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## Obscenity: News Articles (1989): News Article 11

Barbara Gamarekian

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# Senate Panel Asks Ban on Grants to 2 Arts Groups

By BARBARA GAMAREKIAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 25 — The Senate Appropriations Committee voted without discussion today for a five-year ban on grants made by the National Endowment for the Arts to two arts organizations that helped support exhibitions of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano.

The measure, which is expected to go to the Senate floor on Wednesday, also allocates an additional \$100,000 for a study by an "outside party" of the endowment's procedures for giving grants.

The action was sharply criticized by arts agencies and was seen as a punitive action against the endowment, whose \$171 million budget has already been reduced by \$45,000 — the amount it granted for the two exhibitions — in a House of Representatives bill because of the controversy over the Mapplethorpe and Serrano exhibitions.

Committees of the House and Senate will try to arrive at a uniform bill that can then be voted upon by each body.

## 'They Have Crossed the Line'

"What they have done is shocking; it makes me fearful for the country," said Anne Murphy, the executive director of the American Arts Alliance. "They have crossed the line to censorship. I think it goes against every previous Congressional instruction that the Congress should not get involved deciding which organizations

## Legislators send a message that cultural officials don't like.

would or would not be funded."

Senator Clairborne Pell, Democrat of Rhode Island, who helped write the legislation establishing the National Endowment, said today, "I understand the reason for their actions, but I find it a bit extreme."

Legislators have criticized an endowment grant of \$30,000 to the Institute of Contemporary Art of Philadelphia to help support a retrospective of Mr. Mapplethorpe's work, some of which is explicitly homoerotic. Members of Congress have also condemned the endowment's grant to the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, N.C., an organization that awarded a \$15,000 fellowship to Mr. Serrano for his photograph of a crucifix submerged in the artist's urine.

## 'A Dangerous Precedent'

Hugh Southern, the acting director of the endowment, said today that the Senate committee's action banning grants for specific institutions is "a dangerous precedent which goes against the long and widely respected system of Federal support for the

arts through a competitive peer-review process."

"Both of these organizations have made important contributions for many years to the arts in their states and regions," Mr. Southern said. "Enactment of this provision would be the first instance since the endowment's founding nearly 25 years ago of direct Congressional involvement in awarding or prohibiting specific grants."

Livingston Biddle, a former director of the endowment, said the action taken by the House in cutting \$45,000 from the arts budget had sent a clear signal that Congress wanted more accountability in making grants. "But," he said, "I think the action to ban two organizations of considerable reputation and value to the arts is overly punitive and sets a very dangerous precedent."

## Challenging the Public

"Every cultural institution in the country should be chilled by this," said Ted Potter, the executive director of the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art.

His group "is being punished for doing exactly what we are supposed to do: challenge the public to see, think and discuss critical issues of our culture and society," Mr. Potter said. "The role of contemporary arts and the institutions that foster it is to take risks and confront the established dogmas with innovative insights and to offer challenging exhibitions and educational experiences."

Nancy Burd, chief of development for the Institute for Contemporary Art, said today: "I think by this ac-

tion the Congress reached around N.E.A. and punished the little guy. It is really unfortunate for I.C.A. to be caught in the middle of a controversy between Congress and N.E.A. In applying for endowment funding we went through the peer-review process and followed all established procedures. N.E.A. clearly knew what they were getting."

Ms. Burd said the Philadelphia institute has received \$700,000 in Federal money over the past five years in addition to a \$500,000 challenge grant for a new building. "Losing Federal support would drastically affect our program," she said, "not only for exhibitions but our education and community programs which reach out into every aspect of this community."

## 'Got to Work Against This'

Arts organizations around the country were astounded by the Senate Appropriations Committee's action. "It appears punitive," said Mimi Gaudieri, executive director of the Association of Art Museum Directors. "We've got to work against this somehow."

Jack Duncan of the American Council for the Arts said the measure "runs counter to the spirit and the law that created the endowment, which was to keep Federal interference at a minimum."

"The interference is much more dangerous than the two works of art in question," Mr. Duncan said. "Here is Congress taking on the cloak they feared the agency might assume, of censorship, and funding only works of art that they felt appropriate for the American public to see."

Photo: by Catherine Ashmore

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