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Biddle, Livy: Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (1977-1979): News Article 21

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Should the government really be involved

F. terHorst

WASHINGTON — Art, we are told, is the eye of the beholder. Art also seems to be increasingly in the federal budgets. Are these two concepts coexist? Or is there certainty that art and politics mix? Or is there a fundamental difference in how one detects art and the public?

One day a couple of million dollars are spent to induce creativity in cultural development in America. But now the federal government is increasing its role in the arts.

A couple of million dollars were made much of a fuss a couple of years ago when Washington first spent a couple of million dollars on television. And many persons have begun to ask, why and whether this is not a question of emphasis on spending for the arts.

There are a couple of million dollars spent on television. And many persons have begun to ask, why and whether this is not a question of emphasis on spending for the arts.

President Carter, of course, isn’t thinking of going that far. But he has expressed a desire that ArtsEnder, the chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has been working on a plan to phase out the National Endowment for the Humanities. But Carter administration think this is deplorable. They cite the study as evidence that federal support of the arts therefore is undemocratic. What the President ought to do, it is said, is to make sure that the two endowment funds are made to work more closely with the “elite” of the past by putting a more “populist” emphasis on spending for the arts.

Well, there is a very simple answer to that question if carried to its logical conclusion. Persons who have the opportunity to learn about Michelangelo, Beethoven and Shakespeare are much more likely to appreciate an art gallery, a symphony, or a dramatic production than those who lack that background.

If mass appeal is to be the only true test of a nation’s cultural level, then the administration could solve it simply by channelling its “art” money into things like television quiz games, popular music, professional sports, and T-shirt slogans.

The mask of King Tutankhamun: subsidy of the arts goes way back.