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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 19

Rene Buch

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REPERTORIO ESPANOL

138 EAST 27TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10016 (212) 889-2850

June 20, 1989

Rec'd
6/29/89

Dear Senator Pell:

I write in support of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), its peer panel review system, and the thousands of organizations supported nationwide to urge an end to the current attack on the Endowment's grant-making process.

An attempt to restrict artistic expression (a manifestation of free speech) by reducing or eliminating the Endowment's appropriation would only produce censorship mandated by law. No government agency is asked to make its grants by weighing "the prevailing standards of decency and religious belief" (let us recall the principle of separation of church and state), as proposed by Representative Armev of Texas, but by evaluating the merits of the project, and in the case of the NEA, its artistic quality.

The NEA's paramount criteria is the artistic excellence of proposed projects. Projects are judged based on the artist's or organization's overall record of achievement. The peer review system has proved its validity over the years. Its ability to promote and maintain the highest standards are well respected in the artistic community, and have served as a model for state agencies and private funding sources. No system is infallible, but the system as it stands is surely preferable to a politicized process.

Concerning the suggestion that some panelists should be "members of the community at large", I must stress that artists are members of the community - not set apart, but drawn from all walks of life, and involved in the same issues facing each citizen of the United States. We are representing our art, and our communities when we serve on NEA's panels.

I agree with the NEA's response to this controversy. The arts and artists risk controversy daily, but we stand by the right of the NEA and its funded institutions to make decisions independent of government or political interference. To do otherwise is to risk clipping the wings of our hope as artists: to inspire, to challenge, and move forward the sensibility and awareness of our audiences.

Sincerely,



Rene Buch
Artistic Director, Repertorio Espanol
NEA Theatre Panelist
Member, Independent Committee on Arts Policy

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