



SHUT UP & Censored and defunded, artists in the South still SHUT DOWN hold their heads up.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

— *The First Amendment, U.S. Constitution*

Forget art for art's sake. The 1980s and the wars over public funding of arts have been fought and mostly lost. The NEA still exists, but in reduced circumstances. Private foundations fund programs, but they tend to look for art that is more project than product, art that builds communities, cooperation or self-esteem. State and federal agencies also support teaching or participation with what little they have. As one actor said, "You have to do something useful with the community — workshops, oral histories, something. You can't just get some actors together and put on a play anymore." You especially can't do something vulgar, anti-religious, or sexual. After bruising controversies, art — especially in public spaces, and most especially with public money — seems to be growing more timid, less daring and edgy.

Many would agree that public funding shouldn't go to in-your-face offensive art anyway. They may welcome the trend toward funding useful art. But even if art does help to transform a community, it's not likely to get much support — the funds just aren't out there. The budget of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has been going steadily downhill — from \$176 million in 1992 to \$99.5 million both this year and last year.

The NEA cuts "have slowed down growth but haven't ended production," says Lisa Mount, the managing director of Seven Stages, a multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary theater company in Atlanta. But, she says, the larger, urban companies are much better off than rural, community theaters because the bigger ven-

ues have other resources. "Seven Stages can absorb these blows — they're not punishing — but for smaller, more isolated communities, they definitely are," she says.

The NEA, which reorganized to deal with massive cuts, eliminated the Expansion Arts Program "where almost all organizations of color got most of their funding," says Linda Burnham of Art in the Public Interest, a community arts advocacy organization that publishes *High Performance* magazine.

Individuals are affected the most, especially those involved in jazz and literature, says Steve Durland, also of Art in the Public Interest. The large institutions will continue to operate at the expense of the smaller organizations. And (some legislators may be relieved to hear), those that are community-based and non-controversial will be able to cope with the cuts better than "out-of-control activists," he says.

But starving the arts is bad economic and social policy.

Far from being a drain on public resources, the arts play a crucial role in the health of the economy. "Even if the positive social values of the arts are recognized, they are often shortsightedly dismissed as 'unaffordable,'" says a 1994 report, "Arts in the Local Economy," a study by the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (NALAA). "When our communities invest in the arts, they are *not* opting for cultural benefits *at the expense of* economic benefits . . . Quite simply, the arts are an industry that generates jobs."

Their report showed that nonprofit

"Painters, dancers, actors are tough as weeds and can grow in cracks in the concrete. There was great art, drama, writing and scholarship in America before 1965, when the endowments were founded. Dedicated people create ingenious strategies of survival for themselves. But why should they have to?"

— Robert Hughes, *Time*, August 7, 1995

Art is moral passion married to entertainment. Moral passion without entertainment is propaganda, and entertainment without moral passion is television.

— Rita Mae Brown

arts accounted for more than 2,100 jobs in Dade County (Miami), Florida, in 1992, more than 5,700 jobs in Houston, and some 650 jobs in New Orleans. These nonprofit arts organizations — local theaters, opera companies, community orchestras or major symphonies, film festivals, museums — generate millions of dollars in revenues.

Overall the nonprofit arts in the United States support more than 1.3 million jobs, which return \$3.4 billion in income tax to the federal government each year. The National Endowment for the Arts provides just a small part of the revenues — most comes from state and local governments, foundations and private donors, and people who attend the concerts and plays, read the literature, and see the exhibitions.

The total arts industry produces an annual output of \$314.5 billion, contributing 6 percent of the gross national product. About 1 percent of U.S. labor goes to the nonprofit arts — almost as many workers as are involved in building construction.

Money for jobs isn't the only economic benefit of the arts. Artistic and cultural offerings draw tourists, boosting local economies. An annual storytelling festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee, attracts a nationwide audience, pumping \$5 million into a small, Appalachian community. Direct spending on the arts, both by artists buying supplies and renting facilities and by audiences who buy their tickets and often spend more money on parking, food, drink, and shopping, creates wider, indirect economic growth. These indirect revenues add up. A 1993 study by the Colorado Business Community for the Arts calculated the non-ticket spending of people attending cultural events on items like food, accommodations, and parking — in Houston, audience members spend an average of \$14 besides their ticket. In Atlanta, they spend more than \$15.

"Our leaders need visible proof of the economic benefits of the arts, so that arts funding can be strengthened and made less susceptible to public and political whim," said the National Association of Local Arts Agencies (which recently

merged with other arts advocacy organizations to become Americans for the Arts).

There is also the cultural benefit, the most obvious benefit of art, the stimulation, the throwing of creative sparks, the inspiration, the beauty. The problem in publicly funded art is judging what's worthy and what's not, what is beautiful and what is offensive. One of our staff members said that something like "Piss Christ," described in the article on the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, should never be publicly funded. I disagreed. Restricting the flash points in art creates a chilling effect. When schoolchildren painted the little white posts in front of the Mississippi Cultural Crossroads building with bright colors as part of a mural project, the powers-that-be in Port Gibson, Mississippi, were offended enough that they insisted that the little posts be repainted white.

The chill on finances and freedom of expression hasn't stopped artists in the South. I conceived this section to talk about how bruising the censorship and defunding of arts has been in the region — how the arts have been shut down and shut up. But what I found as I talked with artists all over the South is that they keep on doing their work no matter what. The section became "Arts that refuse to shut up and shut down," and features a portfolio of artists who just won't give up.



I would like to dedicate this section to my mother, Edna Arnow, who gave me an appreciation of the importance of art in everyday life. After working as a studio potter for 45 years, she retired, and shortly thereafter got a new studio because she found she couldn't live without making pots — another artist who just won't give up.

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— Pat Arnow with Gretchen Boger and Caroline Brown.

Gretchen Boger is from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and a student at Yale University. Caroline Brown attends Duke University and is from Greensboro, North Carolina.