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CONGRESS AND THE ARTS

While the Congress of the United States has not consistently fostered the arts, it has supported the arts to a limited degree through a number of agencies and acts.

Earliest government patronage was almost exclusively for historical and decorative purposes. In 1817 Congress appropriated funds for works of art to decorate the Capitol and John Trumbull was commissioned to paint four pictures of the Revolutionary War period. The granting of commissions for historical paintings predominated as the type of federal government patronage until well into the 20th century when the arts projects of the 1930's were established. In attempting to meet the practical needs of unemployed artists in the fields of music, drama, writing and art and in concern for the cultural well-being of the Nation the federal government set up programs unprecedented in size, scope, and diversity. Complete theatrical productions, state guide books, public performances by many kinds of musical groups, art projects intended to give expression to every form of talent in the visual arts, and educational programs in the arts were supported by the national government. These programs, with the exception of the theatre projects, continued for an eight-year period until 1943 when they were terminated by World War II,

although some of the art projects continued to exist in the form of emergency jobs for war agencies.

Congressional fostering of the arts largely has come about indirectly through the Government agencies which were established by Congress and which receive funds appropriated by Congress. With few exceptions, most of these agencies are concerned with other aspects of national life but do have occasion to relate the arts to their functions.

Listed below are those agencies of the federal government which have activities relating to the arts.

Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian Institution was created by act of Congress approved August 10, 1846, under the terms of the will of James Smithson, of London, England. Six of the bureaus under the Institution are closely concerned with the arts:

1. U.S. National Museum. This is the largest depository of the national collections including a series of collections relating to the arts and industries, and the graphic arts.

2. National Collection of Fine Arts. The National Collection of Fine Arts fosters public appreciation of art and encourages creative expression by living American artists by exhibiting in Washington and other cities in the U.S. works of past and contemporary origin. It shows exhibits from foreign countries and prepares exhibitions for the use of the United States Government overseas. It advises Government agencies regarding the use of decorative art in Federal buildings. It maintains a number of exhibits.

3. **Freer Gallery of Art.** The Freer Gallery is devoted principally to Oriental Fine Arts. The building, the collections which it houses, and an endowment fund were the gift of the late Charles L. Freer of Detroit.

4. **National Portrait Gallery.** The National Portrait Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery Commission were established within the Smithsonian Institution by act approved April 27, 1962. The Gallery exhibits and studies portraiture and statuary depicting men and women who have made scientific contributions to the history, development and culture of the people of the U.S.

5. **National Gallery of Art.** The National Gallery of Art is a bureau of the Smithsonian Institution created by joint resolution of Congress approved March 24, 1938, as a result of Andrew W. Mellon's gift to the Nation of his collection of works of art and a monumental gallery building. Under the direction of the Board, the gallery is charged with the responsibility of assembling and maintaining a national collection of paintings, sculpture, and the graphic arts, representative of the best in the artistic heritage of America and Europe. Included among the activities of the Gallery are free weekly concerts throughout most of the year.

6. **The National Cultural Center.** The National Cultural Center was established as a bureau of the Smithsonian Institution by act approved September 2, 1958.

Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts was established by act of Congress approved May 17, 1910. Enactment of this legislation provided the Government with a permanent commission whose members were qualified to give expert advice on matters relating to art; and directed officers charged by law to determine such questions in each case to call for the Commission's advice.

Architect of the Capitol

The first Architect of the Capitol was appointed in 1793 by the President and the office has been permanent since 1851. The activities of the Architect include in addition to responsibility for the maintenance and repair of the Capitol and a number of buildings and grounds, the planning and construction of such buildings as may be committed to his care by Congress from time to time.

Library of Congress

The Library of Congress was established under law approved April 24, 1800. Subsequent acts have created various divisions and authorities. In addition to its regular functions the Library of Congress maintains and exhibits special art collections, and sponsors concerts, lectures and programs related to the arts.

Department of State

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Through legislative authorization the Bureau directs the Department's exchange of persons

programs, the administration of the program providing for cultural presentations abroad and Departmental activities relating to UNESCO. The Office of Cultural Exchange conducts, directly and by agreement or with public and private agencies, activities in the educational and cultural field other than those of an academic nature; conducts programs for bringing persons to the United States for travel, observation, and specialized practical experience, and for sending Americans abroad; sends performing artists and athletic groups overseas; administers a program for grants and professional services to American-sponsored schools in Latin America and assists American-sponsored schools in other areas; and aids non-governmental organizations, institutions, and individuals here and abroad in undertaking exchange projects which can further the national interest.

Office of Foreign Buildings. Provides and maintains office and residential quarters for the Foreign Service and other Federal agencies abroad. The office is responsible for the design of our embassies and consulates.

Bureau of Engraving and Printing

Although there is no specific legislative authority relating to the creation of the Bureau, it operates on basic authorities conferred by a number of acts and additional authorities contained in appropriations for work to be undertaken. The Bureau designs, engraves, and prints all major items of a financial character issued by the U.S. government.

General Services Administration

The Public Buildings Service was established December 11, 1949, by the Administrator of General Services, to supersede the Public Buildings Administration which was abolished by the act of June 30, 1949. The Public Buildings Service is responsible to the Administrator of General Services for the design, construction, management, maintenance, operation, alteration, extension, remodeling, preservation, repair, improvement, protection, and control of buildings, both federally loaned and leased, in which are provided housing accommodations for Government activities where authorized.

Department of the Interior

National Park Service. The National Park Service was established in the Department of the Interior by the act of August 25, 1916. Subsequent acts, Executive orders, and proclamations have added to the National Park System and expanded the activities of the Service. The Service's activities pertain to the preservation of American antiquities, historic and prehistoric sites and buildings, and properties of national historic or archeological significance.

Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was created by the War Department in 1824 and was transferred to the Department of the Interior at the time of its establishment in 1849. The Bureau includes art in its program of assisting the Indian and encourages the development of Indian arts and crafts.

The above listing contains those agencies which at the present time appear to have major activities related to the arts. Other agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, have such programs as making educational motion pictures. The Office of Education has recently established a Cultural Affairs Branch which will be concerned with education needs in the arts and humanities.

The Armed Forces also have cultural activities which are broad in scope, ranging from the touring exhibition of art masterpieces saved from the German salt mines to the well known Armed Forces bands. During both World Wars art has had a role in military activities. The branches of the military have used artists to record battle experiences. Even before the end of the Revolutionary War, George Washington, as commander-in-chief of the Continental army appointed several artists to paint an historical record of that war. President Lincoln, during the Civil War and President McKinley during the Spanish-American War, appointed official war artists.

In addition to the bureaus already mentioned we include a "List of Existing Federal Advisory Committees Related to the Arts" which appeared in "The Arts and the National Government," a report submitted by August Heckscher, the former Special Consultant on the Arts appointed by the late President Kennedy.

1. The White House

The Fine Arts Committee of the White House.
Advisory Committee to the Fine Arts Committee.
Special Committee for White House Paintings.

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2. Commission of Fine Arts (itself an advisory body)

The Board of Architectural Consultants for the Old Georgetown Act.
Advisory Panel on the Performing Arts (inactive).

3. Smithsonian Institution

Smithsonian Art Commission.
Advisory Committee on the Arts to the National Cultural Center.

4. Department of the Interior

Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and
Monuments.
Consulting Committee for the National Survey of Historic Sites
and Buildings.

5. Department of Defense

Air Force Academy Fine Arts Panel.
National Music Council Overseas Touring Committee (Department of
the Army).
American Educational Theatre Association Overseas Touring
Committee.
Navy Art Cooperation and Liaison Committee.

6. Department of the Post Office.

Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee.

7. Department of State

U.S. Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural
Affairs.
Advisory Committee on the Arts.
U.S. National Commission for UNESCO.
Advisory Panel on Buildings Overseas.
Government Advisory Committee on International Book Programs.

8. U.S. Information Agency

Advisory Committee on Cultural Information.
Music Advisory Panel.

9. Federal Aviation Agency

The Design Advisory Committee.

10. Library of Congress

Committee To Select Prints for Purchase under the Pennell Fund.
Advisory Committee to the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation.
Advisory Board to the Serge Koussevitsky Music Foundation.
Individual consultants and advisers.

Recent years have seen increased Congressional concern for the arts in America. Measures have been introduced to encourage the arts through legislation in such fields as taxation, copyright laws, and postal rates, affecting the arts. Legislation has been sponsored to establish a National Arts Foundation, a National Advisory Council on the Arts, a National Arts Agency in the Office of Education, and a National Institute on the Arts and Humanities. In the present Congress, S. 2379, a bill to establish a National Advisory Council on the Arts and a National Arts Foundation has been passed by the Senate and waits action in the House. This bill would make statutory the President's Advisory Council on the Arts which President Kennedy created by executive order June 12, 1963, upon the recommendation of the Special Consultant on the Arts, August Heckscher.

SOURCES: Heckscher, August. The arts and the national government. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1963.

Purcell, Ralph. Government and art. Washington, Public Affairs Press, 1956.

U.S. Government Organization Manual, 1963-64. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1963.

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