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## **EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 P.M. ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2009**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 21, 2009

### **ROCCO LANDESMAN ANNOUNCES “ART WORKS” TOUR AT THE 2009 GRANTMAKERS IN THE ARTS NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

#### ***NEA Chairman to visit Peoria, Illinois, as first stop***

*Brooklyn, NY*—National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Rocco Landesman delivered a keynote address today to close the 2009 national Grantmakers in the Arts conference: Navigating the Art of Change.

In his remarks, Chairman Landesman laid out the guiding principle that will inform his work at the agency, which can be summed up in two words: “Art works.” Chairman Landesman explained that he means this in three ways:

1. “Art works” is a noun. They are the books, crafts, dances, designs, drawings, films, installations, music, musicals, paintings, plays, performances, poetry, textiles, and sculptures that are the creation of artists.
2. “Art works” is a verb. Art works on and within people to change and inspire them; it addresses the need people have to create, to imagine, to aspire to something more.
3. “Art works” is a declarative sentence: arts jobs are real jobs that are part of the real economy. Art workers pay taxes, and art contributes to economic growth, neighborhood revitalization, and the livability of American towns and cities.

Chairman Landesman announced that he will spend the next six months learning and highlighting the ways that art works in neighborhoods and towns across America.

This national tour will begin on Friday, November 6, 2009 with a visit to Peoria, Illinois, at the invitation of Kathy Chitwood, executive director of the Eastlight Theatre, and Suzette Boulais, executive director of Arts Partners of Central Illinois. The Chairman’s visit to Peoria will begin with a round table discussion about the impact of the arts that will be moderated by Carol Coletta, president and CEO of CEOs for Cities, and will include Peoria’s political, civic, business, and arts leaders. It will also include a tour of Peoria’s “warehouse district” and a performance of Eastlight Theatre’s production of the musical *Rent*.

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The “Art Works” tour will continue on to St. Louis, Missouri, the week of November 23, 2009; to Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee, the week of November 30, 2009; and to other states, including California, Idaho, Kentucky, and Washington over the next months.

To help inform this tour, the NEA is hosting a blog at [www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov) where Americans can post examples and stories of how art works in their own communities. Chairman Landesman will also post dispatches from the “Art Works” tour on the website, beginning after his visit to Peoria on November 6.

“In the coming months, I look forward to seeing downtown sculpture gardens, art walks along waterfronts, public performances and exhibitions, adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings, and subsidized work spaces for artists,” said Chairman Landesman. “Despite the economic realities we are all confronting, art continues to work.”

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*Remarks as prepared are below; please check against delivery.*

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### **NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman**

#### **Keynote Address to 2009 Grantmakers in the Arts conference October 21, 2009**

Hi. It's good to be back in Brooklyn, where I lived happily for 18 years. If you can linger here for a little while, get to Coney Island, a colorful corner of a vanishing America – which has thankfully been marked for preservation by Amanda Burden and her enlightened colleagues in the New York City government. And you should also get to Peter Ligers for what is without any doubt the best steak known to man.

My wife Debby can't be here today, she's at the Salzburg Seminar, but I wish she could be. Her career has been in philanthropy and the very last thing she ever expected of me is that I would become a "grantmaker in the arts." Needless to say, I never expected it either. However, Debby is, in a way, represented here by another grantmaker, the legendary Joan Shigekawa, whom I found through Debby's network and whom I selfishly seduced from the Rockefeller Foundation to join me at the NEA. So far, it's the best move I've made.

Our conference title, "Navigating the Art of Change" refers, with some subtlety, to our present circumstances, and since I'm always reading about how blunt I am, I will go along and translate that as "The news is bad." You don't need to hear from me the litany about exactly how bad the news is, you live with it every day. Your endowments are devastated; your presidents and boards are steering money away from the arts; corporations, in the interest of better optics, are having to take their names off arts contributions already committed, well, this is starting to sound like a litany.

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The rational and perfectly appropriate response to bad news is discouragement. And believe me, I can empathize. I too, have found much to be discouraged about.

I've been at the NEA 8 weeks and already I have my own litany: the NEA is funding porn in California, the agency has become a propagandist for the Obama Administration programs, and to truly add insult to injury, we've been told, vis-à-vis our share of the stimulus money, that we in the arts don't even work.

One congressman summed up this view perfectly when he stated, "How can we spend 50 million dollars on the National Endowment for the Arts when we could spend that money creating real jobs like building roads?" I should pause here to note that that \$50 million is one six-thousandth of one percent of the money in the stimulus bill. But more importantly, if you are, say, a musician who through long study and practice and talent has risen to play first violin in a symphony orchestra, please understand that although you have two kids to put through college, you don't have a real job. Discouraging? Just a little.

But here's the thing. The rational and appropriate response is the wrong one. The right response is the irrational and inappropriate one: Optimism. I will elaborate.

My first interview in the White House for the job of Chairman of the NEA was with Valerie Jarrett. I did a rather odd thing. I brought to the interview a prop (I'm a theater guy), which I placed down on the table in front of me. It was a book written 3 decades ago by a zoologist, Lionel Tiger. The title was: "Optimism. The Biology of Hope." This book made what now seems to me to be an obvious point: that optimism is a core survival mechanism of the species. It may be unrealistic, misguided, maybe even irrational, but vital. It is hardwired into our DNA. Every day we make decisions because we assume-- often foolishly and mistakenly-- a positive outcome. We get married, have children, buy stocks, bet on horses, change jobs, you name it.

I'm a theatrical producer. Fewer than 20% of the shows that open on Broadway earn back their investment, it is an absolutely terrible business and the people who invest in it know that. So why do they do it? Because they're optimistic.

Which brings me to President Obama, our Optimist in Chief. He is a writer, an artist but we'll come to that later. His second book had a title that would resonate with Lionel Tiger: "The Audacity of Hope". This is much more than a felicitous phrase that he found in a sermon: it is the manifesto of this presidency and will lay the groundwork for the most arts-supportive administration since Roosevelt.

Again, optimism presumes positive outcomes, the exigencies of the real world notwithstanding. The Obama campaign, and now the Obama presidency, has always been about aspiration: the idea that our current reality, our circumstances, if you will, need not determine our future.

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This aspiration takes different forms: people will aspire to racial equality or economic security or educational opportunity, or more crassly, to be rich or famous or revered. We dream, we want to do better, to be better. And the most compelling expression of our desire to reach beyond the quotidian is art: the impulse to imagine, to create, to express.

Art is the most optimistic of activities: the ballerina standing en pointe or being thrown high into the air, lovers breaking into song in musicals, painters through history rendering success in war and hunting, or religious imagery or the exuberant discovery of new forms and shapes, the thrilling, spontaneous riff of a jazz saxophonist, the emotional release of comedy, even tragedy in the Aristotelian sense of catharsis and lessons learned.

Optimistic all, a deliverance from necessity and limits and everyday determinism. There is grandeur in art, there is boldness, there is even, to use a loaded word, the possibility of change, and we mortals need that.

Michelle Obama, a passionate advocate for the arts, said in Pittsburg at the G 20 Summit: "We believe strongly that the arts aren't somehow an "extra" part of our national life, but instead we feel that the arts are at the heart of our national life." How true, yet in a sense the arts are an "extra", not in the sense meant by our congressional critics, but the extra in extraordinary, a necessity if our lives are to be "more than ordinary."

OK, I'm sure that by now you are all wildly optimistic. Well, maybe not all of you. There might be a couple of you, way in the back, that are saying to yourselves, "That's all very sweet, very arty, but what does it have to do with the budget of the NEA?"

My answer is pretty simple. There is a new president and a new NEA. The president first. This is the first president that actually writes his own books since Teddy Roosevelt and arguably the first to write them really well since Lincoln. If you accept the premise, and I do, that the United States is the most powerful country in the world, then Barack Obama is the most powerful writer since Julius Caesar. That has to be good for American artists.

Candidate Obama was the first in my memory to establish an arts advisory committee and the first to propose an arts policy. President Obama followed that up by making a surprising, out-of-left field choice to head the NEA, a signal I certainly took to mean he wasn't interested in business-as-usual for the arts. Not long ago he even referenced the NEA when talking about the budget deficit issue. He said, in a speech at Georgetown University: "Let's not kid ourselves and suggest that we can solve this problem by... cutting the budget for the National Endowment for the Arts."

And if I have anything to say about it, there is a new NEA. I actually think I'm coming into a better situation than my predecessors did because of the heavy lifting that they've already done.

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Bill Ivey and Dana Gioia worked tirelessly to build strong relationships on Capitol Hill and to re-establish the NEA as a respected, bipartisan agency with a presence in every state and most Congressional districts. The perception of an NEA Chair cozying up to a select few of the high arts impresarios at galas in New York and Los Angeles is long gone.

The NEA has never been more ubiquitous or more dedicated to the accessibility of the arts for all Americans. But for reasons we all know well, their work, or much of it anyway, was reconstructive. The best policy was "keep your head down, and build your credibility good grant by good grant."

If there was an unofficial press strategy, it was "no news is good news." Heaven knows where we'd be today if not for them. But it's time now to move the ball down the field (yes, I'm a sucker for any sports metaphor) and it's difficult to do that if you're always looking over your shoulder to see who might be about to tackle you.

My colleagues in Washington cringe when I use words like "pathetic" and "invisible" and "embarrassing" to describe the NEA budget, so let's just say that the funds we have to work with are "not that large." England is the European country that is the worst public supporter of the arts. Their budget? \$900 million. That would translate with our population to an NEA budget of \$4.6 billion. That's not going to happen here in my great grand-kids lifetimes. But there are some significant things we can do with even modest amounts of new funding.

So I'm here to tell you today that we have a plan. But since this is America, before you have a plan, you have to have a motto. And it's not "no news is good news" or the recent "A great nation deserves great art."

It's a simple, two-word declaration: "Art works."

I hope you'll soon start seeing that logo everywhere. Why "art works?" The fact is that those two words sum up everything we are, or are going to be about, at the NEA. "Art works" is a triple entendre. Of course, "art works" is a noun, which encompasses the very stuff of what we do, the achievements of artists. Great "art works" is the objective of every grant we make.

Secondly, "art works" is a sentence that describes the very activity that I mentioned earlier: art works on and within people to change – that word again – and inspire them, it addresses the need we all have to create, to imagine, to aspire to something more, to become, if only for a few moments, more than we've been. It is the most hopeful of human activities. And one of the most essential.

And finally, and maybe most importantly, art works because arts jobs are real jobs. The 5.7 million people who have full-time arts-related jobs in this country are a part of the real economy. They pay

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taxes and spend money. Obviously. But we're going to be making a point beyond that. Any discussion of policy for coming out of this recession, any plan that addresses economic growth and urban and neighborhood revitalization has to include the arts. We know, and we can prove, that when you bring art and artists into the center of town, that town changes.

We are in Brooklyn, where right down the street, the Brooklyn Academy of Music has been the catalyst for the transformation of a neighborhood. In a couple of hours I will be at PS 109 in East Harlem, where a former public school in a neighborhood no one wanted to go near, is being made into an art gallery and performance space and what happened? The property values in the surrounding blocks tripled and the tax base increased.

Chattanooga, Tennessee, has been transformed by its arts district. In my home town, St. Louis, Citigarden a public sculpture park, has provided a reason for people to linger downtown rather than just get in their cars after a Cardinals game and drive back to the suburbs.

And Chicago, Illinois? Don't even get me started. Mayor Daley should be the number one hero to everyone in this country who cares about art because he was a visionary in this field before it was a field.

His work, I should add, began in 1989, 13 years before New York City's great arts advocate, Mayor Bloomberg, was even elected. Daley spent public money to restore the old vaudeville houses in Chicago and created a bustling, downtown theater district, he built Millennium Park, with its dynamic arts installations, and connected it to the Art Institute of Chicago and now both are powerful attractions for Chicagoans and tourists. It sometimes seems like he has created an arts festival for every neighborhood in the city.

Mayor Daley may love art, but he's a tough guy, and don't think he's not focused every day on the ledger of the city's economy. Create an arts scene downtown, and small towns have downtowns too, and you change the place. Artists are great place-makers, they are entrepreneurs, and they should be the centerpiece of every town's strategy for the future. We know now that businesses follows labor, not the other way around.

Strong footnoting to Richard Florida here.

Companies seek a highly skilled workforce and that workforce seeks places with a high quality of life. And at the top of the "quality of life" criteria are education and culture. Business follows people and people follow other people. To twist the great line from "Field of Dreams" (here I am with sports metaphors again), "If you come, they will build it."

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Today, we are announcing that I will spend the next six months visiting neighborhoods and towns all across America, seeing and spotlighting all the ways that art works. I will visit downtown sculpture gardens, art walks along waterfronts, free public performances and exhibitions, historic building renovations, and subsidized artist work spaces and residences.

And I am going to kick off this “art works tour” with a visit to--where else?-- Peoria, Illinois on November 6. Carol Coletta, the president of CEOs for Cities will join me in talking with political, civic and arts leaders – including Kathy Chitwood, the head of the Eastlight Theatre who has invited me to see a performance of Rent – and in looking at Peoria’s “warehouse district” that might just be the site of a new MASS MoCA or Marfa.

I already have trips planned to Missouri and Tennessee, and we are setting up visits to California, Idaho, Kentucky and Washington State.

I know firsthand that great art can come from the unlikeliest of places. A few years ago, I visited Eric, Oklahoma, where a museum was being dedicated to one of my idols, the great country music songwriter and singer, Roger Miller. He wrote the music for my first show, "Big River." While driving the 140 miles from Oklahoma city to Eric, you pass the hometowns of Sheb Wooley, one of the creators of rock and roll, the songwriter Jimmy Webb, and Garth Brooks. What is in the water there? There are certainly no music conservatories, probably precious few music teachers, no colleges, no arts centers, nothing. Just an inexplicable concentration of genius.

But we also need to hear from you. Many of you have been working hard, doing for years what we at the NEA are just starting to talk about now.

And I hope that you will tell us about it. We are opening up a page on the NEA’s web site – [www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov) – where each of you, and any of your colleagues can post examples and stories of how art works in your own communities. I will also be posting dispatches from the stops on my tour.

We need to compare notes, we need to get together and find where the best ideas are--in fact we are planning a gathering in the spring on art and neighborhood revitalization and we hope to have your active participation in that--but we need to do more than talk. We need to begin lasting partnerships in this arena, and there is nothing that will give Congress more confidence when appropriations time comes than showing how we--the public and private sectors--are working towards a common purpose.

And we need to start yesterday. Between the time of my nomination and confirmation I reached out to a number of important foundation leaders and my conversations with them were more than encouraging. If there is one thing I'm sure of, it's that there are great projects, some of them already teed up, that we can work on together and achieve some inspiring early successes. To borrow a line from the Artist in Chief, I'm "fired up and ready to go."

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Am I starting to sound like an advocate? Well, that seems to be a touchy subject. Some quote-unquote “journalists” have recently accused this agency of losing its independence and becoming a propaganda machine. While I want to state in no uncertain terms that the NEA is not a political agency and that when art becomes propaganda I lose all interest in it, I also want everyone to know that the days of a defensive NEA are over. We have a plan and we are going to, quote, "advocate" for it.

Remember, please, that the NEA is an unusual agency within the federal government. We have always been considered the champions of the arts and artists in the public sector. In a sense, we do "advocate" for them in a way that the IRS doesn't advocate for taxes or the FCC for bandwidth. We promote the arts.

We are grantmakers, not a regulatory or enforcement agency. And will we "advocate" for the President's agenda as well? If it's a particular program – e.g. health care reform – no, of course not. But the President picked me for a reason and I decided to go to Washington and sign on with a federal bureaucracy – ugh! – for a reason. And that reason is that within the ethos of this White House, where words like change and hope and aspiration have real meaning, the arts can play a starring role. Whatever might be said on television, radio or blog sites, I have no intention of walking away from the compelling themes of this presidency and a historic opportunity in arts policy.

Will we realize our hopes? Hey, I'm an optimist. I produced "The Producers," so I'm sure Mel Brooks would give me permission to appropriate and butcher some lines from that show. We are optimistic, irrational, unrealistic and delusional. But we can't help it. We're grantmakers in the arts.

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