

2017

## Kerr, John Hoare (1978-1984): Article 03

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A trio plays as children warm up.



A sculptor in an artist in schools program.

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## ARTISTS IN THE SCHOOLS:

[On October 21, 1977, John Kerr, director, and Thomas A. Kanahale, administrator of the education program of the National Endowment for the Arts, were interviewed about the artist in schools program by Charles O. Moody, MENC director of development, and John Aquino, MENC acting director of publications-editor, ME].

**CM:** Artist in schools programs have received a great deal of publicity, have had an influence on arts education, and have also inspired some criticism from arts educators. And yet, with all this, music educators and MENC have really not been much involved in AIS programs.

**Kerr:** I think that one of the reasons the Endowment hasn't done much in the schools in the music area is that there was already so much being done. And beyond that there was a large amount of money in our symphony orchestra program, really more than is going into our AIS program, and a large part of that was going into the schools. And so we moved rather slowly, I think, in the music area. At the last meeting of the National Council on the Arts that I attended, which must have been some time in May, the question was asked, why aren't we doing more in jazz and folk music? I suppose this is something that we should do. Another thing that occurs to me is that while in the beginning we sought advice from professional arts education organizations when we moved into a particular subject area, the program was designed to place artists

who were meant to work with the arts educator in the school. And so, from that point of view, there is a commonality of interest.

**CM:** There are two points that bear consideration. As you mentioned, there is a great deal of music already in the schools. Music is surely the most visible of the arts in the schools, and because of this, as you explained, the focus of AIS programs tends to be on other areas.

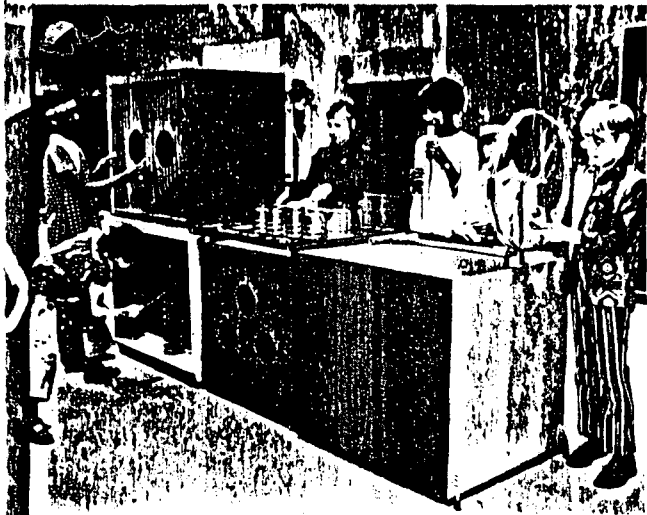
**Kerr:** It has tended that way. We feel a little guilty about it. It's still in the guidelines.

**CM:** But there are many more music educators in the school than there are other arts educators. There is, therefore, a larger population and larger end result, a larger expectancy, and a larger realization of the existence of AIS, if only because there are more music educators than others. But there's something else to this. A remote ancestor of artist in schools is presumably the Ford-funded program that put composers and musicians in schools.

**Kerr:** No question about it. That was one of the first things I looked into.

**CM:** And this program had a sensitizing effect on music educators. So I think some of the sensitivity that we have experienced toward the AIS program from our members in the field has been partly due to their previous experience and partly due to their previous experience and partly to their feeling that they have been left out. This is why we feel that we need something specifically addressed to music educators in the field about the AIS program.

All photos courtesy of the National Endowment for the Arts.



A music machine project in Tennessee.



An artist supervises a mosaic sculpture.

## A DISCUSSION FOR MUSIC EDUCATORS

**Kerr:** I suspect what is happening, and I hope it is so, is that the National Endowment for the Arts is becoming increasingly sensitive to the needs of education, and the Office of Education is becoming increasingly sensitive to the importance of the arts.

**CM:** I hope this is so, too. With this in mind, what information are we to disseminate to our membership? The AIS guidelines state on page three that there should be appropriate involvement and sharing with state associations and professional organizations.

**Kanahele:** One thing that should be made clear is that the proper source of information for people interested in pursuing artist in schools programs is state arts agencies. I say this because we have been swamped by many phone calls saying, "Can we apply?" The state arts agencies are doing a fantastic job in trying to get the information out and yet still not reaching everyone. So people should contact the state arts agency, specifically the AIS coordinator in the state arts agency.

**Kerr:** I had a funny experience in New York. I was in this bus coming in from the airport. And behind me were these two men. One turned to the other, and they started talking. Well, it turned out that one was a filmmaker in Vermont, and the other one was the person who coordinated the film efforts in a Montpelier school. And they were asking back and forth, and the artist said, "Do you ever have artists in the school? Do you ever employ artists?" And the other said, "No, we don't." And I said to myself, "Isn't it extraordinary, here we are on the same bus." And I couldn't resist it. I turned around, and I said, "Look, I

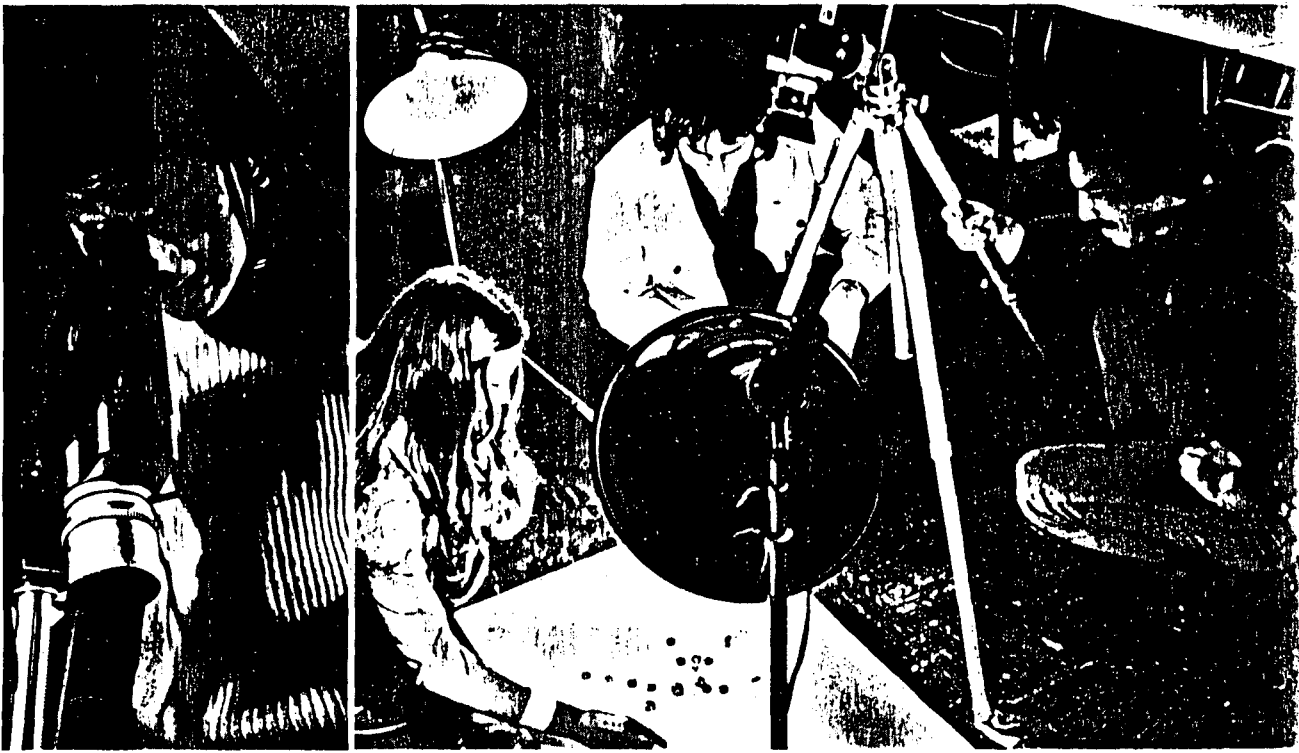
run a program like that." And I said to the fellow from Montpelier, "Do you know your state arts agency person in Montpelier and your artist in schools coordinator?" And he said, "No, I never heard of him." So, while we say contact them, we really mean that because people often don't know what to do. Here this man was in Montpelier, which isn't the biggest city in the world, was running the whole school program in film, and as far as I know at one time we did have a film grant there—it never really got off the ground very much because I think the teachers were a little bit nervous about the AIS program. They wanted to have a filmmaker with them, but they really didn't want him too much in the classroom. So, it's no small communication thing that you all could do.

**CM:** Where does the initiative come from to select the school system where the artists will be placed?

**Kanahele:** The AIS coordinator of the state arts agency goes out, and it literally becomes a selling job of the AIS program to the school and to the school principal. It's up to the school principal or the school superintendent to decide. But the last word really comes from the school principal or the teachers themselves.

**JA:** A question that needs to be answered is, why artist in the schools rather than something else?

**Kerr:** Okay, well, I can answer that from the point of view of the Endowment. The Endowment's mandate is for the support of the artist and the professional arts organization. We de-



Cinematography program.

Animator.

cided that if we were to be involved in education in any way, it would have to be through that mandate and through the thing we do best, and that is the involvement of the artist. That's one answer. Another answer is that the artist wants to be involved in the schools and the learning process and to do a good job at it. And as the agency that is particularly involved with artists and arts organizations, where their interests are, our interests should be. The third answer would be, we have had a lot of push toward that direction. It started in the early days with the Bureau of the Budget. The Endowment had very little money in those days, and the then-Commissioner Marland was prevailed upon to transfer, I think it was, \$100,000 to the Arts Endowment. We talked with the Office of Education about how it was to be used and, since we had had previous experience with poetry in the schools and symphony orchestras, that seemed the logical place to go. So we expanded a program that just grew with demand.

**Kanahele:** We have pilots to develop in the education area like "learning through arts"—which places artists in the communities. We have projects that are in their pilot and their laboratory stages. This year we begin evaluation of those approximately seventeen projects. The only involvement we have in higher education is arts administration—six universities who are in their fifth years.

**Kerr:** One of the good things about "learning through arts" is that, much as we're happy

with going through the arts agencies, we'd like the freedom to be able to fund others now and then. And if people can qualify under "learning through the arts" and can fit into the laboratory scheme, perhaps we can do something.

**JA:** Let's take up your statement that the emphasis is with the artist. Many people, like Ralph Smith in a recent article in *Art Education*, have indicated that the literature about the AIS program is often unclear as to whether it is an educational program or an artist-oriented program.

**Kerr:** See, I have great difficulty with that. To me that's all bunkum in a way because we are both: We are for education and are for artists. We are concerned in both areas, and the fact that both seem to work very well together is not an anomaly to us; it seems like a very obvious thing. They're working together. Why must you take a position that one is only for artists or only for educators? It seems to me that they all meld in well together. I'm a pragmatist. If it works, then you should look at it, and you should certainly say, why does it work, how can we get more of it? But it seems to me that one doesn't say, I know it works, but is it fish or fowl? I don't think it has to be fish or fowl. I think it has to be whatever is needed for people to develop a good experience with the arts. And so, as for all of those criticisms of the AIS program, either I am very, very dense or they have absolutely passed me by, because I judge from experiences I have had in personally looking at pro-



Filmmaker.



Painter.

grams. This is not to say that there are no problems. There are obviously problems in anything you do that's worthwhile. One of the major concerns we have is that teachers and artists get together beforehand and understand what is going to be done and how it's going to be done. And we think there's no substitute for this type of orientation. We're not just dumping people willy-nilly into a situation and saying, "Okay, just go." I visited a group of artists and teachers in Hawaii. They were in a room, and for the first half hour nobody would say anything except the person who was trying to get them together. And then one of the teachers said, "Okay, you come into the classroom, and we want to know what you're going to do, how you're going to do it, and that we have all the skills that you are going to present so that there are no surprises for us?" And the artists said, "Great, we would like to do that with you." And before I left that place they were having sessions on how they would be exploring the arts in class.

**Kanahele:** And it is frightening to have an artist in the classroom. I taught for five years before I came to the Endowment. And two days after an artist came to my class, a student came up to me and said, "Mr. Kanahele, he knows more than you do." And I said to myself, "Okay, that's it! No more artist in my classroom!" When you're on that side looking out, it's a threat to the educator. You really have to sit down and analyze it and say, how

came to the conclusion that here this person's a professional, and what a nice way to rip off a talent. But even before an artist is placed in the classroom many teachers are nervous about it. When there was that teacher strike in New Jersey, we went through one week of hell because we had a hundred calls to our office coming in from teachers saying, "Artists are stealing our jobs!" Situations like that become a confusing miscommunication. When you're an educator, it takes a lot of understanding.

**Kerr:** And the thing is that we're either going to hang separately or we're going to have success together. It's a time when school budgets are being slashed, and they say teachers are the first to go. It's refreshing to know that places that have had artists in residence or schools have opted to hire arts teachers. The two should work jointly together to avoid the mayhem.

**JA:** Connected with the whole subject of teacher attitudes and fears is the concern about letting artists serve as teachers when they are not certified to teach. This practice brings up the questions, who is qualified to teach, and what does certification mean?

**Kerr:** What teachers are being certified for is really not what artists are doing. What artists are doing is presenting as best as they can what they are doing in their art form. Certification does not always address that. An artist is



Potter.

Blindfold clay experience.

Ceramacist and puppeteer.

**Kanahale:** Certification in this case really makes no difference because the artist is there as a practicing professional artist and a resource person. The teacher is the last word, and "turf" should be clarified from the beginning. Inservice training can help this.

**Kerr:** That isn't to say the artist won't show the kids how to use a wheel or how to do a welding thing—

**JA:** It definitely is a team approach, then.

**Kerr:** At its best, it definitely is. There are, of course, as many variations on what we say here as there are grants. We're saying that they're not there as teachers, but we're not saying that the learning process isn't being helped along, that people aren't being trained in the arts by their being there. There wouldn't be any point in their being there if you were to put them in a pit and say to the kids, "There's an artist down there."

**JA:** But at the root of the AIS program is the a priori assumption that artists are good communicators of their skills. What is the screening process that state arts agencies use or is there a general policy?

**Kerr:** There are educators, artists, and administrators who meet together and look over the qualifications. It varies in each form how it's done. In the visual, it's done with a panel. Because music has been not as big a program, it isn't as cut and dried, but there is some kind of panel process that goes. In dance, there's a panel that develops a list of people, and another panel selects from that list.

**JA:** Let's deal again with whether it's an educational program or an arts-oriented program.

Elliot Eisner, for instance, has written about the need for determining educational criteria for AIS programs. Now, the AIS guideline state, "Strictly educational criteria may not always accommodate the uniqueness of the artists in schools program." Ralph Smith in the *Art Education* article takes this up and asks what other type of criteria should educators be concerned with if it is something that is in the schools?

**Kerr:** Okay, again, that is the kind of question that seems to me to pick at a thing to death. I think that the truth is that any educator in the arts will say that criteria for the arts are very hard to determine, that evaluations in the arts are not as easy to prove as evaluations in the sciences, say, or in mathematics. And I think that that's one of the things that the guidelines are trying to get a hold of. What we're after is not turning out a generation of artists, particularly, although that would be a nice thing, but rather, people who will be sensitive to their environment, to their culture, to their arts, who will have some kind of addition to their lives, and I suppose that's the only way ultimately to find out what effect it has had. The thing is, I think what one should do is go in and see what's happening. And we have done that. When pressed by people to evaluate, we have evaluated, and we took the areas of visual arts and poetry. In the Western states, they did an evaluation, which was with no help from us whatsoever except that we funded it. As a matter of fact, I wasn't even permitted to visit or encouraged to even talk to people except to generally find out what the projects were grounded in. And it was overwhelming, and it was so positive that when I saw it I said, "Who's going to believe this?" And they said, "What did you want us to do, tamper with the facts?" And I said, "I don't want to tamper with the facts."



Poet.

Students working with poetry.

Poems for a poet.

but I was just amazed since we have had such tremendous criticism from a few people, and I emphasize that it's only a few people. The interesting thing is, when you get out into the project, it seems to me, the criticism doesn't exist so heavily. There are problems, certainly, that have to be worked out, but the split between the artist and the teacher or the educator in actual fact does not exist when they're really working together. It's almost as if somebody's stirring the mush and saying, "Watch out for these guys," and then, in turn, trying to get the other people to be nervous about something. And maybe it's just the nature of people.

**JA:** I also think that the only things you hear are usually the bad things. I know several classroom teachers who are working with artists in schools, and they say, "Well, you know the principal will run in with an emergency note for the student. And she'll go into a classroom, and the class will be gone because the artist decided he wanted to go to a museum." They say that artists don't pay any attention to school schedules, or to classroom. . . .

**Kerr:** And that's a problem that should be worked out.

**Kanahele:** The teacher has to lay down the law with that artist. If that child gets out of that classroom, if the artist took him out, it's still the teacher's fault, so that has to be checked on. I really got blasted by this when my artist asked to take the kids out to the football field. And I said, "Fine!" And when he went out to the football field, what was he doing? Our school had green and yellow bleachers, and he was unbolting the bleachers and shifting them around to show how with a

ance of the football field. And the principal hit the ceiling. The kids thought it was fantastic, but, of course, that didn't go along with the administration, the administrator there. I got chewed out for that because the artist was given permission by me to go out there, and I didn't take the time to say, "By the way, what are you going to do?" It's really role definition, and communication, and the only way it works is not between the people who write the articles but between the teacher and the artist, with the administrator there to give an overall idea of how the system is going to work.

**CM:** This is something I keep coming back to. I'm having difficulty with the bridge. There is the AIS coordinator, who has, as I've heard you describe it, a selling job. I have some difficulty seeing the connection, getting from the person with that selling job to the kind of cooperative, mutually reinforcing relationship going on down here.

**Kerr:** What happens sometimes, and I have to say "sometimes" because there are so many schools doing programs, but there's usually responsibility given to some particular person in the school system, and that may be a music supervisor or an arts supervisor. Then within the schools if there is a music teacher, then responsibility would be given to the music teacher. But there's always somebody assigned to that role. Then you get to the key, how well is that role being accomplished and how cooperative is the artist at that point? Again, I think a lot of that has to be done by getting together with the people beforehand. For example, in architecture and dance, we have a whole series of meetings with the principals, dancers, and the teachers who are go-

**CM:** Is perhaps part of the problem of the relationship between the artist and teacher derived from a sense of competition between those teachers who feel that they also are artists? The visual arts and music teachers usually see themselves as professional artists.

**Kerr:** One of my children, obviously thinking of what his daddy did, said something to the teacher, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could have an artist in our classroom?" And the teacher didn't know what daddy did. I was there, and she said, "Look, I'm not going to go into that. It's a mess, and I know it." And I said, "Why do you say it's a mess?" And she said, "Look, I'm not having anybody take over my authority in the classroom. This is what I do, and I do it best."

**JA:** It then requires redefining the role of the teacher—

**Kanahele:** It also requires the artist knowing what the teacher is about. When an artist comes in, they may not know that each child is unusual, that each child has limits, that each child has potentials for things he can and cannot do, that the teacher is the one responsible for discipline in the classroom, that the teacher is following lesson plans. So it requires that a teacher get together with an artist and explain what he's to expect and that an artist tell a teacher, "Look, these are my skills."

**Kerr:** We're terribly interested in having this sort of thing done, and the state arts agencies are doing it more and more. Some of the criticism that has come up about the AIS program is not really as justified as it would have been in the early days of the program when we were just starting out. In your pilot stage, you watch it so carefully that you make sure those things are taken care of. Then there's that period when you say, now we know it works, let's turn it over to some other people and see how they handle it. And in the process they may or may not make some mistakes along the way. And those get widespread around. And people come in and say we've gotta eliminate those things, and they move quickly to eliminate them. But it's like a cultural lag. People may be criticizing things that have already been corrected. One nice thing about it, however, even though I say we have to stop ripping at each other, is that it's good to have criticism. I don't know if we would have moved to a grant to have our programs as thoroughly evaluated as we did if Elliot Eisner had not written his articles. I hope we would have. But he certainly has made a great contribution.

**CM:** But, again, about the tensions between artists and teachers, arts educators often are performers as well. The teacher as a performer is usually a soloist. Perhaps part of the problem is that it's very difficult if you've always been a solo performer to learn at a later point in your career to share the stage, especially if you are unclear about the reason. Another aspect of this is the frustration the teacher feels about the surroundings in which he performs—having to serve in loco parentis, for example. And the teacher says, "I would be a better performer if I didn't have these responsibilities. But I accept these kinds of restraint." Then the artist comes in, as a performer, without these constraints. And this reinforces the teacher's feeling that he would love to perform unfettered. This is a potential source of jealousy.

**Kerr:** I see what you're getting at. That's probably true.

**JA:** And, if I can continue the illustration, there is also the feeling, perhaps, from teachers that "I have made the sacrifice. I have devoted my life to education." And the artist comes in and is a performer and also gets to teach. And the teacher may say, "Hey, I got a bum break. This guy is a performer, and he also gets to teach!"

**Kerr:** Then what can we do? The education system has anchored on people a lot of restraints that they would rather do without. Can we get rid of those restraints, or is the system too strong?

**Kanahele:** One thing that we can do is have the teachers get together with the artists assigned to their classrooms, or if they don't have an assigned artist to seek one out who is working in schools, and get together and learn from them, share knowledge with them.

**JA:** I want to end this by saying that one of the things I admire about the AIS program is how it has altered the common stereotype about artists. It used to be people would say, "Oh, artists are too inward and concerned about their art to care about education." And, for some of the AIS artists who don't work out, this may be so. But for many of the others who have functioned successfully in the classroom, the stereotype doesn't hold true—they want to be active in education. And that's good to know.

**Kerr:** We are requiring more of artists than has been the case since the Renaissance, when artists were an active part of the community. And it's working. ||