

5-17-1990

## Reauthorization: S. 2724 (1990): Memorandum 04

Alexander D. Crary

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M E M O R A N D U M

w/v  
TO: Senator ✓  
FROM: ADC  
RE: Attached article re NEA and Realist Artists  
May 17, 1990

I can understand why you are upset over what you have read in this piece from HUMAN EVENTS. I can assure you that the article is based almost entirely on lies and distortions of fact. HUMAN EVENTS picked the piece up from the NEW YORK CITY TRIBUNE - both being ultra-conservative publications which are doing all they can to fan the flames of opinion against the Arts Endowment.

I have spoken twice with Stuart Pivar who clearly generated this piece in the beginning. He is an irrational and semi-hysterical person who has been connected with the New York Academy of Art, a small and new art school in New York City that teaches its 70 students to draw the human figure in the classical tradition. He called me first when he learned that the NEA had rejected the Academy's Challenge Grant application. He could hardly speak he was so furious. He claimed the NEA turned him down for aesthetic reasons and not on the strength of the application. I subsequently learned that the New York Academy is having severe financial troubles and that it had not been in existence long enough to qualify for a Challenge Grant. Aesthetics aside, it wouldn't and shouldn't have gotten this grant.

After cooling Pivar down, I told him that you were encouraging the NEA to give fair consideration to artists and institutions who represented classical and realist traditions. BUT there is still no significant demand from this community for NEA support. This entire piece is based on distorted information from a single financially-pressed rejected applicant.

I also tried to check on John Arthur, the source who refers to you in the piece. The NEA has no record of him ever serving as a panelist which he claims to have been in the 1970's. His credentials here are suspiciously vague. Neither he nor Pivar would seem qualified to say that NEA's jury system is artistically biased.

None of this addresses a fundamental question central to all of this and which I have raised many times before. Are artists who create the type of art that you prefer actually applying for NEA support and, if so, is this the type of art that the national leader in arts support (the NEA) should be supporting? There is

no systematic bias at the NEA against realist painters - as charged in this article. The Visual Arts Program - obviously with the backing of the distinguished National Council on the Arts - supports what it views as art on the cutting edge, that is representative of what is pushing art in the United States forward today; art that will mark this time in the overall history of art. Since funds are so limited, they likely decided that this is the area in which the federal leader in the arts should show its leadership. Perhaps they think there is no leadership in supporting artists whose style harks back to earlier centuries. That art has been done and the NEA may not be the agency to support it. (Perhaps state arts councils?)

Schools of art, however, are funded - schools that have a quality track record unlike Pivar's. While drawing is taught at these institutions, it may not be required as it is at Pivar's school where the emphasis is strictly on figure drawing. Pivar believes that it is impossible to be an artist and not know how to draw the human figure.

If you ever had time, I would suggest that you and I attend a Visual Arts Fellowship panel review meeting at the NEA. I have done so twice to see what kinds of artists are applying and what gets funded. The panel begins by viewing the slides submitted by artists without learning their names - and ALL submitted slides are shown in this first session. There is no pre-screening by staff to weed out the classical/realist work. Each time the slides are shown, the panelists weed more out until they have a number that can be funded with available funds.

I cannot remember seeing works that were representational in a classical or 19th century sense. There was plenty of contemporary representational art, however, but I do not believe this is what appeals to you. It is an amazing process and it helps so much to see how it works first hand. Witnessing it would provide a great deal more depth for you in discussing this and since it is such an important issue for you, I highly recommend that you try to do this. It made me truly appreciate the strength and integrity of the peer review system and the professional way the NEA conducts it.