

1989

Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 08

John M. Ludwig

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE *for* MUSIC THEATER

Advancing Opera and Musical Theater

June 23, 1989

Congressman Sidney Yates
2234 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Yates:

I am, like many of your fans, grateful for your effective support for our Arts Endowment.

However, I understand your committee has agreed that prohibiting NEA from using the sub-grant mechanism will be an effective response to complaints of Rep. Arney and other legislators, and, with all respect, sir, I urge you to reconsider.

Banning sub-grants will not reduce the incidence of funding for controversial artists, but it will significantly diminish the NEA's ability to form productive Public/Private partnerships and to assist individual artists, especially those at career-entry level.

I speak from personal conviction based on 12 years' experience. This Institute is a sub-granting organization and receives about 12% of its funding from NEA. Each year promising young singers and composers in opera and musical theater are recommended to us by established professionals across the nation, and we process about 450 applications from those young artists who qualify.

Our grantees receive not only cash grants, but, more importantly, they are given on-going advice and guidance from advanced professionals and invaluable introductions into the professional network, services any Government agency would find it difficult to provide.

These programs distribute about \$250,000 annually and cost about \$50,000 to operate. NEA provides just over \$100,000 toward their operation, the Private Sector providing the other \$200,000. About 140 entry-level artists in opera and musical theater benefit from these programs. They are the cream of the crop, and they believe so strongly in what we do that they have recently formed an "alumni group" which contributes services and cash to our maintenance.

This enthusiasm notwithstanding, programs which support young, unknown artists are not inherently popular and are extremely difficult to fund. Were NEA's support to be withdrawn, the result would not be their diminution, it would be their dissolution.

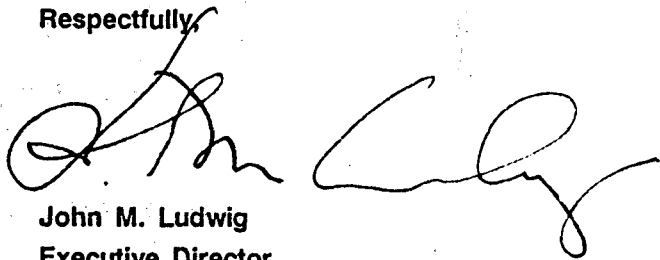
NEA would have lost a productive Public/Private partnership of 20 years duration and would have to set up similar programs in house at greatly increased cost or abandon its support of individual artists in this area.

And, as both sides in this Mapplethorpe/Serrano flap have agreed, NEA's expert panels would still recommend -- from time to time and as they should -- that support be given to outstanding artists even if some of their work is provocative or outrageous.

I do not belittle the passion of Rep. Armev and his colleagues, but I decry any attempt to undermine our freedom of expression. As my mother, who could never abide the cubists, said, "After all, dear, I don't have to look at it, do I?"

Please, sir, find another solution to this admittedly multi-dimensional, thorny problem. Killing sub-grants may smooth the ruffled feathers, but only for a time. The damage to the NEA and to America's artists will be irreparable.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John M. Ludwig". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "L".

**John M. Ludwig
Executive Director**

cc: Sen. Claiborne Pell