philosopher Lionel Ruby advised in an introductory logic textbook: "If we desire to avoid obfuscation and discussions which move at cross-purposes, we must give definite and precise meanings to our terms." Advocates for the arts ought to heed Ruby's exhortation before attempting to make a "better case for the arts."

RE: Final Thoughts

posted by Andrew Bales | 03/11/05

I happened upon this discussion only yesterday and pressed print to kill a few more trees. I took it home and read the comments of the many panelists without realizing that I had failed to get most of the earlier comments so my references miss the starting point from most of those contributing.

Several big picture comments come to mind, but for brevity I will offer only a couple of short comments.

1. The conversations continually uses an outdated and pejorative term "nonprofit". Several years ago I started challenging all who would listen on this point. Our legal documents do mention "not-for-profit" but the real term of art that is embedded in the 501c3 letters is that we are "public benefit" corporations. Allowing our field to be known by the negative is digging the proverbial trench that we must first crawl out of before we make our case. I encourage all to remember that Ford Motor, Microsoft, and General Electric are legitimately "not-for-public-benefit" corporations. Let's claim the public benefit sector that is ours to claim.

2. Several comments pit the arts case against the case of other groups. I doubt the Transportation Dept. assails the arts when seeking their own support. We must make our points on our own turf, and not focus on what else is being held up as "higher needs". We should also avoid overstating our case. In one instance a contributor wrote that the public was either passionate, mildly interested, or not acquainted with the value of the arts. Our objective to this writer was to find those minimally acquainted and show them the values they have missed. It is also possible that many who do know of our programs and products are not interested. We need not appeal to all. Making the case that we are right for all is arrogant. America is an increasingly pluralistic society and the breadth of our interests color the arts and culture as we know it. The heritage of the past still has great merit for some and little interest to others. Our programs reach across many boundaries but there are those who find all of them lacking when set aside a golf game or a backpacking trip or gardening. It is a disservice to say that we can serve all people. We serve many people well and often, but not all. The niche we fill is huge and the numbers that RAND is loath to accept do defend a scale of support that needs to be rational. We should stand along with other programs not on top of them.

3. The comments that I read failed to address virtuosity. Innovation and pluralistic service received significant comment, but excellence can be an end unto itself as well. The ability to present extraordinary high standards is an achievement and should be honored and promoted.

4. The arts is a social commerce activity between an originator/creator/interpreter and a receiver/audience. The experience of that commerce is unique to each experience. When pressed for outcome-based defenses, we shortchange the very field we engage in. We are generally in the first camp, but the vast majority of those served by the arts are on the back side - the receivers - we should be loath to control how they view the arts.

5. Program expansion and growth are not objectives but options that extends the need for resources. A sound case can be made that the arts have a great deal to offer within the macro scale they now operate at, and that imminent future growth is not an attractive option. The arts need to serve within their means. Development costs in organizations need to shrink to allow the arts, not expand.

Alwin Nikolais gave a now famous speech many years ago to Dance/USA's national roundtable in which he noted that the emergence of government funding sources during his lifetime may have hurt the development of the arts. The demands for "accountability" embedded in public support created cost centers he did not previously have. In the end when he looked over a 20-year span of his activities, he felt he had more creative options before the support arrived. He now felt the obligations of an institution rather than the drive of a creator. He challenged the audience of artists to take back their field, unfortunately for him the national Roundtable on Dance was populated almost entirely by artists managers, those utilizing the resources that might have gone to the dancers. It is fair to say that, prior to the growth of local arts support, government support never kept up with the cost structures that they imposed. It cost more to take the money than the grant value.

6. During the "culture wars", I felt we should have lobbied to kill the NEA rather than keep it alive. It represented so minor a piece of the support puzzle that its fiscal impact would not have been noticed, but we allowed those wars to give voice to the nay sayers about the arts when they had "no skin in the game". We hurt the image and status of a profound vocation by letting it wallow in the muddy wake of those politicians who chose to make it the whipping boy of other issues. We lacked field leadership. We lacked field integrity. I read the note about Wily Coyote and thought that amusing note was actually not totally accurate. We are more often the Road Runner - focusing more on racing with all our might to avoid being hit, rather than getting something done.

There I went on far too long. I enjoyed taking time to think about the topics and appreciate the input of the many who put this together and gave of their time to share the ideas.

On the main point I would revert to the FDR Fireside chat strategy. When FDR discovered the power of radio, he recognized a medium where he could share his message to the masses, but that the masses were not receiving it that way. They were alone or with their family in their living rooms. It was an intimate one-on-one approach to mass communication. We win our battles by doing great work, being honest, sharing the outcome, and having audience/receivers tout our accomplishments and programs for us wherever possible. We are bit players in life, but what is life for but to have all the components. Let's be content to find our share of the whole and make great use of it.

RE: Final Thoughts

posted by Bitsy Bidwell | 03/11/05

Barry has a point, but the reverse is also true. What if more arts administrators were artists? Then we could volunteer our artwork to support the cause. Or, we could use our elevated salaries to join The Arts Action coalition at Americans for the Arts and get some real lobbying going. Barry is also right that one chief recipient of the arts message must be local and federal elected officials. Jim points out that they give to their constituents, so it is important that we make ourselves known to the politicians and that we donate to their campaigns in any way possible. One person said that, in their county, a strange pickup truck in the parking lot of a school board meeting meant there was a serious issue to discuss. We need to be that unknown voice that makes sure it is heard.

RE: A thousand thanks

posted by William Osborne | 03/11/05

Douglas asked for concrete suggestions that might help us better understand and create arts-funding models. At this point, I think the most important changes need to be in our thinking.

1. If America is ever to have adequate and consistent funding, it will have to be from public sources. Relying on the wealthy (and their manifestations, such as foundations and corporations) for gifts will continue to be as ineffective as it has in the past. Working within our current system will always have the character of using bailing wire and rubber bands to repair a broken-down automobile that will never run properly.
2. The move to genuinely funding the arts publicly will take at least half a century. There are no short-term fixes that will produce lasting results. Long-term strategies must be developed, and become a

coordinated effort of a wide spectrum of arts and social organizations. Supporting the arts publicly will require a transformation in our understandings about the meanings of wealth and its use for the common good that is deeply needed in the United States.

3. We should have full confidence in the meaning and importance of the arts and be fully prepared to take a stand for their importance in society.
4. We must understand that there has NOT been a grass-roots rejection of the NEA by the American people. The attacks have come from special interest groups of rightwing politicians and media organizations who reject the arts for their left-leaning tendencies. This is a part of a larger cultural war to control institutions that also include PBS, NPR and our universities. Polls show that these politicians have not been given a mandate for their actions. Americans still strongly support the NEA, PBS and NPR. We must continue publicity efforts to sustain and strengthen this support.
5. We must realize that our current funding system plays a large role in making the arts seem elitist. The financial patrons of the arts are the very wealthy. Elitist systems of patronage tend toward a concept of art that reinforces, justifies, and rationalizes an ethos of elitism. Public funding would bring increased arts education, lower ticket prices, and a wider geographic distribution of the arts. This would help move the arts to the mainstream of our population – and away from the enclave of the wealthy.
6. We must realize that cultural identity always has a local character, and that this should be reflected in our funding system. The main sources of funding should come from the state and municipal levels. A federal agency such as the NEA simply does not have the understanding of local communities it would need to be a successful arts funder. It is also too vulnerable to specious attacks from opportunistic politicians.
7. We must realize that the health of our arts and our urban environments will always be deeply connected. American cities suffer more social problems than any other country's in the industrial world. Without healing the problems of our cities, we will not be able to create a healthy atmosphere in which the arts and culture can thrive.

I realize that these transformations will take a very long time, but I think they will eventually come.

RE: Final Thoughts

posted by Derek | 03/11/05

I think there have been some excellent suggestions so far. It seems most potential solutions have been geared towards a national scope. I'd like to encourage all to read Jim Kelly's post on retail advocacy (if you haven't already). Maybe the best way to reach more people, and particularly get more youth involved in the arts, is to take what been offered at the national and applying the same concepts through local efforts. I think most of us engage in the arts, and engage others in the arts in our communities. You can't set a star atop the Christmas tree without the tree, and we don't build buildings from the top down (although it would be interesting to see someone try). Local leaders know (or should know) their communities, and want to serve to make them better. We can engage in policy decisions at the national level, but perhaps the easiest way to do this is to work our way up from local communities. Communities exist in all sizes, whether it be a small rural town to a large urban city, each with its own levels of arts development. Some communities may not be able to support anything more than a small organization whereas other may support several very large arts organizations and many smaller ones. Maybe all we need is a little shift in the why of why we ask for the funds we do. Working from the local to state to federal levels can help broaden the base of political leaders supporting the arts and create an upward drive for greater support of the arts. If local leaders become arts supporters, and convey what the arts are doing in their communities and how state support would help the communities and therefore, the state, your more likely to get state leaders on board. The same principle applies moving from state to national. Conversely, using a top-down push could potentially result in state and local leaders feeling pressured to find a way to support the arts without knowing how they are or can truly affect their communities (people can also get very defensive about their turf if prodded or pushed). Support provided to the arts will not likely be used as effectively as it could in this scenario. If we want to have the arts be a larger part of

American culture, government support (through financial support or legislation) is a key part of conveying its importance to the American public.

Some further thoughts on influence. If Alan Greenspan were to say the dollar is weakening and will decline over the next year, people would listen. Maybe some would rethink their travel plans overseas, others may convert their U.S. dollars into a stronger foreign currency. If the government allocates more funds to the arts and has more arts advocates, the public will see, listen, and react accordingly. Many in the public might not have a clue if next year the arts got more funding (even a large amount like \$25Bn), but there would individuals or groups that would notice who have access to the public. Eventually, people would get the message, what the message would be depends on who delivers it. The public would then respond (either taking a closer look at the arts and maybe the arts would become more important in culture or protesting and arts funding would drop back down). If we start at the community level and develop a broader base of arts supporters, the likelihood a positive reaction would occur in the public from an increase in arts funding is much higher than starting at the national level and seeing how the public reacts (guessing and hoping they will be supportive and take a closer look at the arts).

RE: One Town at a Time

posted by Charles Hankin | 03/12/05

Thank you to all who have shared their knowledge. This discussion has allowed me to read the RAND study with a different perspective.

p.s. Where are the American art heroes? Most of our society love sports because they admire those who are the best. I find mine in galleries for the most part. I hope that they will someday find their way into major museums.

There is also a group of artists who because of economic need have worked their whole lives as designers, architects or teachers who consider themselves "fine artists." I see many who return to their roots when they retire from their career.

Thanks to Andrew and the other AJ bloggers who daily lead us through the maze of the arts.