

The Community Arts Council Movement

History
Opinions
Issues

Nina Freedlander Gibans

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To my father, Samuel O. Freedlander, for his belief in life and challenge.

To Lester Glick, for his humanistic leadership and his belief in the potential of the arts council challenge.

To Sarah Lawrence College for instilling in each individual a sense of one's own responsibility for learning and self-fulfillment.

No other group [than the local arts agency] has had more experience in supporting and serving the arts in America and no other group has been more involved in developing the public and private support necessary to sustain our cultural resources. Unlike many of the other organizations, . . . most of the agencies have never received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts . . . but our opposition stems from . . . our certain knowledge of the precarious financial state of the arts in America and the impact that these cuts will have upon the overall public commitment to the arts for present and future generations.

For too long, we have expected the arts in this country to be sustained by wooing rich old ladies and gentlemen, by holding charity balls and auctions, by submitting innovative proposals to foundations and corporations, by increasing admission fees, and by paying, if at all, ridiculously low wages and spending too little time on art and too much time on fundraising. While some of these activities may be necessary, both for the arts and members of Congress, they tend to obscure the reality — which is an inadequate public support base for the arts in America. No other civilized nation in the world expects its arts institutions to operate in such a manner. It is a testament to the resourcefulness of the arts to do so much, for so many, with so little, for so long.

The paltry sums which have been provided for federal arts support since 1965 have never, in any year, even approached the level of the public relations budget for the Pentagon. . . .

Those of us who were working in the arts prior to the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965 remember, only too well, a time of no federal support. A time of little state support and one in which municipal support was limited to a few public museums, zoos and recreation programs. We well remember this period when most of the nation's performing artists were seasonal employees or migrant workers. When teaching offered the only stable employment for most of our creative artists. When most arts programs were avocational, run by volunteers on nights or weekends. When parents viewed a career in the arts for their children as something akin to prostitution. We have no desire to return to those golden days.

The agencies I represent know that a decreasing federal commitment to the arts has a ripple effect upon state and local government support and that the cuts in many other federal programs have made it more difficult for the arts to compete for funds from the private sector at the local level. We know that this nation can ill afford to deny a significant portion of our population access to our cultural institutions or to restrict the arts to a handful of major cities who enjoy substantial private resources and growth.

Robert Canon, President, National Assembly
of Community Arts Agencies, in testimony
before Senate Subcommittee hearing on the
Fiscal 1983 National Endowment for the
Arts appropriations, March 3, 1982.