

University of Rhode Island

DigitalCommons@URI

---

Briefing Book: National Endowment for the Arts  
(1994)

Education: National Endowment for the Arts  
and Humanities, Subject Files I (1973-1996)

---

6-15-1994

## Briefing Book: National Endowment for the Arts (1994): Correspondence 03

Jane Alexander


Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell\\_neh\\_I\\_14](https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_14)

---

### Recommended Citation

Alexander, Jane, "Briefing Book: National Endowment for the Arts (1994): Correspondence 03" (1994).  
*Briefing Book: National Endowment for the Arts (1994)*. Paper 6.  
[https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell\\_neh\\_I\\_14/6](https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_14/6)[https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell\\_neh\\_I\\_14/6](https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_14/6)

This Correspondence is brought to you for free and open access by the Education: National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, Subject Files I (1973-1996) at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Briefing Book: National Endowment for the Arts (1994) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu).

NATIONAL  
 ENDOWMENT  
 FOR THE  
  
 ARTS

June 15, 1994

The Hon. Claiborne Pell  
 U.S. Senate  
 335 Russell Senate Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20510

*The Federal agency  
 that supports the  
 visual, literary and  
 performing arts to  
 benefit all Americans*

Dear Senator Pell:

*Office of the  
 Chairman*

Much of my time these past eight months has been spent travelling across the country talking with people about the National Endowment for the Arts. I have been to 36 states so far and seen the wonderful arts organizations the Endowment has made possible in areas of the United States from the most rural to the most dense inner city: organizations which build communities through the celebration of heritage, or that address the needs of at-risk youth in after-school programs or go into the classrooms to teach music, or painting.

*Arts in Education*

*Challenge &  
 Advancement*

*Dance*

*Design Arts*

*Expansion Arts*

*Folk Arts*

*International*

*Literature*

*Locals*

*Media Arts*

*Museum*

*Music*

*Opera/Musical  
 Theater*

*Presenting &  
 Commissioning*

*State & Regional*

*Theater*

*Visual Arts*

The National Endowment for the Arts is an unqualified success as an agency. For every dollar we award we leverage 11 to 20 from other public and private sources in a community. This is no handout by the federal government but an investment by the American taxpayer of 65 cents per person, per year in the vitality of our communities both economically and creatively.

That is why it is so distressing to me to read mailings from the Christian Action Network and other groups which so distort and misrepresent what we at the Endowment do. Let me set the record straight with regard to inaccurate accounts currently being circulated by these groups.

The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, one of the oldest (1879) and most prestigious museums in the country received a \$104,500 matching grant in March 1993, to support a season of more than 100 performing arts events.

On March 5, 1994, the Walker Art Center hosted a one night performance by Ron Athey before an audience of 100 people. Mr. Athey and a three-member cast performed excerpts from his ritualistic work exploring modern day martyrdom as it relates to AIDS. Athey is HIV-positive and his work includes scarification and the use of acupuncture needles.

There was absolutely no risk to the audience, the performers, or the crew backstage. The Walker Art Center took all health precautions necessary and the Minnesota Health Department concurred.

*The Nancy Hanks Center  
 100 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
 Washington, DC 20506  
 202/682-5400*

There was no blood dripping from towels as erroneously reported in the Minneapolis Star Tribune three weeks after the event took place.

Walker officials recognized the mature theme of the performance and advised viewer discretion in all press materials and calendars which advertised the performance.

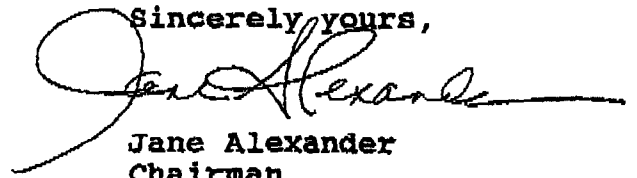
Subsequent letters to the Star Tribune editor from patrons at the performance expressed dismay not only about the inaccurate coverage of the event, but concern about how the newspaper had trivialized what was a moving performance on a very disturbing and important contemporary subject. These people are taxpayers too.

I fully understand that the National Endowment for the Arts must be accountable to your constituents and those of other members of Congress. In supporting the Walker Art Center, the Endowment is simply responding to the overwhelming support afforded that institution by the people and the corporate community of Minneapolis. The Walker is clearly the most prestigious cultural institution in Minnesota. It is staffed by serious professionals who are accountable to the community, and we expect them to make decisions that are respectful of, and appropriate to the community. This I believe they have done.

I wish it were not so, but the reports following Mr. Athey's performance lend a certain proof to the old adage that a falsehood repeated over and over eventually becomes truth in the ear of the listener. In past years, the Endowment has been harmed over and over again by false reports about the art it may or may not have supported, reports that get repeated again until they have the ring of truth.

I have devoted the first year of my chairmanship to turning around the reputation of the National Endowment for the Arts by engaging people all over the country in a dialogue about all of the very good projects that we support. I felt it was important in this respect to give you the facts regarding the performance at the Walker Art Center. I hope you will contact me if you have any additional questions about it.

Sincerely yours,



Jane Alexander  
Chairman

JA/lw