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Correction Sheet
Washington Times Article, "Art Turns Heads, Stomach"
July 9, 1993

The Washington Times article on a Whitney Museum exhibition is a piece of sensationalism that is extremely misleading and erroneous about the National Endowment for the Arts and the Clinton Administration's commitment to excellence in the arts.

The following correction sheet clarifies the "information" written and reported by the Washington Times as it relates to the National Arts Endowment.

Para 1 "An NEA-funded museum in New York is displaying an art exhibit featuring images of excrement and homoerotic art."

Fact: The National Arts Endowment does in fact have a history of support for programs and educational study at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The Endowment, however, did not fund the exhibition described in the article. Moreover, the Endowment does not provide general operating support to museums; it only provides project support. The WTimes guilt by association tactic used in the first paragraph is grossly misleading of the real facts.

Para 7 "Since 1991, the federal arts endowment has provided \$65,000 to the Whitney's Independent Study Program, which mounted both "Abject Art" and a second exhibit..."

Fact: The National Arts Endowment has long provided support toward the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program which serves as a graduate study program for ten fellows who pursue scholarly research, engage in the critical examination of art, and analyze the social and cultural context in which art is made and viewed.

In August 1992, the National Council on the Arts recommended a \$20,000 grant to the Whitney's ISP. In September 1992, then-acting chairperson Anne-Imelda Radice approved the Council's recommendation for the ISP grant application.

At the conclusion of the ISP program the fellows organize one or more exhibits to be presented at the Museum or one of its branches. The exhibition, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire*, was developed by the Whitney fellows, but the National Arts Endowment did not fund the exhibition. Again, the Endowment only supported the ISP program, not the exhibition. Instead, the Whitney Museum used other funds for the exhibition.

Para 10 "Christian Action Network officials this week hand-delivered letters to 114 freshman members of Congress and Republican congressional leaders urging them to abolish the NEA. The letter cites '*Abject Art*' as a prime reason to end NEA funding."

Fact: While CAN is lobbying Capitol Hill to abolish the agency, it is using inaccuracies and distortions as its reasons. For instance, CAN offers as a prime reason the current exhibition at the Whitney; but the National Arts Endowment did not fund the exhibition.

Para 11
12 "Mr. Mawyer blamed the depictions in the exhibit on the Clinton Administration. Although the Whitney's Independent Study Program was last awarded an NEA grant in 1992, during the Bush Administration, Mr. Mawyer charged that 'the fact that no one is at the helm of the NEA is exactly why these types of grants get abused at museums.'"

Fact: The Clinton Administration had nothing to do with the approval of the grant or the mounting of the exhibition. Again, the grant was approved by Anne-Imelda Radice, President Bush's acting chairperson, prior to the election of Mr. Clinton in November 1992. And the grant did not "get abused," nor did the grant go toward the funding of the exhibition.

Para 14 "'I feel that if Anne-Imelda Radice were still at the helm of the NEA, she would have denounced the exhibit and demanded the money back,'" Mr. Mawyer said.

Fact: The Washington Times earlier in the article stated that "Whitney spokesman Steven Schlough said the '*Abject Art*' exhibit has not received funds from the NEA or any other government source." The Endowment under the current administration -- or under any administration -- does not have the right to retrieve money from a project it did not fund. Ms. Radice's approval of the grant to the Whitney was to support the ISP program, not the exhibition.

Para 16 "NEA spokeswoman Ginny Terzano said the CAN president's comments 'indicate how Mr. Mawyer's organization and other special interest groups spread misinformation about this agency.'"

Fact: Mr. Mawyer and his organization, the Christian Action Network, have repeatedly used the Endowment for CAN's financial and political expediency. Mr. Mawyer has distorted the Endowment's position and involvement with the funding of the Whitney grant. Mr. Mawyer has blamed the Endowment under the Clinton Administration for allowing this exhibition to go forth. However, the exhibition was not funded by the Endowment during the Clinton Administration. In fact, the exhibition was not funded by the Endowment at all.

Mr. Mawyer's distortions do not begin here however. On August 6, 1992, Mr. Mawyer held a news conference outside the Arts Endowment office building following a meeting with Ms. Radice and other Endowment officials. At the news conference, Mawyer pledged that CAN would end its targeting of the Endowment because he had assurances that the agency would not fund "homoerotic or blasphemous" art.

Following the news conference, the Endowment issued a press release which said, "Our meeting provided an opportunity for this agency to hear first hand from an organization which has had concerns about our processes. We told Mr. Mawyer that the Endowment is working diligently to ensure that our process is fair and accountable."

At the same time, the then-Endowment spokesperson said the issue of homoerotic and blasphemous art "never came up" in the meeting, "nor was it asked" by CAN leaders.

According to several news accounts on the press conference, Mr. Mawyer also acknowledged that CAN's actions to stop the anti-NEA campaign were motivated partially by politics. Said Mr. Mawyer, "[We] wanted to get this issue resolved before the Republican National Convention. [We] want our supporters to get rid of any obstacles they may have to going to the polls in November."

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Para 22 "In the CAN letter, Mr. Mawyer tells freshman House members they 'have been elected to Congress to reform a government fraught with waste and fraud. The NEA is a classic example.'"

Fact: The National Endowment for the Arts has a budget just under \$175 million. The agency is mandated by Congress and is required to fulfill its obligations according to legislation set forth by Congress. Mr. Mawyer accuses the Endowment of being a "classic example" of a government fraught with "waste and fraud" but offers not a shred of evidence to support the allegation. The Endowment staff takes their responsibility as public servants very seriously.

The Endowment's grant-making procedure is comprised of a three tier, legislatively-mandated, process. Rotating panels of private citizens -- nearly 1,000 each year -- review applications and make recommendations based on artistic merit. Panels are composed of artists, administrators, critics, patrons, academicians, and lay persons with a recognized expertise in the artistic discipline for which they have been asked to make judgments. Panelists come from broad geographic, aesthetic, and culturally diverse backgrounds.

The National Council on the Arts, an advisory body of Presidentially-appointed and Senate-confirmed private citizens who have made distinguished contributions to the arts, reviews all panel recommendations at quarterly meetings. Council members make their recommendations on grants, and decisions on rejections, and advise the Chairperson on policy, program, and procedural matters.

The Chairperson of the Arts Endowment makes final determinations on the applications recommended for funding by the Council.

Since 1965, the Endowment has awarded about 100,000 grants. The agency receives over 17,000 applications annually and makes roughly 4,000 grants a year. Grants to arts organizations generally must be matched by at least one dollar for every federal dollar awarded, thus serving as catalysts for raising additional local public and private support. In FY92, for example, Endowment grants of \$123 million generated matching funds estimated at \$1.4 billion, an eleven-fold match.

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Of the 100,000 grants awarded by this agency, a minuscule portion (less than one percent) have been controversial. The agency throughout its 27 year history has been committed to preserving our nation's cultural heritage and providing all Americans with access to the finest of the arts. We are accountable to the Congress, the Administration, and the American people. The Endowment's efforts and impact are seen through the 4 million students and teachers who have been touched by Endowment funding in one year alone, and the 335,800,000 people who have attended arts events supported by the local-state-federal funding partnership during the last five years. There is no proof and no substance to Mr. Mawyer's claim.