from Phyllis Schlaf1y

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Bon Voyage to John Frohnmayer

The with-no-regrets termination of John Frohnmayer as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was long overdue. But one swallow does not a summer make, and now is the time for a total basement-to-attic housecleaning at the agency that has been an acute embarrassment to the Bush Administration for three years.

Although as Chief Art Commissar Frohnmayer must take final responsibility, the dozens of dirty and disgusting materials that the NEA funded with taxpayers' money were not selected. by Frohnmayer.

So, now is the time to fire all those up and down the line who selected for cash awards Karen (dressed only in chocolate) Finley, Robert ("bullwhip") Mapplethorpe, Andres ("Piss Christ") Serrano, and. other offensive materials. Now is the time to restructure the entire buddy system that greased those grants.

The whole idea of having a Federal Ministry of Culture vested with the power to decide which art should be taxpayer-financed, and which should not, is offensive to Americans. This agency was a sideshow of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, and it has produced a new class of self-styled "artists," living in the culture of dependency and loudly demanding the next installment of their "entitlements."

It may be hard for young people to believe, but America survived its first two centuries without any art dole from the Federal Government. That fact alone proves it isn't needed because we certainly had plenty of fine art in the pre-LBJ era, and the $176 million spent this year by the NEA is a drop in the bucket compared. to the billions spent annually by individuals on art and entertainment.

It is patently unjust to American taxpayers for the NEA to give their money to individuals for their personal enrichment and reputation enhancement. That is clearly a taking of public money for private grain. We don't even know what the money will be spent for until the artsy handout hunter has completed his bizarre imaginings.

The process of allowing “artists” to sit on the peer panels and approve each other’s grants is so corrupt that it wouldn't be tolerated in any other agency. This back-scratching racket makes sure that only those who get their pals on the panels have a chance of feeding from the NEA gravy train.

Bad as Frohnmayer's judgment has been, the peer panels under him are more decadent. A “performance space” called the Franklin Furnace, which received NEA grants every year for the last 15 years, was recommended by a peer panel for a 1992 grant on the basis of a video in which an artist named “Scarlet O” strips down to a garter belt and lets a man from the audience rub lotion between her legs. In a rare burst of concern for “artistic merit” the NEA's advisory council vetoed this grant, but the disappointed “artists” are organizing to get that decision overturned.

Another frequent performer in the “theaters” and “performance spaces” funded by the NEA is Annie Sprinkle, described by the Washington Post as “former triple-X queen, former hooker” who has appeared in l50 porn flicks. Her latest “art” consists of smearing her breasts with ink and selling “tit prints.”

Sprinkle's new video show, “The Sluts and Goddesses of Transformation Salon,” was shown at “The Kitchen,” a so-called theater that has received several NEA grants. The video guides the viewer through a 45-minute performance featuring such pleasure simulators as flagellation by oak leaves, gender bending, body shaving, body painting, menstrual blood, rhythmic deep breathing, and passionate safe sex.

Other NEA recipients in recent months include two filthy books called “Live Sex Acts” and “Queer City.” The latter is not only outrageously blasphemous about Christ, but it exalts the fun of wanting to kill a woman and of running through the park for sex, saying “let’s get a female jogger.”

Congress tried last fall to call a halt to these outrages. On September 19, the Senate voted 68 to 28 for Senator Jesse Helms' amendment to restrain the NEA from spending taxpayer dollars for “patently offensive” artworks, or for stage performances “depicting sexual or excretory activities.” On October 16 and 17, the House voted 286 to l35 and 287 to 133, respectively, for Rep. Willian Dannemeyer’s motion to support the Helms’ amendment.

Then, the Senate-House conference committee devised a backroom package that dropped the dirty art restrictions along with a continuation of low grazing fees on

public lands, which Western Congressmen had. to vote for. After Congress approved the “corn for porn” dea1, the next day Chairman Frohnmayer awarded additional grants to two controversial people whom the Washington Post called “sexually explicit performance artists” -- Tim Miller and Hol1y Hughes.

The media are reporting that President Bush ousted Frohnmayer because of one sentence about the NEA in Pat Buchanan's speech last week. f hope that wasn't the only reason. In any event, giving Frohnmayer his walking papers should be only the first step in a desperately needed spring housecleaning.