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Briefing Book: National Endowment for the Arts (1994): Speech 19

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TALKING POINTS RE: WHITNEY MUSEUM/ABJECT ART

- o The NEA did not fund the "Abject Art" exhibit. The NEA funded the Whitney Museum's independent study program for graduates students who use NEA funds to pursue scholarly research and advance their art. The NEA does not provide general operating support to museums, only project support. We ought not to blame the Arts Endowment for supporting an educational program in an establish institution because a student at the institution created work that is thought to be objectionable.

- o This particular award for independent study was approved by Ann-Radice, appointed Acting Director of the NEA by President George Bush.

Dornan Response

(1). The NEA did not fund the "Abject Art" exhibit. The NEA funded the Whitney's independent study program for graduate students. It's similar to the Department of Education funding graduate programs in college. These students use the NEA funds to pursue scholarly research and advance their art. At the end of the study program, the students organize exhibits. One of these was the Abject Art exhibit. However, the NEA never funded the exhibit. It's like blaming the Department of Education for giving financial aid to a graduate student who then, while in college, writes or performs something that is objectionable. I think we should hold the NEA accountable for what it actually does, but not for things it doesn't do.

The NEA has notified the San Diego project that NEA funds not be used to give money away to illegal aliens. The agency acted in a positive, constructive manner. The issue should be left to rest.

The NEA did not fund the Joel Witkin photographs. Mr. Witkin received NEA support in the past. However, his photographs in question were not produced during the time he was receiving NEA

(4). Finally, the NEA did not fund the 1991 Pittsburgh International Lesbian and Gay Film festival, either directly or indirectly. And any film clips from that festival are not the result of NEA funds. Now, my colleague may be upset that future film festivals may be funded, but he has no way of knowing what the result of that funding will be. The funds that will be available this year will not be for the exhibition of films at the festival. Only activities such as symposia and lectures on the art of film and filmmaking will be supported with NEA funds. So there will be no NEA supported film clips for my colleague to get upset about.