

Statement of Christine Anagnos
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for the record of the
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Regarding the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) requests funding of at least \$170 million each for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for Fiscal Year 2021. We also ask that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) be provided with the funding necessary to staff and train personnel in order to avoid placing any additional impediments on American art museums that are importing works of art containing ivory for the purposes of temporary public exhibition.

INDEMNITY PROGRAM: The NEA administers exhibition indemnity agreements under the Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Act of 1975. As amended in 2007, the Act authorizes separate grant programs to cover exhibitions that include works from abroad as well as purely domestic exhibitions. In their 46 years of existence, they have facilitated the presentation of more than a thousand significant exhibitions. Absent the indemnity programs, museums would be unable to present exhibitions of this size and value. Careful review and stringent standards have kept loss or damage to a minimum, while a high deductible provides taxpayers with additional protection: to date only two validated claim payments have been appropriated by Congress, for a net sum of \$4,700.

At irregular intervals since 1975, Congress has acted to increase the amount that may be indemnified per exhibition as well as the total amount that may be outstanding at any one time. Both in 2007 and in 2014, the last time that such action was taken, the increases were included in the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Accordingly, we respectfully request that Subcommittee consider increasing the programs' caps by 25 percent each.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS: We have been gratified to see bipartisan support on this Committee and in Congress for the NEA's work. We particularly note the widespread commendation of the NEA's pioneering programs for military personnel, veterans, and their families. AAMD also commends NEA for its commitment to the Blue Star Museums initiative, now in its eleventh year. AAMD members have responded with overwhelming enthusiasm to Chairman Carter's invitation to offer free admission to active duty military and their families at least from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Approximately 90 percent of AAMD members in the United States have either formally joined the program or already offer free admission to all. Each year, more than 2,000 museums participate, reaching on average more than 856,000 military members and their families. According to a survey conducted by Blue Star Families, fifteen percent of

participants reported that it was the first time they had visited a museum. AAMD is grateful to Blue Star Families and the NEA for the opportunity to serve this new audience.

The NEA provides modest but important grants to art museums or their parent institutions across the country.

The University of Minnesota received a grant to support the exhibition *Harriet Bart: Abracadabra and Other Forms of Protection* at the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum. The exhibition presents visual poet and conceptual artist Harriet Bart (b. 1941), whose powerful and varied conceptual installations address urgent contemporary issues such as the devastations of war, the complexities of memorialization, and the emotional dimensions of space and memory. Through the prism of this visionary artist, the exhibition reflects on art's ability to protect and transform, to expand our capacity for empathy, and to sensitize us to histories we might otherwise forget.

The Tacoma Art Museum received a grant to support Dia de los Muertos programming. In observance of the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead, the museum will offer performances of traditional Mexican music and dance, as well as present displays of ceremonial alters and tapetes (sand paintings). The festivities also will highlight the work of Latino artists contained in the museum's collections.

On a related note, the Tacoma Art Museum loaned a work of art to the National Gallery of Art exhibition *Degas at the Opera*, which was made possible by the international indemnity program administered by the NEA. This illustrates that the program benefits not only museums that host exhibitions, but also those that lend to exhibitions, thus enabling them to share their collections with a much broader public.

The Bronx Museum of the Arts received a grant to support the exhibition *Sanford Biggers: Code-Switch*, which opens next month, and an accompanying catalogue. The exhibition will highlight Biggers' abstract motifs painted onto quilts, textiles, and other tapestries, while also exploring the history of quilt patterns once used as signposts to denote safe houses for slaves who traveled the Underground Railroad. The exhibition will include as many as 80 quilts, textiles, and archival materials.

The Art Institute of Chicago received a grant on behalf of Video Data Bank to support the development of an online platform offering on-demand streaming of historic and contemporary video and media art works. Designed in consultation with educational and cultural institutions across the country, the platform will offer streaming access to the Video Data Bank's collection of more than 6,000 historically significant artworks. Artists in the collection will receive royalties for rental and exhibition of their works.

Princeton University, on behalf of Princeton University Art Museum, received a grant to support the exhibition *The Power of LIFE: LIFE Magazine and American Photography, 1936-1972*, which is currently up through June 21. The exhibition explores how LIFE Magazine influenced modern photography and Americans' idea of themselves and their

modern history. The exhibition features as many as 150 photographs and examines how the featured images were made, how they gained meaning, and how they influenced readers and U.S. cultural heritage.

The Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) received a grant to support the traveling exhibition *Crossing Night: Art from Southern Africa*, which closed last month. The exhibition was a collaborative effort of the MOCAD and the A4 Art Foundation in Cape Town, South Africa, which hosted the exhibition before it travelled to Detroit. The exhibition featured art made in southern Africa, and included artists from the countries of South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland, Madagascar, Mozambique, Angola, and Malawi, including contemporary art work that has never been seen outside of Africa and a number of special commissions made for the exhibition.

We note also that the Detroit Institute of Arts received an indemnity for its upcoming exhibition *Van Gogh in America*, which is the first exhibition dedicated to the introduction and early reception of Vincent van Gogh's art in the United States. The exhibition will display 68 works by Van Gogh, illustrating the efforts made by early promoters of his art—including the artist's family—in America. This is a story unique to Detroit; the DIA was the first public museum in the United States to purchase a painting by Van Gogh. The DIA is the exclusive venue for this exhibition, opening on June 21.

Also receiving an indemnity is the Cleveland Museum of Art for its upcoming exhibition *Picasso and Paper*, which it organized with the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in collaboration with the Musée national Picasso-Paris. The exhibition opens on May 24.

In Salt Lake City, the University of Utah received a grant on behalf of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts to support the ACME (Art, Community, Museum, and Education) community outreach initiative and related public programming. The museum hosted community conversations in the Salt Lake City region to assess the needs and interests of future audiences, commission artists to produce socially engaging projects, and curate exhibitions that respond specifically to the K-12 curriculum. Students from the university worked with museum staff in all of the project components. Museum staff report that the grant helped spur additional grants from individuals, foundations, and the state.

In Reno, the Nevada Museum of Art received a grant to support the project director and a commission for visual artist Jack Malotte to implement an exhibition and outreach activities in 2019. Going forward, the museum received an indemnity to cover the exhibition *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement*, which opens on June 20.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES: This important agency assists art museums in presenting humanities scholarship to the general public. NEH also plays an invaluable role in assisting with the preservation and conservation of important collections. This is exactly the type of unglamorous work for which it is chronically difficult to raise private funding, making federal support all the more valuable.

AAMD notes NEH's support of grant programs to benefit wounded warriors and to ensure educational opportunities for veterans and service members transitioning to civilian life. We also note NEH's new Infrastructure and Capacity-Building Challenge Grants program, which seeks to strengthen the institutional base of the humanities in the United States.

In Minneapolis, the Society of Fine Arts received a grant to support *Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art* at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (Mia), the first museum exhibition to explore the persistent presence of the supernatural and paranormal in American art. This is an ambitious interdisciplinary project in which the humanities inform the selection of art and the presentation of the subject matter. American art history has barely scratched the surface of this topic, and Mia aspires for this to become the new standard study in the field. The exhibition opens in 2021.

The University of Minnesota received a grant for a planning project to develop a digital portal information and archival sources on Mexican American art. Working with the University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley, and the National Museum of Mexican Art (NMMA), it will aggregate Mexican American art and related documentation from existing digital collections across the nation. Art attributed to Mexican heritage artists living in the United States is a rich aesthetic tradition that enhances how humanities scholars think about American art, history, and culture.

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE: We ask that FWS be provided with the funding necessary to staff and train personnel in order to avoid placing impediments on American art museums as they carry out their mission, not only to temporarily exhibit works of art to the public, which contain ivory, but also to be able to legally acquire works of antique ivory from abroad. FWS staff have worked well with the art museum community on several important issues related to its mission and, as they continue to craft regulations that recognize the importance of maintaining historic works, we urge that they be given all necessary support and resources.

ABOUT AAMD: The purpose of the Association of Art Museum Directors is to support its members in increasing the contribution of art museums to society. The AAMD accomplishes this mission by establishing and maintaining the highest standards of professional practice, serving as forum for the exchange of information and ideas, acting as an advocate for its member art museums, and being a leader in shaping public discourse about the arts community and the role of art in society.

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