from Phyllis Schlafly September 16, 1993 THE NEA'S LATEST OUTRAGE

Whoever opens the mail in Senator Jesse Helms's office must have had a shock upon receiving a recent unsolicited letter from Anne-Imelda M. Radice, Ph.D., the former Acting Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. She said she had just discovered that, on her watch last September, the NEA made a fellowship grant to a photographer named Joel-Peter Witkin who uses "shock quality of prurient subjects as a primary virtue."

Dr. Radice was so embarrassed about this grant that she apparently wanted to get her apology on record before the scandal erupted on the senate floor. Witkin's work (it can't be called art) is nauseating enough to make even liberals concede that there must be a culture war going on in America.

In her defense, Dr. Radice stated that she didn't know how Witkin was going to spend the federal grant funds. She confessed that, under regular procedure, Witkin was under no obligation to tell the NEA ahead of time. However, that's no excuse. Witkin's $20,000 grant in 1992 was his fourth grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

In a book of his photographs published in 1985, Witkin wrote an afterword in which he issued a plea for models to contact him about having their pictures taken. He didn't want just any models. Here are his peculiar specifications, written in his own words:

"A partial listing of my interests: physical prodigies of all kinds, pinheads, dwarfs, giants, hunchbacks, pre-op transsexuals, bearded women, active or retired side show performers, contortionists (erotic), women with one breast (center), twins joined at the

foreheads, twins sharing the same arm or leg, living Cyclopes, people

with tails, horns, wings, fins, claws, reversed feet or hands, elephantine limbs, etc. All people with unusually large genitals. Sex masters and slaves.

"Human skeletons and human pincushions. People with complete rubber wardrobes. Geeks. Private collections of instruments of torture, romance, of human, animal and alien parts. All manner of visual perversions. A young blonde girl with two faces. Any living myth. Anyone bearing the wounds of Christ."

The April issue of the magazine *Vanity Fair* featured a glowing article about Witkin. The author was apparently star-struck with Witkin's perversions and preoccupation with morbidity, praising his "quixotic sense of his divine mission" and calling him "saint Joel Peter of Kodak."

Vanity Fair even gave its readers a preview photo of one of Witkin's latest creations, which will be featured in an upcoming exhibition: the head of a man, with a section of skull removed, converted into a vase with flowers stuck into it.

Witkin is much fawned over by the artsy groups and exhibits at leading photography galleries around the world. One of his most notorious photographs, a picture of a corpse's head sliced in two and smushed lip to lip, sold at Sotheby's in 1990 for $27,000.

Witkin's favorite picture shows a model with a crucifix as a nosepiece. Another is accurately entitled "Testicle Stretch with the Possibility of a Crushed Face."

In addition to his many photographs of corpses in various states of dismemberment, Witkin does a photographic series on masochists who combine pain and torture with sex. I'm not going to describe these gory pictures in this column, but suffice it to say that they make

Mapplethorpe's bullwhip look tame.

There is something so rotten about the process under which such kooks as Witkin are able to get grants of taxpayers' money that it cries out for remedy.

The NEA's FY 92 Visual Artists Fellowships panel in photography reviewed a total of 1,708 applications in a series of four rounds of review. After the first round, 625 applicants remained for further consideration, and 137 were left after the second round.

Witkin survived all four rounds. The minutes of the panel meetings show that one spoke of Witkin's "importance" as an artist, and that the panelists finally agreed that Witkin "is a major talent deserving of support."

Dr. Radice explained why it is impossible for the NEA to reform itself in her letter to Senator Helms: "This [Witkin grant] points to the difficulties which the [NEAJ Agency will continue to experience with these buy time types of awards. There is really little protection for the taxpayers. Unless the chairman can be everywhere and know everything, it is impossible to guarantee that such an unfortunate situation cannot reoccur."

"Protection for the taxpayers"? Another current "art" project was to hand out $10 bills to illegal aliens near the Mexican border. Public ridicule forced the NEA to withdraw its backing, but an NEA spokesman praised the overall project (which received a $250,000 NEA grant) as "an exemplary project."

Yes, there is a way to guarantee that such outrages do not reoccur: abolish the National Endowment for the Arts. Find out how your Congressman voted on July 14 when Congress killed Rep. Philip Crane's amendment (H.R. 2520) to defunct the NEA.