

GRANTMAKERS IN THE ARTS  
*Annual Conference*  
**THE SOURCE:**  
2000

**Proceedings from the Conference**

October 15-18, 2000  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

**Closing Session and  
Wrap-up Meeting**

**Panelists:** Claudine Brown  
*Director, Arts Program, Nathan Cummings  
Foundation*  
Neal Cuthbert  
*Program Director, The McKnight Foundation*  
Cora Mirikatani  
*Program Director, James Irvine Foundation*  
Nick Rabkin  
*Senior Program Officer, John D. and Catherine T.  
MacArthur Foundation*

October 18, 2000, 10:00 a.m.

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**Focke:** I am Anne Focke, executive director of Grantmakers in the Arts. It's wonderful to come to a conference that I can actually attend as a participant because there has been such great organizing on the part of the folks in Minnesota.

We are starting this final session with art, as we have the others, and I am pleased to introduce Theatre Taiko Mu. Maybe I will tell about them afterwards and let them call us together.

**Male:** Thank you very much. I am sure that some of you are familiar with it, but for those of you who are not, the style of drum that we are playing is called a taiko. It's a traditional Japanese-style drum. The first song we are going to perform is a traditional folksong. Almost all of the pieces we are going to play are traditional.

This is a contemporary song that was created by a group of individuals back in the 1960s who came together. It's based upon a traditional Japanese rhythm but they actually created many variations upon that rhythm.

*[presentation]*

Thank you. Thank you very much.

**Focke:** Whew! These art events have been called "Art Attacks" – at least given that name by the organizers. And I think this one qualified. It's an alternative to the exercise machine, I think.

Rick Shiomi is the director of the group and he introduced the program. To just say a little bit about the Theatre Mu, of which Taiko Mu is part. It began in 1992; its mission – I will read it – was "born of the union of Asian and American cultures. We envision theatre as a total sensory experience merging ancient forms, traditions, and stories with contemporary ones. Through our art we aspire to transform the perspective, experience, and understanding of the community and culture in which we live."

And then there is a definition of the meaning of Mu, which is spelled M-U. "Our Mu is the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese ideogram for the shaman artist warrior who connects the heavens and the earth through the tree of life."

So, thank you very much.

Now I would like to invite my other panelists to join me. Neal's idea behind this session was that it was an opportunity for those of you who were here at the end to have a conversation. It will be a brief conversation because he also didn't give us much time. But it would be great if you bravely could come forward. We will not make you be here for very long but we would love your joining us up close.

I will just quickly get your attention again. It's always energizing to move, isn't it? I want to introduce the panelists who are here with me, and I am just going to do it by affiliations; not the whole person, just their current affiliations. Nick Rabkin is senior program officer with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in Chicago. Cora Mirikatani is senior program director with the James Irvine Foundation in California. Claudine Brown is program director of the Arts for the Nathan Cummings Foundation in New York. And Neal Cuthbert, whom you have met several times already, is program director at the McKnight Foundation. Now I can tell you those titles but they are your peers with a difference; they have each organized, or will be organizing, a GIA Conference.

**Cuthbert:** So feel sorry for us!

**Focke:** Neal's assumption was that when you agree to take on the responsibility for coordinating a GIA Conference, it gives you a special perspective on the field of arts grantmaking. So that is part of the premise. We won't be reconstructing conferences or anything like that at this session.

We are miked, but I like acoustic sounds so if you can hear us, I kind of prefer that. We have the cooperation of a great technician over there who will raise the volume if necessary.

The question that Neal posed to these folks and that I get to be the voice for is, especially for those of you who have a conference behind you, what are you currently feeling compelled to be working on right now and does that have some correlation to the conference that you organized?

We will start with you because Nick organized our conference in 1998, which took place in Chicago.

**Rabkin:** First, I want to thank Neal for doing a wonderful job on this conference. I take a little bit of credit for training him. Because he learned an important lesson from the Chicago conference, which is: Get a very engaging National Public Radio personality upfront, early on. It helps, it really helps. And in return for that favor, Neal gave me this puppet as a gift, as a memento. Does anybody else think it looks like Neal?

To start with, I should say that the conference itself was awfully compelling work for me. The conference in Chicago was thematically orchestrated around the question of young people in the arts. It was called "Art Under 21." It really tried to engage the question of what's the value of the arts for young people in this country today? It was a pretty hands-on conference, and I had what I consider the opportunity and privilege to bring Grantmakers in the Arts to see kids making art all over Chicago and meet the kids both at the hotel and across the city.

The theme of the conference coincided with my passion for doing the work. That has continued. It's not an accident that I mention Garrison's speech at the beginning of these remarks, because I was particularly compelled by the way that Garrison organized the art world into the world of trophy art and art that matters to people. All the way along my career at MacArthur, I have been compelled by art that matters to people, and have found myself working in an environment – a big, elite institute like MacArthur – that is constantly struggling with its commitment to trophy art and art that matters to people. It's ambivalent about it, frankly. To a certain extent, my work there has been all about negotiating appropriate compromises between the institutional commitment to trophy art and the impulse to try and push the goddamn thing in the other direction!

The conference was a fabulous opportunity to do some pushing. I have continued to push with the work that compels me the most, which has largely been the national work on learning in the arts. We just had a breakfast roundtable

about arts education work and work on the arts in communities with young people. It has been powerful work. It's still a little bit of an orphan, even after almost a decade of struggling with it in my own institution. It's hard work to do.

**Focke:** You just have a year behind you since the conference, but I know that the year that Cora did the conference, last year, was the first time we shifted from having all sessions in a plenary fashion to breaking out into tracks or concurrent sessions. That is because the size of you all grew to the point where that seemed important. But within all of that there was, I think, some sessions, some themes, that you particularly followed, Cora, that I imagine continue in your work, and maybe you would like to say it?

**Mirikatani:** I am glad to be here today, and I have been fighting a little bit of a sore throat so I haven't been able to join you for the entire time. It's true that I am an adult survivor of conference organizing. You shall be soon. I would agree with Nick in saying that the whole act of organizing a conference was, really, an incredible moment, a moment to focus and to drill down on the state of your own thinking, my thinking, my staff, the committee, as well as the field. First of all, can I get a little show of hands about how many of you were there? We do travel together, don't we? This is a good thing.

This idea that Grantmakers in the Arts and that the arts field and that artists – in spite of, in a sense, our feeling, occasionally, of isolation – are really moving into a new period and a new environment to do our work: I continue to find this both exciting and somewhat troubling.

The excitement comes because, and this might be particular to the West Coast, there is a new sense of possibility in the air that is brought about by the fact that there are new donors in the mix, and increasingly others that are able to support a diversity of artists and ideas. There is a new economy that will allow ideas to transfer more quickly. There is a new generation. There is more money. I see these as really offering possibility for the work that we do that didn't exist even five or ten years ago.

What troubles me about that, though, in this area of what is being called Venture Philanthropy or New Philanthropy, is the fact that I still feel isolated. When I am at meetings I have to say I am, generally, the only arts person. I wonder to myself why is it that artists and those who fund them still continue to operate at the margin of the great rush of new wealth and new ideas and exchange of information and creativity and innovation in our society?

Getting back to the value of these conferences, this is a great moment for us to reflect together because we rarely have a chance. When we return to our foundations and our offices, we don't necessarily have colleagues even down the hall or across the room, to be able to reflect on these issues and where we might fit and how we can better position ourselves and be more powerful in the work that we do in our foundations and in the communities and for the constituents that we serve.

I continue to work on this idea of where the arts fit at the individual level, to support the educational attainment of children, specifically, to bind families and cultures. To act as a way to provide alternatives in the public discourse. These are the important things. They continue to be. I remain challenged to see how we, as funders, can also become more central to that, not only in terms of who we support but in the work that we do in our foundations and for the philanthropists, the many who are coming up the pipeline.

That is what I have been doing and thinking about lately, and it hasn't changed much since last year, it's just a year older.

Anyway, thanks for the soapbox.

**Focke:** I'll go in chronological order. Neal, I don't know that we can have a perspective on this one yet, but what is it that compels your work now? Does that reflect in what we have all experienced over the last few days?

**Cuthbert:** I am a little blurry so, hopefully, I will be marginally coherent.

At my very first board meeting, they are talking about future conference sites and the sites for 2000 didn't seem to be working out. There was

this nervousness around the table and there was some discussion about, well, there are really only two places that we can turn to with this kind of a timeline. It's either New York or the Twin Cities. I just froze and tried to sneak under the table. I couldn't go fast enough! But I conferred with a couple of my colleagues here, Cindy Gehrig and Sarah Lutman, about whether or not we could do this together, and they were very enthusiastic. And then Sarah left her job and Cindy went on a sabbatical! But Cindy came back and did an enormous amount of work with all of the new media stuff so I was really delighted about that. Sarah's guilt factor was pretty high, so she could be called on in times of need.

A big thing that compels me at this work – my own background is as an individual artist – is from a study in contrast, at least in my own life.

I grew up in Detroit, Michigan, and I don't know how many of you know Detroit, it's a very interesting town sociologically and historically. The cultural community there is very, very small and very, very undeveloped. There is an enormous amount of wealth in Detroit made from the auto barons, but that wealth never came to bear on the city. There was this opposition between the city and the wealth that was created, in some ways exacerbated by a work of art, the Diego Rivera murals, which the Dodge family commissioned and then wanted to paint over – a very interesting thing in that city.

I grew up in that milieu. When I was looking for what my future would hold I city-shopped and ended up moving here because of the arts community.

And one of the things that has been striking me here, now for twenty years, is what I refer to as "acts of will." Originally, the thing that I would have named this conference is *Acts of Will*. One of the things that is very interesting in this region, and I think probably in a lot of your regions, is that people don't have to do what they do. People don't have to be living in a small town in rural Minnesota and start a gallery or set up a community theatre or set up a chorale, or set up all of the things that people do.

One of the things that I keep witnessing in this work over time is this really interesting willfulness. And this region, these Twin Cities here, are like that as well. There has been a history of this very interesting community will to build something. Growing up in a place where that will didn't manifest itself, at least culturally, it's very interesting to be living in a community where that will is so apparent.

The idea was not to turn that into a conference, but to look at all of those points of departure, the points that motivates me in this job, the things that we feel compelled to do.

The conference ended up having these themes about individual artists and about philanthropy – why do you have the urge to give to the arts? Of all the things you could possibly do, what is that about? When you are living in Minnesota you can be pretty sure that you are not going to become an artist for fame or for economic gain. So why do you do it? Of all of the other things that you could do, why do you do it? In the face of all of these oppositions and things that constrain you, people still feel compelled to do this kind of work. So in a way, that's what this conference, to me, was about.

**Focke:** How about in your own life, Neal? I mean your own work? Are there similar themes in terms of what you take back to your office?

**Cuthbert:** Seeing people do this all over the state. There are several people here from the regional arts councils around Minnesota who work with small organizations all over the state, who are people making things happen for these invisible reasons. They feel compelled to do this kind of work. That is something I continue with by inspiring individual artists living in this region.

There is an organization up in Duluth called the Duluth Art Institute, which is this incredible artist service organization. They have, like, 400 members. There are artists living in the woods in Northern Minnesota doing all of this kind of work.

At a meeting this morning, Bob DeArmond, who is the director of the Arrowhead Regional

Arts Council, was talking about artists that he knows who are very serious artists, very dedicated to their craft. I have seen some of this work – incredible work. These people don't exhibit, they are not part of the arts economy or the arts-critical economy or part of any sort of stream, but there is this compulsion. They are stuck doing this art thing. I find that very interesting. It's true in my own life, just feeling compelled to continue to make art.

**Focke:** Great, thanks. Thanks, Neal.

Now, Claudine is in a slightly different position of being at the point of imagining what you might draw into a conference. But my guess is that it will draw much from what you are, in your own work and life, compelled to be doing and thinking about.

**Brown:** In truth, this is my second conference. I was not hazed and initiated in my first year on the board. I was initiated in my second year and was the co-chair for the San Antonio conference. Some of the work that went into preparing for the conference really has informed what I am interested in, in this conference.

One of the first things that we did in preparing for that conference is that we had a meeting in the United Federated Territories of Texas with local funders. We found that there were several communities and we couldn't count on Texas-wide support, necessarily, in San Antonio, because each community had its own funding community that was very regional within this really huge state.

So the notion of trying to get people to coalesce and work together was one of our challenges in that place. We did a huge reception for local funders and a lot of them were meeting each other for the first time. That was a part of our preparation for the beginning of the planning process for the local committees. It really made me think about community and coalition building as a metaphor for all of our work.

The first way of taking a look at that, for me, was looking at the community of arts funders, and when we are able to come together and maintain a sustained relationship to get something done and for how long. Those moments are all too rare, but they are going to be needed

more and more in the future if we are going to achieve meaningful goals in our field. They are going to be necessary, just given the diversity of arts funders.

Cora has talked about all of the new funders who come from Silicon Valley and other dot-coms who certainly have a different culture than most of us have been acculturated to. Then there are all kinds of regional differences.

So how we behave as funders, how we build coalitions, how we identify our issues, and how we work over a sustained period of time to make them real, is an issue for me.

One of the things I have witnessed that I think we have tried to do and our colleagues have done as well, is that sometimes our funding initiatives create cohorts of grantees who figure out how to work together over time. So for instance, if a foundation decides to work with a group of community foundations who fund the arts, or a group of local development corporations that support and sustain the arts, sometimes those organizations may never have had conversations with each other around the arts but they begin to learn significantly from each other as a result of a funder bringing them together, supporting them, and convening them so that a conversation that starts out very narrow becomes very broad.

Another level of engagement is how we define what a community-based arts institution is. I recently had a director of a museum say to me, mine is a community-based and culturally-specific institution because I service, basically, white people who live in two zip codes. I am aware of that and I acknowledge that and it's really hard for other people to get to my institution because of where it's located geographically. So it means I have to know as much as I can about those people and make sure that I understand the diversity within that group and deal with it effectively. I thought that was a very valid answer.

So, how we begin to define communities, and the fact that we don't always use community as a buzzword that substitutes for minorities or new immigrants or the under-served. If you have spell-check on your computer, the "under-served" comes out as the "undeserved."

So we are beginning to look at community with some kind of fundamental definition that speaks to who community really is, and we are not being stereotypical about defining community and we are being clear about what a community can be in different regions of the country. I am always amazed when someone says, our institution is really reaching out to African-Americans. They are using a plan that another community might have used with real facility when their challenge is the Hmong community, and they have not looked at that community at all. So, really beginning to be clear in one's definition of what community is.

The last aspect of this work for me is the whole notion of artist engagement in communities. I happen to think that is important because whether artists say they are doing community-based work or not, they all live in communities. Some of them may resonate with communities of artists, and I am a person who goes to lots of openings where nobody is buying work, but artists are swapping with each other furiously and nobody can pay the light bill. Then there are other venues where you go and you know that the people living around artists embrace them, love them, value them, and support them.

Artist patronage looks very different in the year 2000. The De Medicis are not coming. Even though there are more organizations that are funding individual artists, basically, individual artists are being supported by their significant others, by their parents who are, really, handling arrested development really well. They are also being supported by landlords who say, there is this kid who lives upstairs who is an artist who I really love and I am not upping the rent.

Patronage is looking very different in this age and a lot of that patronage is what I would call "community support." A lot of what happens in communities is not incorporated. A lot of the good stuff is unincorporated. A lot of the good stuff is instinctive and has no measurable outcomes. But if we don't begin to look at it with some real care, then we are not going to be alert to the way the field is changing, the way our worlds are changing, and the way artists' lives and productivity might be changing.

And so for me, the metaphor for this conference has to do with how we define the communities that we are working in, and it has to do with our identity in this field. It has to do with how we are defining the work. The last thing for me is that it has to do with who we are accountable to. And I hope we are accountable to more than our boards.

**Question:** The first question is: How does your foundation look at what community it's a part of. The other question is: Has this outcome stuff been affecting your artists?

**Brown:** Sure it has. Our foundation is a Jewish family foundation, and we just selected a new president. One of the issues, in that regard, was whether or not the new president had to be Jewish. As it turned out, he is not, but we have had lots of dialogue with the Jewish funders there that say, you are one of the largest Jewish foundations and how will that impact our world and the role you play? So I guess to that extent, I would say that we are open to the dialogue.

In each of our funding programs, we have been given the ability to define what community means in terms of who we service. We tend to do lots of focus groups. We bring in our grantees and we begin to ask them: What is a community for you? What does it look like? Who are you impacting? So, in terms of how we identify the community of grantees, we are really learning from them.

In terms of our accountability to the field, we certainly have a board like everybody else's and they set policy. Right now they are committed to what is called "community-based and culturally-specific institutions." But the pressures are very strong to change because they also sit on the boards of the opera, the symphony, the ballet, and there is a system that has existed that has created rewards. And so their peers say, why are you funding those little guys when you know we do the best work out there and you are a part of our family? A part of our responsibility is to continuously educate them so they can answer those questions with confidence and really believe that they are doing work that is important and meaningful.

**Focke:** It seems to me as if there is some relationship between the things that are compelling you, Nick, and the things that are compelling Claudine. Did her comments cause you to want to say something more?

**Rabkin:** Yes. Thank you, Anne.

Something that Cora said I found compelling. Cora was talking about how she feels like, as part of the arts funder community and as part of the arts community more broadly, she continues to feel isolated, and I think that we all suffer from that to some extent. One of the reasons that I find the concept of community so compelling in this work is that it's through communities that we become connected to other people and other worlds.

So I mentioned Learning in the Arts very deliberately – Learning in the Arts is an initiative. Those of you who didn't come to the breakfast roundtable or come to the meeting probably have no idea what I am talking about, but talk to Neal afterwards and he will tell you.

It was very deliberately structured as an initiative that was designed to engage education funders, arts funders, and child, youth, and family funders. Get us out of the box! We came to the conclusion that this couldn't succeed if this was going to be an initiative about advancing arts education. It needed to be an initiative about advancing children's development in education.

We had common ground around the idea that the arts had some value to add to that enterprise, and we deserve a place at the table. If we couldn't make a compelling case for that, the arts don't belong at the table and we deserve to be isolated. I think we made a compelling case and it's turning into an ongoing initiative – knock on wood – that connects us to a broader community.

A friend of mine who works in Chicago and founded a wonderful program called The Neighborhood Writing Alliance, which does writing workshops for residents of public housing and publishes their work in a magazine called *The Journal of Ordinary Thought: Everybody is a Philosopher*. These are writers who are

learning to write, literally learning to write. And learning to read at the same time in many cases.

He is a wise guy, though. I don't mean that in the Mafia sense of the word. He is smart, is what I mean. We were talking at one point about what is community?

I said to Claudine yesterday, community, like art in some respects, is kind of a Rorschach word. It means what you feel like it means to you. He actually came up with a working definition that I find extraordinarily useful. It was, "Communities are groups of people who make something together." That can mean something as big as the built environment of the City of Minneapolis, but it also means people who make art together. In fact, that is probably one of the first things that people made together, right? Restoring that meaning of the word "community" – and that meaning of the word "art," too – strikes me as the enterprise that I want to be part of.

I can't help it though, I thought of a joke before I came up here and I missed my opportunity to tell everyone. But it's not really a joke. When I first came here and I heard Garrison's talk and then I heard that the Theatre Mu and Taiko Mu were going to perform, I thought it had something to do with dairy farming. Sorry.

**Focke:** Cora, do you have any observations that you want to make?

**Mirikatani:** This idea of community and the fact that the more you try and define and nail that down, the more elusive it is. I think for Irvine Foundation, that has been more true than any other California-based foundation because our history has been grounded in a zip code idea, that is to say, around the idea that there is a state, a place, not only of mind but of geography. Of course, nothing could be less true and particularly in a place like California.

So this idea of virtual communities, instantaneous communities, art communities, and geographies, and what that means, you know that automatically, you translate that into guidelines. It sort of gives you some idea of why it's so difficult and what, I think, our challenge is as we try to be more included in

other definitions of community. I don't know what the answer to that is, but I think it's hugely important that we begin to explore what that means and how we can respond to that, because I really do fear that the alternative is that we become more isolated and less able to, as Nick would say, define ourselves into the bigger table. I don't think that anyone in this room would believe that we don't belong at the grownups' table at Thanksgiving, you know? That's an outrage. It's a challenge.

**Pam:** I wanted to say that the thing that has been really powerful about this conference is that it connects to understanding our role in communities. What's inspiring is that we were talking about communities and the way that our own foundation or entity participates in that interaction in making something and working with artists who make something.

I am going to try to figure out how to change the way that we go about grantmaking to make it a more human experience. I find that what has been really moving and inspiring about this conference is that it has incorporated the spirit of art making and bringing us into the grace of what art is. Art foundations maybe shortchange the whole process of what is beautiful about art and what the arts do. So I am going to really try to figure out how to do that better.

**Audience:** At the breakfast roundtable I was in this morning, Jim Smith spoke about community and community building in a very interesting way. This was a session about cultural policies. He was talking about looking at previous eras and seeing the metaphor of the zeitgeist, which is a time that just influences thinking, policy thinking, all kinds of thinking throughout our society. He talked about security being the metaphor in the '30s, ranging from social security to national security. He talked about development in the post-war context. He talked about community and community building seeming to be the thing that, across all areas of the life that we live in, people are grappling towards now as opposed to civic engagement. I thought that that was an interesting sub-text for the things that you all said.

**Focke:** Does anybody want to comment? What is compelling you that wasn't mentioned?



**Mirikatani:** I will just make one comment about the depth of engagement because I was really moved by Pam. And I think that just as we have learned that it's not necessarily great for organizations to get bigger in order to get better and sometimes to work deeper is a better sign of growth, in community building I think engagement is a really big issue. Either you have a fleeting engagement – you get the proposal, you read the proposal, you say it's great, you fund it. Or you have a different kind of engagement where you make site visits – you get to meet the staff, you get to see what the product is, and you really do know the program in a very intrinsic and meaningful way.

Those are some of the issues that we, as grant-makers, are having to think about: What kinds of relationships do we want to have with our grantees? How much a part of their community do we want to be? What roles do we define for ourselves? Are we the partner, the 200-pound partner gorilla? Are we the investor? Are we the observer who trusts someone else's artistic vision? All of those are things that we need to be thinking about.

**Focke:** Great! Thank you all. I hope we see you all this year! Bring your friends! And thank the panelists.

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