from Phyllis Schlafly August 5, 1993

CONGRESS PROMOTES DECADENCE

The good news is that 20 more Congressmen than last year voted to defund the National Endowment for the Arts. The bad news is that the House voted 322 to 105 to reward that contemptible agency with $130,000 more of the taxpayers' money than it spent last year.

Few things show Congress's total decadence and disdain for the American people so well as the vote to increase funding for the NEA in the face of its most recent atrocity. We're still waiting for some Congressman to answer, "the National Endowment for the Arts," when TV talk show hosts belligerently ask, "Well, what would you cut out of the federal budget?"

The NEA has given $302,000 to the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City since 1990. on display there from June 23 to August 29 is an exhibition called "Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art."

No words of mine can describe the exhibit as appropriately as the Whitney Museum's own catalogue. The choice of the word "abject" is apt: it means wretched, despicable, degrading, or base.

"Although 'abject art' is a play on 'object art,' the term does not connote an art movement so much as it describes a body of work which incorporates or suggests abject materials such as dirt, hair, excrement, dead animals, menstrual blood, and rotting food in order to confront taboo issues of gender and sexuality. This work also includes abject subject matter that which is often deemed inappropriate by a conservative dominant culture."

Let's continue reading from the Whitney Museum's own description of this offensive exhibit: "Employing methodologies adapted from

feminism, queer theory, post-structuralism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, our goal is to talk dirty in the institution and degrade its atmosphere of purity and prudery by foregrounding issues of gender and sexuality in the art exhibited."

Now hold your nose for a list of some of the "art" on display in this exhibit: a young woman urinating in a toilet, a three-foot mound of excrement, a photograph of a naked woman holding a large fake penis to her private parts, a dismembered sculpture of two women having oral sex, framed samples of baby fecal stains, a film by porn performer Annie Sprinkle called "The Sluts and Goddesses Video Workshop or How to be a Sex Goddess in 101 Easy Steps," and a film by Susie Silver titled "A Spy" with Jesus Christ depicted as a woman standing aked with her breasts exposed.

That's not all. Other items are so obscene I can't bring myself to describe them in this column that runs in family newspapers. Calling this stuff "art" is a perversion of the word.

The Whitney Museum's permanent collection includes two items made famous in the controversy about the NEA a couple of years ago. They are Andre Serrano's "Piss Christ" (a photograph of a crucifix in a jar of urine) and Robert Mapplethorpe's self portrait of himself with a bullwhip up his rectum.

Of course, NEA supporters in Congress didn't defend the Whitney exhibit. They just demogogued about how wonderful it is for Americans to enjoy art by attending symphony orchestra performances.

Leading the valiant battle to defund the NEA was Rep. Philip M. crane (R-IL). He pointed out that there is no constitutional authority for Congress to give taxpayers' money to individual artists to advance their careers, which is exactly what the NEA does.

In 1992, the NEA reviewed 17,677 applications for grants, from which 4,251 were anointed with taxpayers' cash. Government endorsement is used to promote the careers of those so-called artists at the expense of their competitors.

The lucky recipients are usually those who know how to work the system by getting their pals on the peer review panels. Even if the grant procedure were not an outright scandal, it's obvious that the peculiar biases of those doling out the money play a dominant role in who gets the cash.

The NEA functions as a sort of Ministry of Culture from which the Art Commissar decides which art should be endorsed and subsidized and which should not. That doesn't sound very American, does it?

Not only are many choices of the Art Commissar offensive to the American people, not only is the whole selection process inherently unfair and plagued with scandal, not only does the federal deficit demand major cuts throughout the budget, but art in America is probably the least needy category of all federal spending. NEA expenditures of $178 million in 1992 were a drop in the bucket compared to the $9.3 billion given to the arts by the private sector (from individuals, bequests, corporations, and foundations).

Art in America was alive and well long before Lyndon Johnson created this NEA monster as part of the Great Society, and art will do very well, indeed, if the NEA is abolished. Private spending on art continues to climb, despite higher taxes.

Find out how your Congressman voted on the Crane Amendment to H.R. 2520 and, if he voted to spend your money on "art," make him feel your indignation.