

STRATEGY PAPERS, ART - ACTIONS OF RESISTANCE

STRATEGY PAPERS

Includes the following texts:

"Art - Actions of Resistance" Introduction and interviews

"THE ENEMY WITHIN:
Answering Back to Agendas of Censorship"

For more information please write to: eidiahouse@earthlink.net

"Art - Actions of Resistance" The Introduction

Introduction presented by Paul Lamarre at the Southeastern College Art Conference and the Mid-America College Art Association conference in Nashville Tennessee at Vanderbilt University, October 24, 2006. The Panel: AmBushed II, Strategies for Engagement was chaired by: Steven Bleicher, Chair Department of Visual Arts, Coastal Carolina University and Trina Renee Nicklas, Chair of the Illustration Department and Director of the Arts and Humanities Program, Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale. Other panelists included: Tanya Augsburg Ph.D., professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, Arizona State University and Billie Grace Lynn, artist and professor, University of Miami.

Evolving from a 12 years investigation into American cultural policy and censorship of the arts from the viewpoint of visual artists -as manifested in the documentary "the nea tapes" - we are presenting STRATEGY PAPERS: "Art - Actions of Resistance" and "THE ENEMY WITHIN: Answering Back to Agendas of Censorship".

I will keep my comments to just an introduction of sorts, so that after Melissa's paper we can show you some footage of a new film about censorship we are working on entitled B.C. We seek to share this with you as raw footage because what these Brooklyn College MFA artists endured and in turn reacted to, truly strikes to the heart of our topic ANSWERING BACK. What is most compelling about these individual artists is that they remained united when confronted by others who sought to censor and castigate them for their expression.

I often ask myself why we do this work. Why do Melissa and I seem to detour from traditional art practices, opting instead to make an art out of defending free speech and expression? And my “answer back” to myself is that our work always seems to stay in the realm of an art more about responsibility than beauty. And given what is going on in the world; where is the beauty? No wonder individuals and the government in power seek to monitor and control what we say and think -endeavoring to put limits on what an artist’s expression should be.

Melissa and I interviewed David Rhodes, President of the School of Visual Arts, on September 29, 2006 for our aforementioned documentary (work in progress), about the Brooklyn College MFA thesis show that was closed by the Brooklyn Parks Department, removed and partially destroyed by the College itself. Mr. David Rhodes was one of the few in the New York art world to publicly come out in support of the students. It is befitting for the topics of “answering back” that I quote David Rhodes, from his speech: Art, Censorship and Courage, given at the commencement of the School of Visual Arts at Radio City Music Hall, May 10, 2006.

“I urge you to lend your support to their cause because it is really all of ours. As the archconservative Edmund Burke has noted: “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

Melissa’s paper THE ENEMY WITHIN deals with “answering back” when censorship, posing as critique -comes to you from within the art world itself. The STRATEGY PAPER, "Art - Actions of Resistance" was intended to be a handout but given its length (constantly increasing), we felt it best that it be web-based archive at our website www.eidia.com where it can be a free download.

Derived from a series of firsthand recorded phone and video interviews with scholars, historians, artists, professors, critics and librarians as they speak from experiences inside and outside the classroom addressing how they handle presenting difficult subject matter in the arts, "Art - Actions of Resistance", articulates how agendas of contemporary censorship are being countered by those in the field of art production and education.

“Art - Actions of Resistance”, contains examples of "answering back" when faced with the onslaught of the increasing privatized market place which, by its very nature is censorial. The arts are always the first to be attacked and often, interestingly enough, art censorship is usually not equated with the suppression of free speech.

"Art - Actions of Resistance" The Interviews

As part of the EIDIA house ongoing project on economic art censorship, "Art - Actions of Resistance", is a web-based archive of our continuing research into this subject. It will be updated periodically, and remain freely downloadable.

This compilation is derived from a series of first hand recorded phone and video interviews (conducted in 2006 and continuing into 2007) with scholars, historians, artists, professors, critics and librarians. We asked: "What do you say to your class when you present potentially provocative artwork or themes?" The interviewees proposed disparate strategies for teaching difficult subject matter - speaking from personal experience, inside and outside the classroom.

Please bear in mind that (for the most part) these are transcripts of spoken word as taken from video and phone interviews.

Soon to be included in "Art - Actions of Resistance": will be interviews from many of the Brooklyn College Masters of Fine Arts students, class of 2006. These students decided to act as a united body to fight back after their thesis exhibition at the Brooklyn War Memorial was closed by the Brooklyn Parks Department and subsequently dismantled and partially destroyed by Brooklyn College. EIDIA house is in the process of making a documentary about this compelling story.

David Jeffreys Ph.D.
Savannah College of Art and Design
Department of Art History

"We should stop thinking about what art is and think more about what art can do... I make a statement at the beginning of the class, that there may be issues that you are going to not agree with, or you might find controversial, but this is the forum within which to discuss these things. I actually quoted you [Paul Lamarre], when you gave your paper last year at the Southeastern College Art Conference. You talked about the idea of people not wanting to be offended by art - or not wanting to be offended period. And you said: 'What's wrong with being offended?'

And I say to my students; think about how that [art] makes you feel.

[As a professor and artist], If art did not deal with issues which did not end up being confrontational at times, I would just not be interested... I say to the students I am going to show you things that I think are important. For example, during hurricane Katrina, I showed some images of people affected by the hurricane. One of my points was; Where are the artists, trying to deal with this kind of thing? These are the things artists should be dealing with instead of simply making things, which are aesthetically pleasing... There are other reasons for being an artist."

Paul

"How are the students these days? How are the students dealing with censorship? Do you find that you are inspired by their approach to tricky subjects -are they speaking their mind- whether it is political or not?"

Carolee Schneemann
Artist / Educator

"[I'm not teaching intensively right now- I am a visiting artist], but it is so various, and most of the students, are very frightened, very cautious. They often feel that they must follow something programmatic, so that they can be successfully and really ask for a confirmation that if they do, A, and then B, don't they get a reward? And then I have to remind them to look at the history of my work and most of the other artists that they are really interested in -and say no- you don't get the reward. You get more struggle, more striving, more uncertainty, and what you want is a community to share issues; so that you feel some confirmation...Because aspects of the culture are so free and pleasurable and geared to glamour and success; the underlying forms of suppression are much too frightening for most people in the culture to consider at all."

Demetria Kalodimos
Journalist and Ch-4 news anchor, Nashville Tennessee

Paul

"How do you as a news anchor and journalist deal with trying to convey the importance of speech, your speech, my speech, even speech or expression we don't like?"

Demetria

"We say in journalism that one of our ethical responsibilities is to give voice to the voiceless...that means the disadvantaged, homeless, handicapped and more recently those with accented English or no English at all. The politicization of illegal immigration has had a very disturbing side effect. It has endorsed and made acceptable irresponsible speech that borders on hate. Some of the sound-bites we have aired (and wisely not aired) can be compared to what we saw on newsreels in the segregated south of the 1960's, - stuff we look and listen to now in disbelief. This era will be remembered as much for immigrant discrimination and the 60's were for racial issues."

Jody Cutler
Assistant Professor of Art History
University of Central Florida

Paul

"We could not help but notice that as we spoke with scholars, how over and over they would state that they use the Lynda Benglis ad from the 1974 Artforum to address art and controversy."

Jody

"Right out of the box I tell them, if this is going to offend you, this is not the class for you...The whole feminist issue came to a head for all of us [at that time]. [When I show the Benglis ad] I put big letters underneath [stating] this is a published ad in a magazine."

Paul

"You mentioned the issue of demographics down in the South. Lets talk about that for a second...You travel back and forth from Orlando to the Big Apple..."

Jody

"One of the things down here is the Religious Right in central Florida. It's an issue."

Paul

"What do you mean by issue..?"

Jody

"Not the students. The demographics. There is a bigger issue of religion here, fundamental Christian are in general, very conservative protestant and catholic - is an issue in our art history classes."

Paul

"So how does that student, that presence in the classroom makes itself known?"

Jody

"It makes itself known on written assignments, (and also in choices of term paper topics.) In intro art, with medieval art for example, when students talk [write] about biblical illustrations as 'truthful' or 'beautiful'. In one class we were discussing art in the 18th century and the painter Caspar David Friedrich. And one student chose to explore 'God' in Friedrich... [he used the literal] terminology, instead of coming from a historical perspective. I will say, the way I respond to that is, I do it at the beginning of every single one of my classes from intro to theory... I have one [class] art of the last 25 years, which there is a lot of controversial material...so I right off the bat say, as we know art from the beginning of time is about: sex, death, and religion. So these are going

to be discussed. So that, if you are not interested in images of these things and discussing them- you really can't participate in the class..."

Paul

"We forget, we take the iconography of religion for granted. We don't think about the artist behind that and how he came to make that work."

Jody

"The other thing I do. In art history we look at religion from a historical perspective. There are other areas (of study) theology, philosophy, but in art history we look at these texts as history not as scripture. I try to make that differentiation very clear, because that is a fussy area for a lot of religious Christian student. The bible...is a human historical writing, what ever else you may think it is for another class."

Paul

"What kind of reaction do you get to that?"

Jody

"I do think they appreciate the fact that I am very open about it... I don't think it is talked about out loud. They like the idea of having these discussions out in the open... Just because I am very open about my points of view does not mean that you have to be. I don't change the material, and I do not avoid material ever! I don't shy away from controversial material. But I am just very open and clear about how I am approaching it."

Ellen Brooks
Artist / Adjunct Assistant Professor
New York University & Bennington College

Paul

"Do you take any special measure in dealing with art images that a student may find difficult?"

Ellen

"So often each situation that may arise is a little bit different. Though anything that will allow for conversation and dialogue - even if that means being a little bit more tactful. Conversation and differences of opinion are IMPORTANT in any educational institution and that is about challenge and exchange.

I know in one of my classes I have a student who is Jehovah's Witnesses. That does not mean that I am not going to show the slides."

Beverly Naidus, M.F.A.
Associate Professor; Graduate Faculty
Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences
University of Washington Tacoma

“In my art for social change courses, I rarely have students who complain about the content of the art I share. But occasionally, when students do presentations on contemporary artists in class, they get disturbed by the work that their peers present. Because the content of each of my classes is so directly related to the students' lives, they find ways to make sense of the work they see. Sometimes they become more despairing as their eyes become more open, but I try and offer them strategies, through art and activism, that will give them a sense of possibility of transformation, if nothing else.

Once such case happened in my Art in a Time of War class. A student chose to report on the work of John Jota Leanos; in particular she spoke about John's poster "Friendly Fire" about Pat Tillman, the late football player who died in Afghanistan from friendly fire. Two students who were spouses of deployed soldiers in Iraq took extreme offense at the work and wondered if the artist had gotten permission from Tillman's family to create this controversial piece. One of the students claimed that she knew Tillman's family and was certain that they would take offense. John was coming to campus the following month so I told these troubled students that they were welcome to question him about this work, but that my understanding was that the parents of Tillman were quite against the war and would have appreciated John's work.”

Scott Boylston
Graphic Design Professor
Savannah College of Art and Design
Scott has authored numerous books including: "Creative Solutions for Unusual Projects." His quotes have been taken from [Visual Resistance](http://visualresistance.org).
<http://visualresistance.org/wordpress/index.php?p=18>

VR

“How do you balance being a professional designer and teacher with your more political work?”

SB

“It’s pretty straightforward. As much as many people bemoan the monoculture of America, we’re still a pretty diverse nation. And let’s face it, even the most ideologically fanatic person possesses a certain degree of complexity. As a professor, I get a lot of opportunities to let young designers know that there is a realm beyond consumer culture for them to explore. As designers we can act as responsible contributors to society, even as we make a living. These two things

are not diametrically opposed, as some believe. It's true, too, that even bland commercial work is a political statement in support of the non-sustainable quo. So, as young designers realize this, they're more open to exploring other forms of expression.

It can be hard when dealing with students who hold strong ideological viewpoints that vary from mine, but not really. I'll always stress that EVERYONE must be objective and educated in their stance. Only after intensive research into the mindset and rationales of the "enemy camp" can a designer ever assume the role of a responsible communicator. My classes are always open to diverse opinions, and in a way that reveals the promise of diversity within a society, because my most fruitful classes are usually those that have a healthy dose of divergent political and cultural opinion. That provides a catalyst for deeper thought, and a deeper understanding of what it means to exist within a diverse culture as a culture agent."

Mysoon Rizk Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Art History
University of Toledo; Center for Visual Arts

"I actually try to avoid situations where I am talking to people who don't want to hear about homosexual art or ideas which seem threatening to them... Probably the largest space where I encounter that kind of resistance is in the classroom, because at the University of Toledo, for what ever reason, and I think it is because of the city of Toledo is very provincial and conservative. Though that is a challenge [for the students] that can be good. It's a constant struggle to help people open their minds.

Three times I have taught a seminar on "Art and Disease", where I assign David Wojnarowicz readings. And in some ways as confrontational or shocking as his art may seem to people, his writing is even more graphic, more in your face, more no holes barred, and a more intense struggle [which] the students have to go through. The one thing that astounds me is that he actually seems to win them over on a regular basis, [that is] for the students who can get themselves to read it. To get past the sexual descriptions...where he is talking about an encounter with a stranger in a warehouse...or whatever and then actually get to some of the intense insights that he offers - they are won over... I think it is a constant challenge that they face and I face."

Gil Martin
Artist, Instructor of Art
Western Nevada Community College

“As far as presenting controversial material; so far I have not run into a great deal of difficulty with that. The passions then arise when the discussion is then put forward about public funding for the arts, I am speaking in relation to Karen Finley and Mapplethorpe etc. There are well-rounded arguments on both sides of the issues. If there is a reaction to controversial works, that is something being rejected outright- that usually comes from older students. In our world these days there are pretty horrific things happening and regarding controversial art the students seem to take in stride.”

Mary Lou Hightower, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Art Education
Department of Fine Arts & Communication Studies
University of South Carolina Upstate

“What I try to throw in is those things that shock, to try and make [the students] think. Because they have been exposed to so much which is sexually explicit, through the media / television, they are almost immune to it. I do things to shock them value-wise. To provoke the question: How do I value this? What is my perspective of what I feel is good art?
What I like to use is Marcel Duchamp’s “Fountain”, the urinal, the readymade. The students’ reaction is always: ‘I can’t believe this is art! Is this really art?’ I explain that Duchamp was trying to get you to look at something in a different way. Here is something that is readily recognized, (in the male world...but not necessarily the female world). We are looking at the world of these ready made—things, which are a part of our everyday world. And Duchamp has actually put it on display. Can this be an art form? And I try NOT to have any answers. And the students get very frustrated, because I do not give them ‘this is right or this is wrong.’ I say; What do you think?”

Marina Pacini
Memphis Brooks Museum
Chief Curator

“Any good art is going to anger somebody.”

David Rhodes
President of the School Visual Arts in New York City

To follow is his speech given at the commencement of, The School of Visual Arts, at Radio City Music Hall, May 10, 2006.

Art, Censorship, and Courage

“New York is a city of contradictions. Everyone knows that it is irredeemably blue, but its last four mayoral elections have been won by Republicans. It is the financial capital of the United States, but its budget is controlled by the legislature in Albany. Some would like it to be the 51st state, while others think it so corrupt that they would like to cut it off from the mainland and allowed to float out to sea. It is still the capital of the art world and a shining beacon of artistic expression. It is also a city where the whims of one individual can dictate what is appropriate for many.

Five years ago, then-mayor Giuliani, in an effort to revive his flagging poll numbers caused primarily because of his clumsy handling of his divorce, decided that the best way to reverse his decline was to attack the arts. He set up what was commonly known as his Decency Commission, staffed by such luminaries as Curtis Sliwa, founder of the Guardian Angels, who admitted that he did not know much about art, but believed he was qualified to serve on that commission because as he said, he “knows the difference between a Michelob and an Michelangelo;” Raul L. Felder, the Mayor’s divorce lawyer, whose conduct had been criticized by the judge overseeing the Mayor’s divorce proceedings; and Leonard Garment, noted apologist for Richard Nixon.

To his credit, Mayor Bloomberg abolished the commission soon after he was sworn in. But the desire to censor, to control, is something, which runs deep in the psyche of the powerful and appears in various guises from time to time. As Justice Stewart has said, “Censorship reflects society's lack of confidence in itself. It is a hallmark of an authoritarian regime.” And authoritarian is the best way to describe the ham-handed antics of a self-described bureaucrat from Montreal, namely, Julius Spiegel, the parks commissioner of the Borough of Brooklyn.

“Censorship reflects society's lack of confidence in itself. It is a hallmark of an authoritarian regime.”

The Parks Department recently proposed a rule, which would govern New York City’s public art program, which it administers. The rule called for a ban on art that fails to “demonstrates a proper respect for public morals, or conduct or that includes material that is political, sexual or religious in nature.”

As near as I can tell, that leaves out most of what you have studied these past four years. If the Italian government were to offer to loan the city any of its masterpieces, Michelangelo’s David, for example or any of the religious paintings of the Renaissance, it would appear that under this rule the city would have to decline. Although the Parks Department, as a result of the efforts of the College

Art Association and the National Coalition against Censorship, did not adopt this rule, its spirit is alive and well in the actions of commissioner Spiegel.

Each year, the MFA candidates at Brooklyn College are required to exhibit their work at the War Memorial at Cadman Plaza. This year's show was called Plan B. Given the climate not an auspicious name. According to press accounts, the opening was well attended, and both the president and provost of Brooklyn College reported that they enjoyed the show.

At 3:30 p.m. the following day, the memorial supervisor, accompanied by a locksmith, asked the three students who were monitoring the show to leave, had the locksmith change the locks, and closed the show.

A spokesperson for commissioner Spiegel, Warner Johnston, said that the Commissioner made the decision on his own without conferring with other members of the administration. When reached by Maria Rand, the Brooklyn College Gallery Director, Commissioner Spiegel said he had received complaints about two or three works containing sexual content. It should be obvious from this response that Mr. Spiegel had not seen the show, that the number of complaints were few, and that he could not name the offending works. But it is generally the case that those who censor, do not look. As Mark Twain noted, "Nature knows no indecencies; man invents them."

The response of Brooklyn College was not encouraging. After discussions with city officials, the College's provost, Roberta S. Mathews said, "In keeping with the public nature of the space, as well as its position as an honored war memorial, Brooklyn College has respectfully decided to move the entire student exhibit to our campus. Brooklyn College has a long tradition of educating fine artists. Throughout, the administration of the college has supported our students' rights to freedom of artistic expression. We are proud to display our student art here at the college." Only Orwellian obfuscation can describe a successful opening in a public space followed by a craven retreat to campus as a triumph for freedom of speech. "Nature knows no indecencies; man invents them."

Courage seems in short supply. At a minimum, one would have hoped that the college would have decried the confiscation of private property without the benefit of due process. Instead, what we are offered is lip service in support of artistic expression without the college engaging its formidable counsel's office in support of its students. The only praise to be bestowed on a public official goes to an unnamed Park's Department employee who had the good sense to admit one of the students to the exhibition on Friday so that she could feed Daisy, her white pet rat, who was part of her installation—a third grade classroom in which the rat was a symbol of bad behavior.

On Monday morning, three trucks and a squad of men appeared to remove the show. Although the students were taken by surprise, as no one had had the

grace or courtesy to tell them that their work was to be taken hostage, again, they has the good sense to video tape the destruction of their work and to warn the workmen that they could be held liable. This information seems to have halted the removal for a few hours. However, by the end of the day, the show had been removed. Some of the pieces have been damaged beyond repair. Daisy was placed in the back of a van. Her whereabouts are unknown at present.

We still do not know what so offended the Parks Department, but one surmises that it might have been a watercolor of a male torso with a narrative about a sexual encounter between two men, one of whom used the computer name Dick Cheney. This is all rather like what happened at the School of the Art Institute a decade and a half ago when a painting entitled "Mirth and Girth," a satirical depiction of the deceased Mayor Washington, was arrested. After the painting was punished (in other words damaged) the charges were dismissed.

In an effort to placate the students they have been offered a gallery space in Dumbo. The space would be provided by real estate developer David Walentas whose developments have made it impossible for struggling artists to afford to live in Dumbo any longer. Yet another irony.

During all of this Mayor Bloomberg has been either silent or blandly supportive of the Parks Department's view of what is suitable for the public. It has not been his finest hour, but is reminiscent of his behavior during the Republican National Convention in 2004.

To their credit the students have not accepted this situation with equanimity. Norman Siegel, the former head of the New York Civil Liberties Union, has agreed to take the students' case and will file a federal suit later this week alleging that the students rights to free speech have been violated. They have also established a blog at: <http://www.plancensored.blogspot.com/>.

I urge you to lend your support to their cause because it is really all of ours. As the archconservative Edmund Burke has noted: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

THE ENEMY WITHIN
Answering Back to Agendas of Censorship

Presented by Melissa P. Wolf at the Southeastern College Art Conference and the Mid-America College Art Association conference in Nashville Tennessee at Vanderbilt University, October 24, 2006.

Is it possible in this post 9/11 world to survive as an artist educator and at the same time practice intellectual dissidence and create "Art (Actions) of Resistance" or politically relevant art? This paper will articulate how "self-censorship" originating from inside the art establishment, can be countered by those in the field of art production and education.

It is rarely understood in the censoring of art that art is speech. This fact is obstensively overlooked in the majority of cases of art censorship. What is viewed as a privileged position—artists exercising control over the creation and exhibition their work—is indeed a matter of free speech rights. And unless an incident is appropriately sensational for the national press to cover, art censorship is usually soon forgotten by all except the censored individual or individuals.

Too often censorship is privileged by the art world mechanism itself. In academia and in the world of museums, curators, galleries, dealers, journalism and critics, the use of self-censorship as a "privatized repression" is both viral and contagious.

It is typically understood that even attempting to rebut a critic or curator's denunciation is ill-advised. As artists in general are more exposed to this kind of intimidation, defenses must be developed against the increasingly subtle strategies to subordinate or seduce artists into self-censorship. It is always an ongoing struggle of defending your position when your work is under attacked but, to quote the late French social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu: "The artist's role is to reveal that which the dominants want to remain hidden."

I will use Kristen Hileman's review of our film, "the nea tapes", published in the Visual Resources Book Reviews; Vol. XX, No. 4, December 2004 pp. 390-393, as an example of how an artist can creatively counter clever constructs of censorship. In presenting this example I would suggest that most artists have experienced some form of censorship of their work either as a student or as exhibiting artists. This shared experience has resulted in a complicity of silence about the censoring of art. Paul and I have chosen to fight against this form of self-censorship using this presentation as an art action, answering back truth to power.

To her credit, Kristen Hileman does lay out in the first few sentences a reasonable accounting of "the nea tapes": "Paul Lamarre and Melissa Wolf's 'the nea tapes' takes viewers on a tour of the American culture wars during the mid-to late 1990s. Ambitious in its scope, the one hour-long video starts with Andres Serrano and controversy over the National Endowment for the Arts funding linked to the exhibition of that artist' now infamous photograph Piss Christ and ends with New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's attack on the Brooklyn Museum's much-hyped Sensations exhibition. The documentarians rely almost entirely on the interviews to capture and present information on their topic, journeying back and

forth across the country over a five year period to talk to over 300 subjects, ranging from name-brand artists, Hollywood stars, high-powered lawyers and politicians to more obscure artists, craftspeople and local arts administrators.”

However encouraging this introduction might sound, Hileman then proceeds to attack the integrity of the video, its production values, the production team behind it, and, in the process, deliberately misconstrues the content of the film with liberal amounts of hyperbole. By aiming her critical weapons at the documentarians and not at the reactionary forces declaring war on US artists since the late 1980s, Hileman does her readers and artists a great disservice.

She accuses the filmmakers of cynicism and presumed naiveté; blatantly attempting to discredit the material and message of the film without actually attacking the (better known) individuals presented in the film. She is, after all, a curator herself-an Assistant Curator at the Smithsonian Institution’s Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., to be exact. Perhaps because of her position at the Hirshhorn one could assume she is protecting herself pending future interactions with these individuals. In other words, she is killing the messengers - the artists / filmmakers - who are not well known or market-tested, but careful not to slight those whom she sees as more powerful than herself in the art world pecking order.

Hileman proceeds to criticize the film for: not providing an in-depth look at the NEA; lack of balance; and use of sound bites. We were fascinated to learn from Hileman that our documentary limits its focus to individuals “personally invested in public arts funding” or having “strong sympathies for government sponsorship of the arts”. This is a rather awkward criticism considering that Hileman herself is actually one of these individuals! While readers of Visual Resources were informed that Hileman was with George Washington University, Hileman failed to mention that at the time the review’s publication she was also at the Hirshhorn. I think the legal term for this is “conflict of interest”. This may explain Hileman’s reluctance to dedicate equally disapproving prose to specific museum officials, grant and funding agencies, boards of trustees, lobbyists, politicians, journalists, and anyone else connected with the attacks on public funding of the arts.

When we hear Hileman stating that the film is not “a balanced consideration of arts funding in America during the late twentieth century”, our first reaction is to question whether she had actually seen “the nea tapes”. If she had, she would have recalled that the documentary makes no claims to providing an “in-depth look at the NEA’s history” or “a balanced consideration of arts funding in America during the late twentieth century”. The film instead states from the onset that it wishes to present the artists’ side of the arts funding battle. (In fact, many of the artists expressed their disenchantment with the arts endowment.) Hileman’s rather malevolent statements signal that her review would probably be more at home in the right wing cultural periodical, *The New Criterion*, rather than in the more scholarly Visual Resources Book Reviews.

Hileman continues: "When we hear from the opposition, it is largely in the form of C-Span clips of congressional debate. The filmmakers seem to have arrived at the conclusion that any restriction on government arts funding amounts to censorship and an attack on first amendment rights well before they started their project."

In response: first of all, she fails to mention that we devoted an entire segment to Martin Mayer and his Religious Right freak show of NEA art horrors presented in the offices of congress which he was traveling with across the country back in 1996. The second charge is quite puzzling—that we master minds behind "the nea tapes" reached our conclusions about restrictions on government arts funding before we started our project. In truth, when "the nea tapes" was conceived in January 1995, it looked as if the NEA was about to be totally eradicated by Congress. We didn't know if the agency would be "history" or not. And to be honest, previously we had not thought a lot about the NEA and its linkage to censorship and first amendment rights.

We started the project by interviewing artists- documenting their observations / personal stories about the NEA and the controversy surrounding funding for the arts in the wake of House of Representatives' repeated attempts to abolish this agency. We found out that there were many on the side of the NEA whose voice and perspective were not being heard.

We had to make some hard editorial choices and decided firstly to defend the artists' voice and expression and in the process the principles on which the NEA was based. We reasoned that democracies by definition tolerate criticism of their values and accept dissenting voices. This is a section from the original Mission Statement of The National Endowment for the Arts, 1965. "While no government can call a great artist or scholar into existence, it is necessary and appropriate for a federal government to help create and sustain not only a climate encouraging freedom of thought, imagination and inquiry but also material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent."

Digging deeper into Hileman's statement, we are not told what "restriction on government arts funding" she is referring to. Is she referring to the notorious Helms amendment? Is she referring to right wing pressure to eliminate individual grants to artists? Your guess is as good as ours.

If Hileman is accusing the documentarians of partiality, then she ought to, for the sake of livening up an otherwise dry essay, reveal her own obvious biases. As an employee of the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, we also suspect that Hileman would not argue against continued government funding of her Smithsonian Institution employer. For the record, the Smithsonian received \$621.3 million, or 70% of its budget, from the United States Congress for 2006 (Washington Post, Friday, May 5, 2006; Page C01).

It is truly unfortunate to see a curator setting herself up against “artists”. In the dominant economic climate, artists are producers to Hileman’s distributor. As a distributor, Hileman feels the right if not a duty to share in the spoils of Smithsonian's “Government Funding”. Curiously, she clearly feels no need to include this in her part of the discussion about government funding of individual artists. By refuting individual artists access to government funds but not renouncing the same to huge cultural agencies such as the Smithsonian, Hileman is essentially advocating economic censorship.

She then escalates her accusations: “Consequently, their video commits the same sins of conservatives who intolerantly respond to the surface but not the substance of challenging work, (albeit Lamarre and Wolf do so in the name of individual creative freedom).” Sorry, but we’re still a little confused. At first, we are being criticized for having enough character to maintain a point of reference on the subject of a documentary we spent six years of our lives creating. And here is she suggesting that we don’t take the subject of the video seriously enough -the result of our "intolerance" against those who wish to deprive us of our speech?

Referring to the sections of the film which documents the main events of censorship during the culture wars, Hileman writes: “To perpetuate a situation where the public associates names and titles such as Serrano, Mapplethorpe, Finley, and Sensations with scandals rather than aesthetic and intellectual concepts diminishes the transformative and critical role arts plays in society and underestimates the intelligence of the general public.” In suggesting the suppression of this history and in effect denying these events Hileman is acting as a censor. It was the artists after all who were censored. It was the religious and political right that provoked the resulting censorship to advance their agenda. In debates over the fate of the NEA, the religious right had created uproar over specific grants and exhibitions such as Robert Mapplethorpe's X-Portfolio or Andres Serrano’s Piss Christ. They conducted massive mail and media campaigns to portray the arts community as promoters of degenerate moral values. The ensuing media attention was procured using the very images they condemned. Media creditability, on this subject, was granted to such figures as; Martin Mayer’s of the Christian Action Network and Christian Coalitions’ Ralph Reed and others in the political -religious right camp. Through this media exposure conservatives were clearly given the advantage to communicate to a wide audience why tax dollars should not be spent on support for the arts. By manipulating this issue, the religious right raised was able to money, organized their supporters, launched massive direct mail campaigns, and lobbied Congress. Wasn’t it about time the arts community gave its supporters a voice, and have a presence in the national media explaining why the arts are important? Hileman’s suggestion is to present the history of the culture wars through her mediated concept of art and not allowing the artists to speak for

themselves. In presenting the issue this way, she is using a double standard to neutralizing the artist's power.

Our documentary is further described by Hileman as “a great American arts road trip”- an excuse for us to hobnob with the likes of Arthur Danto, Noam Chomsky, and Tim Robbins. We created the film to give the arts community supporters a voice. Our mission was to articulate the controversies about funding for the arts and education through the different voices from across the country. It was only by going outside the “elitist” art world of New York that we were enabled to provide a profile of the diversity of culture in America. We don't deny that a “great American arts road trip” resulted from making our documentary. This “road trip” has never ended for us as we struggle to get our work screened for audiences around the country. And we did cross paths with many extraordinary artists and arts advocates throughout the United States. Our brand of quote, “networking” (as Hileman refers to it) has not lead to curatorial positions at the Hirshhorn or comfortable posts at George Washington University or even a gallery exhibition. But it has enabled us to study the battle for arts funding not from the safety of a Washington, D.C. museum but from the trenches. It seems this approach to arts advocacy runs contrary to Hileman's elitist orientations.

Nevertheless, as defenders of the right of US citizens to receive state and federal funding for arts and cultural projects, we can't imagine a better way to wage this good fight. Hileman ends her review with the following words, “a melancholic Lamarre concludes the suppression of the arts in America will continue indefinitely.” Again she misrepresents the documentary. I suppose here she is referring to a comment in the film by attorney Floyd Abrams. (Abrams successfully defended the Brooklyn Museum on First Amendment grounds against the attempts of Mayor Giuliani and the City of New York to evict the museum.) Abrams ends the film's segment on the Sensations fracas by saying: “Well, it doesn't go away and there will be other mayors and other museums so at some point you just have to call a halt to your work and to tell the story as it is at a particular moment.” Hileman mistakenly attributes these words to Paul. To the contrary, what Paul really said was optimistic: “We hope that in the end 'the nea tapes' will create a different dialogue about funding for the arts in America.”

Paul and I are both artists. Oddly, even as an artist's team positioned mostly outside the system, we find ourselves at the forefront of the struggle for the defense for one of the highest values of humanity: the right to speech. By defending ourselves, we are defending the rights of others to speak as well, which is in fact the subtext of this film “the nea tapes”. The most common form of censorship is to repress or eliminate, the offending artwork in the public's eye from public view. We continue with our work to fight against this. Opponents of public arts funding never tire of portraying culture as a divisive element in our society. As a result of the spreading of this misinformation, most of the public remains unfamiliar with the basic concepts that connect cultural policy, freedom of speech and the art's role in sustaining our civic life.
