

ROCCO LANDESMAN WEIGHS IN, AGAIN, ON ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

Wednesday, February 2, 2011

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NYTimes Arts Beat - Feb. 1, 2011

By ROBIN POGREBIN

Last week, Rocco Landesman, the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, prompted an outcry when he publicly suggested that perhaps the supply of arts organizations exceeded the demand for them. On Monday, Mr. Landesman weighed in on the debate his comments has generated.

"When I say that 'decreasing supply' has to be on the table when talking about the future of not-for-profit arts organizations, in no way do I mean that that is the only thing that should be on the table," Mr. Landesman said in a post on Art Works, the N.E.A.'s official blog. Other options to consider, he said, include increasing arts education, offering free samples (like free broadcast concerts) and examining arts infrastructure. "There are 5.7 million arts workers in this country and two million artists," he said. "Do we need three administrators for every artist?"

In support of his argument about potential downsizing of the arts field, Mr. Landesman cited the N.E.A.'s 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, which reported a five percentage-point decrease in arts audiences in this country since 2002. That was juxtaposed against a 23 percent increase in nonprofit arts organizations.

Mr. Landesman said he also wanted to clarify his suggestion that the N.E.A. consider giving larger grants to fewer institutions. "A number of people took this to mean that the N.E.A. should only fund large institutions," he wrote. "That is totally wrong. I have found no correlation between the size of an organization and its creative output. The best work in this country comes out of organizations across the spectrum of budget size — just look at the offerings from Arena's #NewPlay Festival, which featured productions from the Foundry Theatre, Ma-Yi, Children's Theatre Company and the Rude Mechanicals. All four are deeply worthy of support; none of them is 'large.' We should never talk about survival of the largest; we are here to ensure the survival of the most creative and most dynamic."

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