



**ROCCO LANDESMAN PREPARED COMMENTS AT THE
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF STATE ARTS AGENCIES ANNUAL MEETING**
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Thank you, Jonathan [Katz], for such a warm and fulsome introduction. Jonathan and his colleagues at NASAA – along with all of you – are some of the NEA’s closest partners, and we are all so grateful for your work throughout the year.

I spend about 50% of my time on the road these days, and I love it, as it means I get to see many of you. Just last week, I was at an event in Boston, hosted by Anita Walker and the Massachusetts Cultural Council, where I got to see almost all of the New England arts agency heads – Donna, Randy, everybody.

As I have been travelling around, I have discovered an ever increasing understanding of the role that the arts – artists, arts organizations, and audiences – can play in building vibrant, sustainable communities. I think that role is central to all of our work as public funders.

Many times, when we make the case for investing public dollars in the arts, we have relied solely on economic arguments. Those arguments have met with some success, but that that success has been somewhat limited. In part, because on a pure dollars-and-cents basis, the not-for-profit arts sector cannot really compete with other for-profit sectors.

But it is also a somewhat disingenuous argument, as I would argue that the economics are not what motivated any of us here today to take the jobs we have.

Instead, we need to step back and look at what is unique about the arts – about what the arts can do to complement and complete the work of other sectors. Then, we will end up with a more genuine, more persuasive case for investment in the arts.



Let me begin with the two words that Jonathan, my staff, and probably half the people in this room are tired of hearing: “art works.”

These two words have three meanings, and as a horse guy, I just can’t resist a trifecta. Let me run through them quickly:

Art works. These words first refer to works of art themselves. To the creations of artists. The blues, country, and rock music that fills 6th Street. The ballets that Cookie Ruiz presents. The paintings on the wall of the Austin Museum of Art.

Secondly, "art works" reminds us that art works on us. It works to change and inspire us. It sparks our imaginations. It challenges, confronts, and comforts us. Art works to remind us of who we are, and more importantly, to show us the people we may yet become.

I still remember the production of *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* that I saw as a young man in Maine. It stayed with me, and it is in many ways the reason I have had the career I have had.

And finally, “art works” is a declaration that reminds us that arts jobs are real jobs: some 5.7 million full-time arts related jobs plus 2 million full-time artists.

We are a significant sector across the country, and we deserve the same rights and support as every other sector. At the same time, we also have the same responsibilities for a greater good.

Those three elements – the works of art themselves, the ways art works on audiences, and art as work – together are the inherent, or “intrinsic” value of the arts.



But it is important to extend this conversation and go into the “instrumental” benefits that the arts bring with them. (I am borrowing the “intrinsic/instrumental” dichotomy from the Wallace’s Foundation’s “Measuring the Muse” report.)

So, let’s go back to these instrumental benefits. I was recently in California with Muriel Johnson, and the not-for-profit arts organizations there have annual revenues roughly comparable to that state’s convenience stores. But the arts do something that 7/11’s don’t. The arts don’t make Slurpees; they make places.

And investments in creative placemaking – investing in the arts as a strategy for creating more vibrant, more sustainable communities – is our topic at the NEA.

Why? Because artists are fundamentally placemakers. Towns literally change when you bring artists to the center of them.

And I am not just speaking anecdotally.

Jeremy Nowak, Mark Stern, and Susan Seifert from The Reinvestment Fund and the University of Pennsylvania have made the compelling case that any discussion of policy for coming out of this recession – any plan that addresses economic growth and community revitalization – has to include the arts.

In a world that increasingly allows us to work from anywhere, why does a person choose to live somewhere? The answer is in the things in life that have to be consumed in person, in place, and in real time. In survey after survey, people report that they choose a hometown based on access to good education and excellent culture.

People no longer migrate to where businesses are. Today, businesses move to where the people are. It’s the *Field of Dreams* in reverse: if you come, they will build it.



Going back to the research from the University of Pennsylvania work, three instrumental benefits stand out:

One. The arts are a force for social cohesion and civic engagement.

In communities with a strong cultural presence, people are much more likely to engage in civic activities beyond the arts. Community participation increases measurably, and the result is more stable neighborhoods.

Two. The arts make a major difference in child welfare. Income groups with high cultural participation were more than twice as likely to have low truancy and delinquency rates.

And three. Art is a poverty fighter.

Artists form clusters. Cultural institutions spring up near them. Arts lovers gravitate to them. Businesses follow. Businesses hire. The virtuous cycle continues.

The arts do that directly by employing arts workers. And they have a multiplier effect: I think of the dry cleaner next to the Metropolitan Opera. Or the parking lot attendant next to the Peoria Symphony. Or the bar owner next to a theatre ... well, let's be honest, next to a theatre just about anywhere...

If you take these University of Pennsylvania findings, and add to them the work of economists like Ann Markusen and Richard Florida, I believe that you will find essentially four returns on investment in the arts, four instrumental benefits that contribute toward vibrant, sustainable communities:

One. The arts contribute to livability, to quality of life. It's fun. We all like living near the stuff.



Two. The arts nurture creativity and innovation. Creative, innovative people like being near one another, and the arts are natural aggregators of them because creativity and innovation are the hallmarks of the arts.

Three. The arts help create brand identity for places. Ask anyone around the world to name two streets in New York City. The first will surely be Wall Street, but the second will always be Broadway.

Think about Austin, itself; or Marfa, Texas. Think about Paducah, Kentucky or Santa Fe, New Mexico. We often know our places by their arts.

And being known for the arts can be a better identity for a community. Look at North Adams, Massachusetts or Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Both were known as former, vacant factory towns. But today they are known as home to the largest contemporary arts center in the world, and a music festival that attracts a million people a summer to this town of 70,000 people.

And, finally, the arts drive local economies, and this focus on the local is an important nuance to the economic argument.

By investing in the indigenous arts organizations, residents spend more time in their own neighborhoods. Visitors come. And money is spent as those restaurants, bars, and businesses I mentioned before spring up.

All of this is great. The arts can increase civic engagement, social cohesion, and child welfare. They fight poverty. They contribute to quality of life, foment creativity and innovation, create neighborhood identity, and revitalize local economies. And, intrinsically, the arts are fun, magical, and transporting.



That's an awful lot of bang for a buck, so why isn't everyone investing in the arts? Why are all of you confronting the kinds of budgets you have had over the past two years?

I think some of the problem comes from the arts community ourselves. The arts community – in many ways, rightly so – consider ourselves to be extremely special, to be “other,” to be different and apart from the rest of society.

There is a very positive aspect to this. Columbia University's Joan Jeffri did a study of aging visual artists in New York City, and she discovered that “artist” is a master identity that transcends race, gender, class, and age. As a result, aging visual artists have larger social networks with markedly more intergenerational contacts.

Artists affiliate with other artists. They recognize themselves in one another and want to be connected. As they find each other, they build the communities, the neighborhoods, the organizations, and businesses that I keep talking about.

In many ways, New York City's SoHo neighborhood is the ur-example of this. And it is a great and powerful re-development story, but it is one that is colored by gentrification. Why? Because the flip side of artists feeling “special” and apart is that they often do not see themselves as having anything in common with the other citizens who live in a city or town.

Take the issue of artist housing. Many artists talk about artist live-work space as a right that comes with the “specialness” of the artist.

I don't need to build housing for Jasper Johns or Tony Kushner. Both are pretty special, but both are doing just fine. I believe that we need to build artist housing because artists are an often low-income sector of the workforce who need subsidized housing alongside other low-income workers.



But we do not affiliate with other low-income workers because we too often see ourselves as separate and apart. As one colleague put it, “artists are like, ‘yeah, I may be poor, but I am not poor like you.’”

So one of our challenges, as leaders of public funders of the arts is how to maintain and protect the “specialness” of artists, of the arts, while at the same time highlighting our commonalities with other sectors.

How do we have the arts recognize that beyond our intrinsic jobs (making and presenting art), we also have a role as citizens? This role comes with responsibilities, yes, but it is also a role that is much more likely to engender public investment.

This is exactly impulse that led me to propose a new funding program at the NEA. It will be a \$5 million investment fund called “Our Town.”

It’s called “Our Town,” frankly, because that’s a play, and I am a theatre guy. But also because it highlights the place-based nature of the arts.

Next year, we will be making investments in 35 communities that are recognizing artists as citizens, and welcoming the role the arts can play in helping cities and town become the most vibrant and sustainable places possible.

In order for “Our Town” to be a success, we have to do two things simultaneously:

1. Support the art and the artists in the specific ways that they need (the specialness)
2. Provide this support in such a way that the arts and artists are part of a larger community objective (the common good)



The kinds of projects that we contemplate funding should elegantly do both of these things.

And I am not proposing this new funding in a vacuum. We have a track record of this work at the NEA.

For almost 25 years, the NEA has run the Mayors' Institute on City Design (or "MICD"), which we do with the US Conference of Mayors and the American Architectural Foundation.

During each Institute, a small group of mayors comes together with a team of design professionals to tackle the real world problems with which each mayor is wrestling.

This is an opportunity for these mayors to spend three days thinking of themselves as their cities' chief urban designers.

Historically, the NEA has been there to help the mayors recognize the role the arts can play in building a livable, sustainable community.

And last January, I announced that we would bring something new to the table: we launched a new funding stream called MICD 25 that in many ways serves as a pilot for the work we would like to do with "Our Town."

We invested in 21 cities and towns that were doing one of four things: reusing abandoned or under-utilized spaces, commissioning public art, planning cultural districts, or designing new infrastructure.

In each case, the arts were front and center in a partnership that involved city government, arts organizations, and the private sector.



If you visit our web site – arts-dot-gov – you can see write-ups of all 21 projects, but let me just focus on three illustrative projects:

First. The mayor of Memphis, Tennessee has been focusing on fully integrating the arts into his overall philosophy and plans for the city.

Memphis is using its NEA grant to conduct the predevelopment of an artist live/work site in the city's South Main Arts District. The city hopes to accelerate the ongoing revitalization efforts – largely driven by artists already – in the neighborhood and surrounding communities.

It is contracting Artspace Projects to lead a study surveying the musicians, artists, and arts organizations in the city to better understand the needs in the community, including how much performance, rehearsal, and storage space is needed.

Following this predevelopment work, an architectural team will be selected and financial models and conceptual building plans will be created.

The project will serve an estimated 7,500 members of the creative community.

The second project. Action Greensboro is a not-for-profit organization in North Carolina that coordinates citizen initiatives to enhance the economy for this city of 250,000. In 2009, Action Greensboro teamed with the City of Greensboro on a multi-use trail that winds through residential neighborhoods and business districts, one that literally encircles and defines its downtown.

With its MICD25 grant, Action Greensboro is funding public art installations as part of the renovation of an abandoned railroad underpass that links an economically disadvantaged part of the city to its center.



The art will include the design and fabrication of 12 decorative iron gates in existing doorways along the underpass, through which will be seen two, huge graphic panels depicting parts of Greensboro's history. Artists will create light installations to illuminate the entire area.

Number three. Madison, Wisconsin is developing a major park in the center of the city. With our money, environmental artist Lorna Jordan is working with the park's design team to both integrate public art into the construction of Central Park and also on the park's green infrastructure. The park is one of the lowest-elevation points in the city, as well as sitting on top of a capped brownfield. Jordan will help solve the rainwater runoff and drainage issues.

These are exactly the sorts of projects that we will also hope to support through "Our Town."

But beyond direct funding, beyond investment, there is another role for the NEA, a catalytic role. I am a recovering Broadway producer, and theatre is by far the most collaborative of the art forms.

That same spirit of collaboration is the hallmark of this Administration, and because of that, the NEA is having high-level conversations across many of the federal agencies.

We are all interested in creating vibrant, sustainable communities, and we can only succeed – especially in this economy – if we get out of our silos and work together.

Responding collectively and collaboratively to citizens' needs can bring real, dynamic change.

Our intentions are ambitious, but the plan is simple. We will find ways that federal agencies, alongside the private sector, can use the arts as a fulcrum for revitalization.



One of our accomplishments of which I am proudest was a Notice of Funding Availability for \$100 million in regional planning grants that the Department of Housing and Urban Development released. For the first time ever, HUD explicitly wrote into the language that they were looking for plans that involved the arts and arts organizations. We jointly sent out a press release – one that had the NEA logo right there next to HUD’s – and the NEA was represented on the team that read and evaluated the proposals. The results just came out as I was getting on the plane yesterday, so I haven’t had a chance to go through them yet, but I look forward to reading them soon.

The arts were also written in as an invitational priority in the Department of Education’s Promise Neighborhood program.

And we are now talking with Agriculture, with Health and Human Services, and with Transportation.

More than anything, I think this collaboration – this insertion of the arts into the everyday business of our sister agencies will be our legacy and will cement the role of the arts in domestic policy.

In short: art works. That’s my story, and I am sticking to it.

Thanks.

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