Mr. Frohnmayer names his poison

Editorial
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You have to tip your hat to John Frohnmayer, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, a man who never gives up. After two years of national nausea at what the NEA has done with taxpayers' money and the damage it has inflicted on American arts by funding the Mapplethorpoids, Mr. Frohnmayer is back in the trenches yet again. This time he's defending a $25,000 NEA grant to homosexual filmmaker Todd Haynes for producing a movie about forcible anal sex in prison. If Saddam Hussein had had generals as steadfast as Mr. Frohnmayer, Norman Schwarzkopf might have been busted to private.

The movie, appropriately titled "Poison," lasts 85 gruesome minutes. It won't be coming to your neighborhood soon, and even if it did, you wouldn't want to see it. Nor do you want to pay for it, but you did anyway. "Variety" reviewed the flick last month, and here's how it was described: "A mood of seething, violent homoeroticism permeates the proceedings as one prisoner stalks another in an episode spiked with multiple glimpses of rear-entry intercourse and one of genital fondling....But the most explicit and sure to be most-talked about scene is a flashback in which several young men humiliate another by repeatedly spitting into his gaping mouth. Unpleasant is an understatement." All we can say is that the gaping young man must be a taxpayer.

Mr. Haynes, however, is at pains to quell rumors that his film is offensive. "There are no shots of rear-entry intercourse," he sputtered to the San Francisco Chronicle last week. In one scene, "the two characters are sleeping next to each other. One wakes up. There is genital fondling, mostly through the pants. You get a very quick glimpse of a penis in it. And that's it." Well, actually, the Fellini of fellatio confesses, that's not quite it. "There is a rape at the end of the film, which is basically covered by a medium two-shot of two inmates, focusing on their heads. There are two cutaways to their pants, but all you see is one-half of one guy's thigh, and mostly a lot of clothing hanging off. It's very tasteful."

Well, it certainly sounds that way, and we're sure Julie Andrews will use the very same techniques in the sequel to "The Sound of Music." Meanwhile, back at the NEA's chicken ranch, Mr. Frohnmayer and his mouth-spitting mafia have scaled new heights of beauty with $15,000 to performance artiste Holly Hughes to write a play about lesbianism with under-age girls. Miss Hughes in her grant application vowed that her drama would have all of five performers, including "two pubescent girls, black and white, about 12 years old, as the main characters." Who can say what the other three will be like?

Last year some people actually believed that congressional guidelines stuck into the NEA authorization bill would put an end to the endowment's hobby of using public funds to support depictions and stage productions of sodomy, rape, excretion and other practices that resemble what the Iraqi army does on furlough. But some other people—including us—didn't believe it and argued that Congress ought to abolish the NEA. Now, the NEA's latest dip in the cesspool having shown that guidelines, restrictions and well-meaning advice don't work, maybe Congress will take that argument more seriously.

But the NEA's habit of subsidizing filth and Mr. Frohnmayer's repeatedly regurgitated contempt for the taxpayers, the Congress and the Bush administration, which warned him last year to use a little judgment in awarding grants, are only part of the reason why this country ought to endure without the endowment. For 200 years and more, Americans have been producing art, in the form of painting, theater, films, dance, sculpture, architecture, music and even quilts, without being subsidized by the state. They produce it because art is in the bloodstream of human beings, not their gonads, and they don't need tax money or publicly funded sex manuals to teach them how to do it.

When the state undertakes to improve art by giving money to artists, the result is to help aesthetic endeavor in the same way the state helps the family by providing welfare. Subsidizing art removes artists from the market, which operates in accordance with real standards of taste and not those of Mr. Haynes' morbid fantasies. State subsidies thus undermine the artist's sense of proportion and responsibility. It ought not to surprise anyone that once those restraints are weakened, the perversions of Robert Mapplethorpe and Mr. Haynes are what we get in place of real art.

Mr. Frohnmayer's irresponsible conduct as NEA chairman merits his dismissal, but Congress and the Bush administration ought to go further this year. They need to take a long, hard look at the NEA, think carefully about what art is and what it does to and for a society and why government has no legitimate reason to produce it, either for the sake of art or the sake of government. When the congressmen have sufficiently pondered these matters, they should pull the plug on an agency that has become a feeding trough and a public latrine for a pack of pornographers who can't even make a living peddling honest smut and who flourish because the only art they understand is how to rape the imprisoned taxpayers.

NEA: Nobody here but us artists

Taken from A CONSERVATIVE VIEW Column
By James J. Kilpatrick, Copyright 1991
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For the past two years, the National Endowment for the Arts has suffered under criticism that it occasionally subsidizes pornography. The NEA deserves to suffer, for the charge is true. But that is not the only thing about the NEA, or even the major thing, that merits concern. Let us talk about grantors and grantees.

The artists and organizations who seek grants from the NEA submit their applications to "peer panels" appointed by Chairman John Frohnmayer. The panels range in size from six to 20 members. They are chosen with an eye toward diversity in race, sex and residence. The panels meet formally once a year, but members often exchange views informally by telephone and correspondence.

It is exceedingly rare for a panel's recommendation to be overruled by Chairman Frohnmayer. For all practical purposes, an NEA award is a panel's award. It is instructive to observe the relationship between some of the panelists and some of the awards. I find the relationship chummy. A few specific examples may clarify the matter.

In 1988-89, the most recent year for which data are available, Frohnmayer named eight panels in the field of dance. One such panel was known as Challenge II. It had six members.

The six were Bonnie Brooks, director of professional development for the Association of Dance Presenters in Washington, D.C.; Laura Dean, of the Dean Dance & Music Foundation in New York City; Myrna Saturn Gatty, deputy director of the Southern Arts Federation in Atlanta; Heinz Poll, artistic director of the Ohio Ballet; Gus Solomons Jr., artistic director of Solomons Company/Dance in New York City; and Darlene Neel, manager of the Lewitzky Dance Company in Los Angeles.

During the year, Brooks won a $55,000 grant through a panel of inter-arts.

Dean won $100,000 from the panel on dance companies.

Gatty's Southern Arts Federation won eight grants from various panels totaling $820,680.

Poll won a $10,000 grant "to support the development of new work by Artistic Director Heinz Poll for the Ohio Ballet."

Solomons' company won a $19,000 grant "to support domestic touring, general management representatives, and the creation of collaborative work by Artistic Director Gus Solomons."

Darlene Neel, the sixth member of the Challenge II panel, apparently got nothing at all for her Lewitzky Dance Company.

Now mind you, because this is important, none of the grants that went to five members of the Challenge II panel was recommended by the Challenge II panel itself. The recommendations came from other panels with other members.

To press on: Elvi Moore of the Washington Ballet served on the Challenge III panel. His company won a grant of $34,000—but from a different panel. Liz Thompson, executive director of the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Lee, Massachusetts, also served on Challenge III. The Jacob's Pillow Festival won seven grants totaling $170,500, but from seven other panels.

Also on the Challenge III panel was Garth Fagan, artistic director of Garth Fagan's Bucket Dance Theater in Rochester, New York. From two other panels he won awards of $82,500.

You get the picture. Susan Marshall served on a panel charged with awarding $7,000 fellowships to 85 choreographers. She was one of only four choreographers to receive a special three-year grant of $45,000.

In the rarefied air of the dance world, every important figure knows every other important figure. The same thing is true of the world of the theater. I suspect it is true of poetry and fiction, and probably a careful analysis of NEA grants would find interlocking associations and correlations across the entire spread of 4,453 grants totaling $153 million.

To the NEA's credit, when I applied under the Freedom of Information Act for certain data, the data were promptly supplied. It is a tedious business to match individual panel members with grants to their organizations, for the computer did not churn them out that way. I looked at "dance" only because it was the first one in the NEA's annual report for 1989, and one has to start somewhere.

Have you ever looked at the tangled roots of a mangrove tree? Same thing. Artist A is on Panel B that awards a grant to Artist C who serves on Panel D. Artist E's panel awards a grant to Artist A. So it goes, so it goes, so it goes.

Sting says we need birth control

Sting, the rock singer, recently promoted the need for birth control in our society. He told Rolling Stone magazine (2/7/91), "We have too many people...we **have** to use birth control."

Sting is the father of five children.

MediaWatch, March/April 1991

Paper to recognize homosexual 'unions'

The Minneapolis Star Tribune has become one of the few general circulation newspapers in the country to allow homosexual and lesbian domestic partners to announce celebrations of their commitment ceremonies in its advertising columns.

The newspaper's decision follows passage of a Minneapolis city ordinance in late January that allows domestic partners to register their relationships. Minneapolis became one of only 19 municipalities in the country to give some official recognition to such relationships.

"We're thrilled that the Star Tribune made this decision," said Ann DeGroot, executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Community Action Council.

The Star Tribune is believed to be the first major metropolitan newspaper to make such a decision, though no comprehensive survey is available.

Two smaller newspapers on the West Coast, the Everett (Washington) Herald near Seattle and the Marin Independent Journal outside San Francisco, recently adopted similar policies.

The Star Tribune made its decision after a group of the newspaper's homosexual and lesbian employees, called Paper Eagles (Employee Association for Gays and Lesbians), raised the issue.

The decision was a natural response to the City Council domestic partners ordinance that went into effect February 19, said Bette Fenton, Star Tribune spokesperson. Fenton said the paper's position is that "it was the right thing to do." She said the relationships have been made legitimate by the ordinance.

"Weddings" in Thursday's Variety section has been renamed "Celebrations" to reflect the diverse postings. A subsection called "Domestic Partners" will appear along with subsections titled "Engagements," "Weddings," and "Anniversaries."

Minneapolis Star Tribune, 3/8/91

Portland officials call for boycott of show

The Portland, Oregon, City Council and Mayor Bud Clark called for a boycott of a performance by comedian Andrew Dice Clay. The officials even asked Portlanders to turn in their tickets if they had already purchased them.

"We must raise our voices in protest against 'entertainment' which perpetrates negative attitudes and stereotypes," the council said. "We urge Portlanders not to go to the concert. We ask that you refuse to economically reward those who try to make a living off hatred and violence."

The council said they "support the First Amendment rights of all Americans, including Andrew Dice Clay." The group said that a boycott of the show was not censorship.

Surgeon General asks beer companies' help

Launching an unprecedented campaign against beer-drinking by college students, the nation's top medical official asked brewers to refrain from touting their brands during the college spring break.

Surgeon General Antonia Novello also called on retailers and local merchants to cooperate in a campaign to sharply reduce college drinking in general.

Dr. Novello, a pediatrician by training, has made excessive drinking among young people a major issue. Earlier this year, she criticized a New York wine company for packaging a highly alcoholic drink called Cisco to look like a wine cooler. The company agreed to repackage the drink to eliminate confusion. She said beer is the main culprit for college students because it's inexpensive and easily consumed.

The U.S. Office for Substance Abuse Prevention issued a report Tuesday saying 41% of U.S. college students surveyed said they were heavy drinkers, compared with 34% of their noncollege counterparts.

Memphis Commerical Appeal, 3/6/91