

# ART PAPERS

July/August 1997 Volume 21 Issue 4

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## on the cover

This image was constructed in direct response to this issue's editorial comments by Ruth Resnicow. (In fact, she also helped me with the computer collage of it, as did Jennifer Smith.) The recognition that artists and culture are (and have been) embattled is without question. We all feel it, and many of us are battle-weary, to say the least.

The way forward is another kettle of fish. For the individual artist, as well as small arts organizations, survival will require resourcefulness, optimism, and a certain scrappiness. But when hasn't it? The call to put our "collective creative individual minds towards a solution is clear." And remind others—and ourselves—of the value of individual innovation, of the artist, of art in our lives.

Lisa Tuttle, *Atlanta, Georgia*

## SUBSCRIPTION & BACK ISSUES

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NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE  
ARTS



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## URGENT!! ACTION ALERT!!

As we go to press, the House Appropriations subcommittee has approved allocating \$10 million to the National Endowment of the Arts in 1998, the amount that the NEA estimates it will need to effectively close down (as opposed to \$99.5 million received in 1997). While not everyone approves of the NEA's recent tactics, it is imperative that we in the arts community support its existence. The issue is expected to reach the House floor in July, so you should **CALL YOUR REPRESENTATIVES IMMEDIATELY**.

According to *The New York Times*, Representative Jim Kolbe, R-Arizona, said that he supported the NEA but would vote to eliminate it to support Republican leaders. He questioned suggestions that the endowment was responsible for the success of arts programs across the country. "The arts community is vibrant because of local communities," he said. "It is not, I don't think, because of the NEA."

**LET THEM KNOW WHAT YOU THINK.** Moderate Republicans (especially in the Southeast) are particularly important as they represent the swing vote. You can get phone numbers for your elected officials by calling your local Voter Registration, or on the net at <http://www.house.gov> (House of Representatives) or <http://www.senate.gov> (Senate)

For government to refrain...from promoting the improvement...cultivation and encouragement of...the elegant arts...would be treachery to the most sacred of trusts.

*John Quincy Adams*

That that treachery is upon us is not in question.

Congress has prohibited the Arts Endowment from making direct grants to individuals except for Literature Fellowships, American Jazz Masters, and National Heritage Fellowships in the Folk & Traditional Arts.

*National Endowment for the Arts  
Application Guidelines,  
FY 1998*

That it is time to put our collective creative minds towards a solution is clear.

In the history of nations, the neglect or suppression of the arts is an augury of national decline.

*Stanley Kunitz, poet*

This issue of *Art Papers* investigates the state of arts institutions and individual artists in this era of reduced governmental funding; assesses the severity and implications of the crisis; and identifies essential elements and strategies of various artists' support systems. Furthermore, we consider what role the newest artistic medium—on-line resources—can play in surmounting these newest attacks on the arts: can the Internet provide greater, more democratic access to the arts, or is its potency revealed when employed as a means of vast and rapid communication among arts agencies?

A WWW roundtable of artists, administrators, and writers on this topic discussed access to the arts in a situation characterized by new media (exemplified by the bulletin board itself), but also by limited public access to the arts (given reduced schedules and permanent closings among arts organizations). Glenn Harper offers an overview of these on-line discussions in *A Brave New World? Access to Arts at the End of the Millennium*.

Our second feature reports on the symposium *American Creativity at Risk: Restoring Creativity as a Priority in Public Policy, Cultural Philanthropy, and Education*, held last year at Brown University and organized by the Alliance of Artists' Communities, which convened a breathtaking array of leaders in the arts, business, science, education, and government—from Robert MacNeil to Guillermo Gómez-Peña—to examine how valuable creativity, individual innovation, and research are to the U.S.; why and how inventive creativity, so prevalent and revered throughout this country's history, became an object of scorn; and "who or what are the adversaries that aim not merely to hold us back, but to bully us into impotence."<sup>2</sup> The findings at this symposium should stir your creative anger into action!

## From the Editor

Sixty-one percent of American people surveyed in 1996 said they were willing to be taxed \$5 a year for federal assistance to the arts. Forty percent said they'd pay \$25 a year.

*1996 Louis Harris Survey*

We've all heard that funding for artists in other countries puts the United States to shame, but how does our nation, the richest in the world, really stack up against funding in other countries? Our London correspondent compares, dollar for dollar, sources of funding opportunities for artists in Canada, England, France, Germany, and the Netherlands to those available in the United States. Furthermore, she offers an alternative scenario to governmental funding and the standard gallery track that has worked well for some young artists in Great Britain.

All creative people are empowered by an inheritance from the past, a gift that can only be repaid by dedicating a portion of our present labors toward the future.

*Lewis Hyde, author*

*Art Papers* is no stranger to creative fundraising, nor to the concept of artists working together to support the arts. The community of artists in Atlanta created and donated mirror-related artworks that were auctioned during our spring fundraising event, The Mirror Ball; the high quality of the works and the high level of community participation made this our most successful benefit of this kind to date. We have commissioned five of those artists to create artists' pages for this issue: Lisa Tuttle (cover), Candice Bennett, Roe Ethridge, Kelly Jo Stump, and the subject of this issue's Studio Visit, Teri Williams.

Through complacency and inaction, we have allowed ourselves to be placed in a position of weakness. Learn *How To Take Your First Step as an Artist's Advocate* in this month's Artists' Survival Guide. And watch out for our next issue (September/October 1997), which will follow up on the situations outlined herein, and offer concrete solutions for surmounting the problems that the American creative community faces.

...The number of people who now call themselves artists has exploded (1.7 million in 1990)...3.2 million Americans (2.7% of all U.S. workers)...work for cultural organizations.

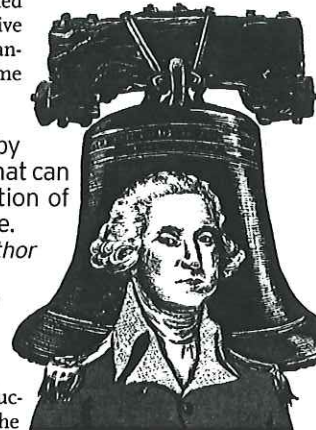
*Robert MacNeill*

The biggest obstacles we face are those we build for ourselves.

*Ruth Resnicow*

<sup>1</sup> From John Quincy Adams' "First Message to Congress," as quoted by art critic Robert Hughes, *Time*, August 7, 1995, and as appearing in "American Creativity at Risk: Restoring Creativity as a Priority in Public Policy, Cultural Philanthropy, and Education." All quotes, unless otherwise noted, appeared in this publication, which can be read in this and the next issues of *Art Papers*.

<sup>2</sup> Brendan Gill in the prologue of the above-named publication.



# AMERICAN CREATIVITY AT RISK:

## Restoring Creativity Priority in Public Philanthropy, and

The Alliance of Artists' Communities' "American Creativity at Risk" symposium, held at Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design November 8-10, 1996, brought together a group of brilliant American leaders and thinkers from all sectors of society—arts, business, science, education, philanthropy, and government—to address what the Alliance saw as a national "crisis of confidence" in the arts, creativity, individual innovation, and research. They called the symposium "American Creativity at Risk" to emphasize the gravity of the broad, societal problem they perceived, and challenged the six speakers, 24 panelists, and 85 registrants in attendance to:

- define the nature of creativity in historical, psychological, and cultural terms;
- measure the significance of creativity to the health and growth of American society;
- identify societal factors that encourage or stifle creativity, in both children and adults; and
- conceive new, innovative strategies to encourage American creativity to flourish, and set forth these ideas in a blueprint for action to restore creativity as a priority in public policy, cultural philanthropy, and education.

Speakers and panelists took a hard look at ways that the United States has in recent years failed to honor its historically optimistic, risk-taking, innovative, and resourceful character. A dramatic example of this failure was given early in the symposium by keynote speaker Mary Schmidt Campbell, Dean of the Tisch School of the Arts and former Cultural Affairs Commissioner for New York City. She related this sobering fact:

*Prisons, once at the bottom of state and local budgets, have in the past ten to twenty years steadily risen towards the top of the budgetary priority list, so that in at least one state, California, spending for prisons exceeds spending for public education. The punitive outweighs the affirmative; the pathological in our society is now more costly to support than the developmental.*

If this comparison shocks us, it should also spur us into action, for it reflects a sea change in this nation's priorities and attitudes—away from building for the future, and toward short-term salves for the complex societal and cultural problems that face us.

Artists, scientists, and business people in attendance at the symposium reported that in an era of budget cutting and conservative politics, science labs, universities, artists' organizations, and private industry are now forced to justify their activities in short-term market terms. The long-term benefits of investing in education, art, and science are more and more being ignored, displaced by a demand for immediate economic return.

For instance, supporters of federal funding for arts and culture have been compelled to advocate for art in terms of tourism dollars, contribution to the country's tax base, growth in related industries, and numbers of jobs provided, as if art's contribution to the evolution of our culture and people were not a potent enough argument. Universities and public school programs are now being run more like businesses, with an attention to the bottom line that is often detrimental to the quality of education they provide. Investment in basic science, which in the past has led to applications we now take for granted (such as computers and laser technology), is decreasing dramatically largely because the gap between basic research and application can be years or even decades in length—too long for the short-term economic gain our society now demands.

Ironically, while program budgets for education, art, and basic science research have continued to shrink, Americans have been drawn to these fields in unprecedented numbers. Robert MacNeil, the writer, journalist, and former co-anchor with Jim Lehrer of the NewsHour on PBS, reported that the number of people who now call themselves artists has exploded (1.7 million in 1990 compared to 400,000 in 1950, according to the American Assembly's statistics). MacNeil also pointed to the 3.2 million Americans (2.7% of all U.S. workers) who work for cultural organizations, and the enormous increase in past decades in the number of orchestras, opera companies, and theaters.

Despite this past dramatic growth in American art and culture, however, the federal government has slashed spending on arts. The 1996 budget of \$99.5 million for the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) represented a 39% reduction from the previous year, which, according to Jane Alexander, put the NEA's purchasing power in real dollars back to where it was in 1972. It is a situation that MacNeil described as follows:

*We are feeding in the arts a much bigger animal than in the past and now government, corporations, foundations, and Americans as individuals seem eager to put this beast on a diet. In the case of science, the huge research machine created by the cold war and the military-industrial-university complex has already been put on a severe diet.*

Indeed, as MacNeil pointed out, federal support for science and technology research has also dropped steadily in the past four to five years. *The New York Times* reports

# creativity as a Policy, Cultural Education

by Tricia Snell

that the Clinton Administration plans to decrease spending on scientific research and development from \$78 billion in 1998 to about \$62 billion in the year 2002. The heaviest cuts to civilian (as opposed to military) research are expected on projects searching for new energy technologies and science-industry partnerships working to improve products.

What does this federal decline in the funding of art, creativity, scientific research, and education forebode for American society? While the "American Creativity at Risk" symposium did not focus on government funding per se, the statistics given above reflect a broad, societal move away from the ideals upon which this nation was founded.

## In California, spending for prisons exceeds spending for public education

The symposium speakers and panelists were asked to examine this shift in attitudes, and to ask themselves: Who will be the innovators of the new millennium? How will they be nurtured, recognized, educated, and supported? As the poet and essayist Lewis Hyde, a symposium speaker, put it:

*The disappearance of the future is one of the hidden wounds of this age, I think. It's as if we are colonizing the future, by which I mean we are treating future generations as a colony that we can exploit and have no obligations to. We are extracting wealth from this world in such a way that the future is impoverished.*

To help define ways in which America as a society can stop "colonizing the future," the "American Creativity at Risk" symposium speakers and panelists went beyond their examination of the problems to look at highly creative people and institutions that had experienced great success. Success was measured in a variety of ways: development of new art styles and forms; scientific and technological discoveries; industrial design improvements;

improved quality of life; increased tolerance among people of different backgrounds; solutions to economic, environmental, and cultural problems; and greater well-being and spiritual growth. Three themes wove through the symposium speakers' and panelists' assessment of the many factors that had contributed to these success stories:

- A remarkably powerful, creative synergy arises when people of different professional backgrounds and skills work together. This creative synergy has led to successful problem-solving—revolutionary ways of seeing, thinking, and approaching the conflicts of our daily, human lives—in both the arts and sciences, time and time again.

- Creative environments give people time to experiment, to fail, to try again, to ask questions, to discover, to play, to make connections among seemingly disparate elements. This experimentation, or research, may not lead to an artistic "product" or scientific application for many years, but all original ideas and products spring from an initial period of experimentation or "fooling around." This "fooling around" may sometimes seem purposeless, but it is the essence of the creative process.

- Creativity is a basic human attribute that must be nurtured among all people, not just artists and scientists. The freedom to learn, to create, to take risks, to fail, to ask questions, to strive, to grow—this is the ethic upon which America was founded. Promoting creativity among all people, of all occupations, economic class, and ethnic background, is essential to the common good.

Are we losing this ethic as a nation, and, if so, what does that mean for our future? What can we do to ensure we are investing in the future of our country and our people? These were the questions that launched three days of lively discussion and visionary thinking at the "American Creativity at Risk" symposium.

## ...the punitive outweighs the affirmative.

### What is Creativity, and Why is it at Risk?

In the words of symposium speaker and moderator Robert MacNeil, "America is creative or it is nothing." With the Declaration of Independence, MacNeil said, Americans created a social contract based on an ideal, and over the years both the contract and the ideal have been recreated to reflect our evolving understanding of citizenship and community. MacNeil described how Americans have transformed, in the past three decades, their views and laws regarding women, minorities, and people with disabilities, effecting changes in attitude that have reverberated worldwide. Likewise, American computer technology, American medicine, American merchandising, and American film and television have effected global change. That is the good news.



The bad news, MacNeil said, is that our tradition of creativity is at risk, curtailed by severe budget cuts, a conservative political climate, and the separation of popular culture from the arts. MacNeil described American culture today as "a triumph of marketing over content." He stressed that nowhere is this conflict more apparent than in the arts. "Why does a great nation need artists?" MacNeil asked. His comprehensive and impassioned answers set the tone for much of the symposium's discussions:

*America needs artists to continue telling the country its story, its unfolding narrative...To help us metabolize rapid changes in mores, in manners, in attitudes to gender and race...To sharpen its moral conscience...To gratify the non-material spirit in this land of unprecedented material appetites...To restore our frayed sense of community, of fellow identity...To stimu-*

**It's as if we are colonizing  
the future, by which I mean  
we are treating future**

*late our sensitivity to beauty not evaluated by its market worth...To reconcile Americans to their place in the new World Order...[And] in Milton's phrase, to "justify the ways of God to men," at the end of a century when for many, God died, but for many others, God lives even more imperatively. In short, America needs its artists to help it obey that most ancient of humanist admonitions, to know thyself.*

Like MacNeil in his opening remarks, symposium keynote speaker Mary Schmidt Campbell referred to America's historical ability to recreate itself. "Our most transformative advances," she said, "have come not only from striving but also from fierce civic eruptions." She described the Civil War and the civil rights movement as transformative events that forced American society to create new definitions of citizenship and community. As part of a historical sketch of American creativity, Campbell cited a variety of examples of the United States' rich tradition of innovation, including Horace Mann, who inspired free public education; Andrew Carnegie, who created a nationwide system of free public libraries; the Wright Brothers, who undertook daring experiments in pursuit of human flight; and Duke Ellington, who led the way in creating America's most original art form, jazz.

Campbell emphasized that these private endeavors were matched by innovative public policy. City charters across the country set aside land, buildings, and operating subsidies to create institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Los Angeles Public Library. Federal institutions like the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as new federal tax laws, all created support for nonprofit institutions, scholars, scientists, and artists.

In stark contrast to these shining examples of our creative past, however, Campbell described the current state of our public institutions thusly:

*It is...[an] assault on these institutions [that] we currently face, in the form of privatization, a laissez-faire, less-government-is-better philosophy, and a cult of success that measures success by money earned in the marketplace. Once-excellent public school systems are falling apart. Private corporations are eliminating or downsizing research and development labs, and our government representatives—representatives of you and me—are reducing spending for culture, scientific research, and education in favor of augmenting measures of control and punishment. Was this the promise of America?*

Guillermo Gómez-Peña completed the first evening of the symposium with readings from his work, which carried MacNeil's and Campbell's broad, socio-political vision beyond U.S. borders and into an imagined "post-Columbian, post-Gringostroika" future. A self-described "stubborn practitioner of many disciplines...an activist-artist, a border pirate, a cross-cultural citizen/diplomat...experimental linguist, alternative chronicler, and reformer within the U.S. cultural institutions," Gómez-Peña's rousing performance and internationalist ethos pushed the parameters of the symposium's discussions wide open.

**generations as a colony that  
we can exploit and have no  
obligations to.**

The discussion took on a more personal tone on the second day. Psychologist Ellen Winner, from Boston College and Harvard's Project Zero, described the difference between "universal creativity" and "domain creativity." Universal creativity is distinguished by three characteristics: inventiveness, playfulness, and flow. These are also the qualities, Winner said, that make the art work of young, visually- and spatially-gifted children so appealing. For instance, a child drawing a person wearing a necklace might draw a circle around the face in an inventive and unconventional reference to the "aroundness" of the necklace. Young children have not yet learned to work within the conventions of drawing, so they can "play" with color, texture, shape, and line, something a mature artist might do only by conscious choice. And gifted children, like mature artists, can draw for long stretches at a time, deeply engrossed and oblivious of the external world—a quality that Winner called "flow."

While an adult artist might reveal the same "universal creativity" characteristics, Winner said that the Picassos and Braques of the art world have additional qualities that make them "domain creative." These individuals, Winner said, are motivated "to alter an established tradition, to reject the prevailing way of doing things." Typically, she said, "domain creators are hard-driving, focussed, dominant, independent, and risk-takers...willing to risk failure, since anything new is likely at first to be ignored or repudiated."

Winner's remarks initiated a discussion on the relationship between the creative individual and the creative process among the symposium's "Respondents," a group chaired by writer and critic Brendan Gill. While Winner focused on giftedness in children, and how that gifted-

ness may or may not translate into adult domain creativity, Gill commented on creativity in older people:

*In old age, we tend to lose the inhibition of self-criticism...lose the fear of failure in the eyes of our friends and family...We regain a kind of creativity in age as a consequence of the loss of inhibition...It doesn't amount quite to a second childhood, but it does give us an opportunity...often reflected in the world of art...That is a very optimistic thing to discover and to look for and hope for, and is of high utility to society.*

Anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson commented that while "all creativity occurs in dialogue with tradition," domain creativity was a kind of "meta-creativity" that goes beyond the resources of civilization "to change the very notion of the resources of civilization." This idea of a "creative commonwealth" was explored vividly later in the symposium by Lewis Hyde.

Roger Mandle, President of the Rhode Island School of Design, asked, How do we nurture creativity in people who are not specially gifted or "domain creative?" Education must rise to the challenge of maintaining the connection between those who "give us the signals of civilization and push us forward" and those who "are more average...who turn out to be appreciators or nurturers," he said. Mandle's comments underlined a major theme of the symposium: the need to make universal creativity universally accessible.

Building on Mandle's remarks, physicist Thomas Humphrey challenged the widely perceived notion that

## **...a company that creates products tends to establish and reward objectives in predictable terms...**

creativity was only within the purview of the artist. He described creativity as a "search for insight," a definition, he said, that could be applied to all professions or domains. He urged symposium participants to develop a common vocabulary about creativity that people from all disciplines can understand.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles introduced herself as the "official (and unsalaried)" artist-in-residence at the New York City Department of Sanitation since 1982. In her work, she has demonstrated to communities around the world just how central art is to their lives, their public spaces, and their own sense of community. In 1978, for instance, she began a project titled *Touch Sanitation Performance*, which entailed shaking hands with all 8,500 of New York City's sanitation workers, saying to each, "Thank you for keeping New York City alive." She spent 2-1/2 years (1-1/2 years for research and obtaining official approvals, 11 months shaking hands) and walked thousands of city blocks to fulfill the project/performance. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, with funding from the Cambridge Arts Commission, Ukeles helped transform an unpopular landfill into the landmark Daney Park, a new center for neighborhood activities. In her current work, *Unburning Los Angeles* (for "Uncommon Sense," a show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles), she

invites city residents and employees (in the schools, fire stations, and street maintenance and sanitation departments) to create art pieces that help heal the scars of the 1992 Los Angeles riots and fires, calling these pieces "unburnings." Ukeles' invitation to these unexpected collaborators is based on her recognition that the city's employees need room for their own creative growth, that they have a dynamic capacity to be inventive and innovative.

Ukeles' descriptions of her own creative process—for instance, how the source of her current work in *Unburning Los Angeles* lay in her experience ten years before, in Philadelphia, when she learned about the 1837 burning of Freedom Hall—was a dramatic illustration of how artistic "products" emerge many years after the artists' first experiments with raw ideas or materials. (The same can be said about the time gap between basic science research and scientific and technological discovery, invention, and application.) Furthermore, Ukeles' account of how her work has evolved through her collaboration with city workers gave symposium participants a vivid and sometimes emotional account of an artist's engagement in society. The impact of Ukeles' remarks are best communicated by her own description of one of the many meetings she had with New York City sanitation workers:

*I got thousands of stories. One of them was this...[A sanitation worker told me that seventeen years ago he was collecting garbage] in Brooklyn and it was very hot. "It was in the 90s. We were tired. We had just loaded this lady's garbage. So we sat down on her steps to rest for a minute. She opened up the door and she said, 'Get away from here, you stinking garbage men. I don't want you stinking up my porch.' " And then he said to me, "Today [with Touch Sanitation Performance] you wiped that out...Will you remember that?" Now when he said "wiped that out," that was the best thing that had ever happened to me in*

## **Such a culture can not nurture, let alone reward, the surprise discovery.**

*my life as an artist, so that when he said the next thing it almost floored me, because how could I forget it? Would I forget that? And then I realized he was saying to me "Listen, artist. You are not my fellow worker, here. You're from the outside. And you have a job. And your job is to make sure that nobody forgets this."...So I made a piece for him called Cleansing the Bad Names, in front of the Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York. There's 75 feet of glass. We built two levels of scaffolds. I sent out a memo from headquarters: "Tell me the bad names that people have called you." We got thousands of names back. Thousands. And I wrote all these names, with helpers, along the 75 feet of glass. We wrote them all out. We built the scaffolds. And it wasn't for me to wipe them out. I invited many people and got 190 performers representing every level of society. I purposely invited people from every level of society. And that was what the performance was. In the center we rebuilt the lady's porch. The entrance to the gallery was the lady's porch. And we went back on that porch and we wiped out those bad names.*

## Hotbeds of Creativity

The discussion following Ukeles' moving presentation introduced the symposium's audience to several "hotbeds of creativity"—organizations that have successfully attacked difficult problems from an unconventional, highly creative angle. The main goal of the presentations was to illuminate situations and conditions that nurture the creative process.

David Liddle, co-founder (with Paul Allen) of Interval Research (a computer technology research group of scientists and artists), described "an intrinsic cultural problem in embedding a creative research lab in a traditional product company." He said that a company that creates products tends to establish and reward objectives in predictable terms; that is, project members are encouraged to make their projects turn out as they said they would. Such a culture cannot nurture, let alone reward, the surprise discovery. He went on:

*In research, you want to do the right thing, not do things right. Productivity in a research laboratory means nothing. Creativity means everything, because most of what you do isn't going to turn out how you thought it would.*

At Interval Research, Liddle leads a diverse and "transdisciplinary" group of scientists and artists in a lab that has two main goals: to support interdisciplinary research and experimentation; and to explore where computer technology may take individuals in the future. Participants are encouraged to break down the disciplinary barriers that isolate computer engineer from designer, or animation artist from physicist. Projects, not disciplines, Liddle said, are the organizing metaphor for Interval Research:

*We don't have any departments or groups or structures that are organized by discipline. We acknowledge when we hire somebody what most of their background was, but the only organizing metaphor that we use is a project. Everyone who works at our place has to work on at least two projects.*

Joe Cusumano of Vis Viva, a teaching and research group of artists and engineers, pointed out a common misconception about interdisciplinary groups:

*The notion that...we are trying to...bring aesthetics to engineers, or conversely, bring a rigorous empiricism to artists...is not the point at all. The point is, both of these groups do both of these things in different ways...Our group attempts...to foster creativity by creating a space for interaction between disciplines and viewpoints.*

Artist Peter Richards, Director of Arts Programs at the Exploratorium, elaborated on Liddle's concept of the surprise discovery. Richards began with a description of creativity as

*...being excited about something and then, in the act of learning more about it, engaging...other people in the process so that in the course of something being noticed, studied, sometimes being physically realized as an exhibit, it also becomes the center of a social phenomenon where a group of colleagues, and sometimes even visitors, enhance the idea with their own observations and perspectives.*

Thus, while the initial creative act may be solitary, he said, it becomes a collaborative effort. The kind of place that fosters this kind of creativity, Richards emphasized, is first and foremost a place that gives people freedom to

take risks; second, it is a place that allows people to discover and develop their own natural intelligence; third, it is a place where there are no "stupid" questions and no "right" answers. Richards was, of course, describing the Exploratorium and other residency programs at artists' communities across the country, but these three standards are likely to be present in any institution that nurtures creativity and innovation.

Richards went on to describe the interaction of an artist and a physicist, both concerned with the nature of light, at the Exploratorium. The artist Bob Miller's *Image Walk* presentation, spawned by his experiments with light and prisms, were focused around various organizing ideas such as "Light is Information" or "A Shadow is a Missing Image." The presentations, which Richards said could range anywhere from an hour in length to a whole day, prompted these words from physicist Rob Semper:

*His models...extended my thinking in new directions and led to new questions about what I saw happening right before my eyes. This was something that my optics course in college had failed to do...Image Walk points out the power of discovering something for yourself, the power of following your own curiosity step by step to new directions.*

Ralf Hotchkiss, founder of the Wheeled Mobility Center, focused his remarks on the need he sees to break down the barriers to both universal creativity (as defined by Ellen Winner earlier in the symposium) and universal access, a concept touched upon by Roger Mandle. His own work is a good example of domain creativity in that he has revolutionized the art of wheeled mobility. Hotchkiss teaches wheelchair-building at San Francisco State University and has launched 27 wheelchair-building workshops in 20 developing countries. Emphasizing that tools of discovery are not available to many people around the world (capital and time are functions of a certain economic class, he said, and 80% of people who need wheelchairs don't have them), Hotchkiss explained that the Wheeled Mobility Center has helped people around the world develop the means of designing their own wheelchairs, using materials available to them locally. Since he does not patent his designs, people can adapt them to local materials, labor skills, and site-specific needs. In his own words:

*If we can find ways to give people who have a vested interest in a solution to a problem, in the improvement of an environment, or in a change in aesthetics [then we also] need to find ways to give them access to the tools.*

Hotchkiss also underlined Peter Richards' assertion that there are no "right" answers, that each person employed in the wheelchair-building workshops is encouraged to discover his or her native intelligence.

*Part two of this report will appear in the September/October issue of Art Papers, and will include such topics as The Creative Commonwealth, Working Toward a Blueprint for Action, Opportunities for Support of Creativity: A Policymaking Viewpoint, A First Footprint, and A Blueprint for Action. For additional information regarding the symposium, the report, or other activities, please contact Alliance of Artists' Communities, 210 SE 50th Avenue, Portland, Oregon, 97215, tel. 503/239-7049, fax 503/239-6936, email AAC@TELEPORT.COM, or visit their website at HTTP://WWW.ARTISTCOMMUNITIES.ORG/~AAC.*

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# part two AMERICAN CREATIVITY AT RISK:

## Restoring Creativity Priority in Public Philanthropy, and

*This is the conclusion of Tricia Snell's report on a symposium held in November 1996 at Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design. Part one appeared in the July/August 1997 issue of Art Papers.*

### The Creative Commonwealth

In his address to the symposium, poet Lewis Hyde explored the bond between the individual artist and the community, using the details of Henry David Thoreau's life to illustrate this mutual dependence. Hyde, author of *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, described how Thoreau, often considered the model of an independent artist, had benefited from the facilities and library of Harvard

domain, both figuratively and literally. Perhaps, Hyde suggested, those gifts could be taxed to create a fund to support living artists. For instance, Thoreau's *Walden* still sells thousands of copies a year. Since it is now in the public domain (and as such is already a gift from the artist to the future), perhaps it and other books, music, plays, and films that have passed into the public domain could be tithed, and the monies collected could support emerging writers. Hyde went on to describe a similar model for this idea, the Music Performance Trust Fund. Established by a cooperative effort of the musicians' union and the Department of Labor, this fund collects a small fraction of the proceeds from the sale of recordings. The money collected is then paid out in fees to support live music performances. In their 1995-96 fiscal year, the Music Performance Trust collected an impressive \$8 million. Thus, the arts pay for the arts.

Hyde also described how Thoreau supported himself after college by teaching school, making pencils, and working as a surveyor. Hyde described this employment as "buying [Thoreau] creative time," or "being his own patron." Of this self-patronage Hyde commented, "He died at the age of forty-five with a tremen-

## The support of communities— educational and other institutions—

## ... is critical to the development of any artist.

College, which he attended as a scholarship student. Thoreau's housing was provided by a supportive family, his older sister shared with him her earnings from sewing, and his mother took in boarders to make extra money to support him. Thoreau also lived with Ralph Waldo Emerson for extended periods, and, when he moved to Walden Pond, lived on land owned by Emerson. The Lyceum Movement (a "kind of cooperative town lecture institution, like a public library," as Hyde described it) provided both Emerson and Thoreau with an audience and some income. Finally, Hyde said, the woods surrounding Concord provided Thoreau with the landscape that was so important to his work.

By listing the various supporters of Thoreau, Hyde effectively deconstructed the myth of the independent artist, the myth that "still dominates so much of our political discourse." The support of communities—educational and other institutions, family, friends, neighborhood, and colleagues—is critical to the development of any artist. In this way, Hyde demonstrated that even artists as "aggressively independent" as Thoreau have a need for a support system. "Thoreau was born with a talent, but he wasn't born the author of *Walden*; he is the fruit of a situation, of a context that nurtured him."

In return, Hyde elaborated, the artist gives back to his community as well. Thoreau's books are his legacy, like "gifts" to American culture that cross generations to enter the public

dous amount of unfinished work, [including] a great sheaf of papers...for a book...about native Americans...If he hadn't had to make twenty-four thousand pencils, we might have this book of Thoreau's."

### Working Toward a Blueprint for Action

Hyde's speech examined the creative community as part of a complex system. Hyde explained how, in most communities, it takes people from all sectors to make the social systems work. Following Hyde's talk, moderator Robert MacNeil led a cross-sectoral discussion about the future of American creativity. The conversation illuminated problems and opportunities unique to specific sectors, and suggested ways that organizations and individuals might collaborate across sectors to support creativity throughout American society.

John Elder, Stewart Professor of English and Environmental Studies at Middlebury College, spoke of his attitudes about creativity and college teaching:

*For me, creativity and education are synonymous. Education is not the reception of information or the imposition of form on disorderly minds. It's the empowerment of people to develop their capacities.*

He observed, however, that college teachers have a primary loyalty to their disciplines, and this intellectual insularity undermines both the concept and the possibility of a general education. He also described

# ity as a Policy, Cultural Education

by Tricia Snell

a need for community-wide "creative grieving" in a time when "the fabric of our natural world is being shredded... We have large problems that require us to rethink every social and cultural institution," he said. "We are challenged to rethink what we are doing and not to pursue art or education abstractly."

Historian Rogers Hollingsworth, from the University of Wisconsin, agreed with Elder's description of the insularity of academic disciplines. He said that there is increasingly less communication and collaboration across academic disciplines, especially in large research universities. Even within the same disciplines, subspecialties isolate college faculty members from one another, and curricula reflect these

**... Creativity and education  
are synonymous.**

isolated subspecialties. As a result, the larger public and research universities do not provide a broad humanistic education to their students.

Artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña discussed a similar problem in cultural and political terms. He said that in a time when national and cultural identity has become so fluid and confusing, people were retreating to isolationism, authoritarian behavior, and nativist positions. Art and education were essential tools for fighting these tendencies, Gómez-Peña said, and for promoting more fluid and tolerant notions of personal and national identity:

*Culture and education can perform a crucial role...we need to learn each other's languages. We need to learn each other's histories. We need to learn each other's political thoughts. And we need to educate our children about the dangers of racism, the complexities of living in a borderless society, which is the inevitable society of the future.*

Now is the time, Gómez-Peña emphasized, when artists and cultural institutions must become "borderismos" or "border translators"—that is, people and organizations that can cross geographical, metaphorical, cultural, artistic, and personal boundaries "to become sanctuaries, demilitarized zones, centers for activism, information, informal think tanks for intercultural dialogue."

Artist Mel Chin described his own efforts at negotiating the terrain between his own work and popular culture. Invited to participate in "Uncommon Sense," the group show commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary Art [for which Mierle Ukeles created *Unburning Los Angeles*, discussed in part one of this report], Chin asked Hollywood producer Aaron Spelling to collaborate on the project. Chin and his studio of students from Cal Arts and the University of Georgia now have been creating art for one of the producer's popular prime-time shows, *Melrose Place*. The project allows the student artists creative freedom, yet they work within the deadline and budget constraints of a weekly series. "If we are at a crisis," Chin insisted, "then this is the time when more experimentation, as opposed to less, should occur."

He argued that the artist must understand popular culture and must be prepared to make expeditions into it:

*I'm interested in those outside my world and how [creative process]...is being destroyed. I don't feel I'm at risk, but actually that we should take more risk... We should be inventing tools to re-examine our lives—if it's true that the unexamined life is not worth living—because those tools are being stripped on a daily basis. And we have to understand popular culture and what it does to strip that away.*

Chin's remarks, as did Gómez-Peña's comments, recalled Ellen Winner's description of "domain creativity"—that is, the desire to alter an established tradition, to reject a prevailing way of doing things.

## **Opportunities for Support of Creativity: A Policymaking Viewpoint**

On the final day of the symposium, Hyde led a discussion among funding agency representatives. This group examined the successes and failures of past initiatives, looked to the current funding climate, and made suggestions for the future.

Pat Williams, Vice President for Programs and Policy at the American Association of Museums (AAM), focused her suggestions for future arts funding on partnership models. For instance, she described a new form of partnership between private and public sectors in the Midwest. The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, recently opened a charter school funded by a coalition of the Museum, the Ford Motor Company, and the Detroit Public School System. Out of a shared concern for the Ford Motor Company's future work force, the model Williams described involved one private corporation, one private nonprofit institution, and one city agency establishing a school dedicated to stimulating innovation and creativity among students and faculty.

Williams also described a federal-level partnership project that she was working on. She said that the AAM plans to collaborate with six private sector partners and four federal cultural agencies to conduct a national strategic planning initiative on cultural tourism, which she described as "a huge opportunity to partner with the commercial sector, to not

**... It's the empowerment of people  
to develop their capacities.**

lose sight of our own mission, our own uniqueness, and our own authenticity, but to also bring about the flow of new dollars into our institutions."

Williams also cautioned everyone to pay close attention to proposed changes to tax laws affecting nonprofit organizations. "It's under attack in many places," she said. "We need to be at the table when those discussions are going on to ensure that if changes are made they're made in a way that's beneficial to the arts and humanities community."

Pennie Ojeda, of the National Endowment for the Arts, also touched on the need for vigilant attention to the changes made in legislation affecting artists and cultural organizations:

*Congress made this very crucial policy decision of not supporting individual artists, and there was very little public comment about that, once the process had happened and the Endowment was out of the news for the time being. But I think...we shouldn't abandon the possibility of the Endowment ever being able to fund individual artists directly...There's been too much success proven in that area. We need to reclaim that as a possibility.*

Ted Berger, Executive Director of the New York Foundation for the Arts, said that unlike past decades, when the NEA had the power to effect dramatic change, the 1990s are a time when "solutions are not going to come from on high, [but rather are] going to trickle up in ways that are very, very different." He went on to describe smaller, artist-driven conversations and initiatives, and he advocated political involvement: "The arts community talks a lot about politics, but it's not politically involved," he said.

Archibald Gillies, President and CEO of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., while noting the success of site-specific

and regional efforts, emphasized the need for action on a national level. When individual artists were cut from the NEA's budget, "where were we?" he asked. "Where was the establishment? Where were national leaders, university presidents, and heads of foundations? With very, very rare exceptions, there was no one who stood up while this was going on. I think we have to start by acknowledging our defeat and trying to figure out why that happened." People have abandoned the national arena for the comfort of their immediate communities, he said. The private market economy is strong but the national foundations, public and private, lack strong leadership. It is time, he said, that people move to fill that vacuum—to collaborate with other institutions, to expand their community, and to engage those outside their immediate circle.

Gillies listed three major, national initiatives that he felt should top the list of our priorities: 1) publicize the content of the "American Creativity at Risk" symposium and speak out publicly in support of creativity; 2) continue to build public understanding and political strength through broad, collaborative networks; and 3) develop and promote a bill that would tax works in the public domain and invest the monies collected in a fund for individual artists, as Hyde had described.

Hollingsworth cautioned that it was "not sufficient for writers, intellectuals, artists, and scientists to join together and to try to shape an agenda." A wider coalition of interest groups was required to effect real change, he said, one that addressed broad, societal issues and involved other major groups in

## Fundamentally, if we are concerned with creativity in this society,

society, such as the corporate sector and low income Americans. "Fundamentally," he said, "...if we are concerned with creativity in this society, we have to be concerned with the quality of life of the entire

society." He said that historically, major government policy had been created to support the arts, sciences, and humanities only at times when a very broad alliance of varied interest groups had worked to improve some fundamental issue of quality of life. These moments often came at times of crisis:

*For instance, in the 1930s, the Congress of the United States did support artists, but significantly, there was an alliance involving artists and the WPA Program, which came about in part through coalitions with labor unions and large numbers of other groups in American society. When the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities came about...it occurred somewhat in the context of the war on poverty.*

Upon being asked by Hyde if he could picture a "re-articulation of power" that would be effective, Hollingsworth's response was sobering:

*This is a huge country with enormous diversity in terms of ethnic, religious, racial groups, and the like, and the more homogeneous the society in all of those respects, and the smaller the society, the easier it is to mobilize power. It's very, very difficult...in a society of this size and complexity, to build a coalition...[However] I think it is necessary that the Alliance [of Artists' Communities] attempt to engage in coalition building, but that it be as broad as possible and that it be very much concerned with the quality of life that we wish to have in this society.*

This coalition-building is the very reason for the symposium and this report, and we hope it is the reason you are reading this article.

### First Footprint

In the symposium's final session, Brendan Gill discussed how the Respondents could best distill a "Blueprint for Action" from all that had been said. He advised that a blueprint was premature, and that a "footprint" (an architectural term for the bounds of space in which a structure can be built) was a more appropriate metaphor. Roger Mandle presented a point-by-point footprint that encompassed eight action points earlier set out by Mary Schmidt Campbell, as well as the major themes that had risen out of the symposium discussions.

The Blueprint, which I invite you to copy and distribute freely, addresses all who seek to restore creativity as a priority in public policy, cultural philanthropy, and education. It speaks to industry leaders, educators, scientists, artists, government agencies, and private foundations. It speaks to the diverse American public about its own interests and to the needs of future generations.

### A Blueprint for Action

For opinion leaders, policy makers, and creative thinkers in all sectors of society.

Goal:

Restore creativity as a priority in American public policy, philanthropy, and education.

Steps:

1. Recognize that creativity is not discipline-specific but transcends age, gender, race, and culture; its sustenance is a societal issue, one vital to the future of American society. Recognize that creativity is an innate quality in all individuals, and work towards a society that unleashes that creativity for the common good

2. Identify the ingredients that nurture and expand the creativity of individuals. Widen the debate on the nature of creativity to include educators, policy-makers, and practitioners from all disciplines.

3. Continue to support creative activities, environments, programs, and projects that move society forward. Work vigilantly to keep healthy the infrastructures that nurture the development of creativity in individuals in all sectors of society.

## we have to be concerned with the quality of life of the entire society.

4. Become an advocate and practitioner of bringing the disciplines together to address the issues of our times. Look to the collective skills and wisdom of all individuals in our society to bring about a creative renaissance in the new millennium.

5. Urge parents to take responsibility for the education of their children. Advocate the development and maintenance of informed educational systems—ones that emphasize universal access and that reward innovation, educational excellence, and social responsibility, rather than the "right answers."

6. Recognize the role that artists play in society. Collaborate with institutions, businesses, unions, government, and the media, establishing national and international linkages to enhance opportunities for artists to serve society as creative problem-solvers. Extend public understanding and respect for artists' skills and insights, and their abilities as citizens to work with other problem-solvers to advance humanity.

7. Recognize that with innovation comes the possibility of failure; creativity and risk are strange bedfellows whose progeny cannot be predicted. Advocate for research and development budgets with the understanding that they are the bedrock of innovation, ensuring that the concern for the bottom line does not mortgage our future.

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