



REFLECTION AND REVOLUTION

the State of the Arts address of the 2016 Americans for the Arts Annual Convention

delivered by Robert Lynch on Friday, June 17, 2016

Hello and Welcome to Boston. And welcome to the great Commonwealth of Massachusetts, my home state. The great City of Boston, where I went to high school.

This is the first time we've been able to bring the Annual Convention here since 1979, and I'm so pleased we're back. My mother was very excited—she's 92, lives in a town called Stoughton, MA, and I told her we were going to have all these people and there was going to be press about it all over the country, and she asked me the same question that she asked me for the last 40 years I've been in this business. She asked me, will that be appearing in the *Stoughton Chronicle*?

Thank you to the City of Boston and our local host. Thank you also to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Mass Cultural Council, as well as all of the supporters of this work. And a special thanks to the Board and Staff of Americans for the Arts.



And of course, thank you to all of you: hardworking LAAs, arts organizations, State Arts Agencies, and advocates, cultural workers, and arts leaders. I've spent the last two days going around to the preconferences and hearing the stories of what you're doing, and we're here to celebrate your work and to learn from you, and for all of us to learn from each other.

Risk. Controversy. Action. Vision. Vibrancy. Equity. Accessibility. Power. Innovation. Failure. Design. Community. Leadership. These are the concepts you're grappling with now, and we hope you'll find sessions that help you as you do that grappling, and takeaways that you can bring back to your home.

You are here, in your work and success, fulfilling what John Adams, our former president who lived just 10 miles from here, prophesized. He said:

“I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy ... to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain ...”

That is a vision of *you*, your great work. That is a vision for a better America.

We try to help you with that. Through professional and leadership training, information and research, advocacy, and strategic partnership and support, we help you succeed. I've seen your great work in places all across the country.

John Adams believed in you, as we do. We believe that you are America's secret weapon in moving us toward the joy and value of the arts for everyone. You are creating better communities—communities that are built upon justice, equity, and inclusion throughout our nation.

I have seen your great work in the places I have visited this year. I've seen your work in the wake of disaster—and we have too much of that today. Whether that's here in Boston, Baltimore, Ferguson, San Bernardino, Charleston, Orlando, or across the sea in Paris and Brussels. And I see the great work you're doing to bring the arts as a healer and a joy—you, arts leaders, have gone to bat in the aftermath of terrible things to provide the arts in moments where they are needed. You are helping people deal with the issues and problems of the 21st century in your own communities. You are heroes, all, nowhere more than now, in this year of reflection and revolution.

The arts reflect us. They tell us who we are and how we got here. And perhaps provide a pathway to go forward.

The arts, as our 2016 Nancy Hanks lecturer John Maeda said, “pull in the world and make sense of it.” He, like many of you, is a strong believer in arts education, STEAM, and creativity in the workforce, and every day you and your organizations prove that the arts encourage our evolution, and drive us to make our communities healthier, more vibrant, and more equitable. We spent the past year talking to you, holding New Community Visions forums in eight regions across the country. We talked with 1,000 of you and those you serve in your communities to map out new ideas, new models, new threats and opportunities for communities and the arts in the decades to come.

Do people value what we do? New public opinion polling conducted by Americans for the Arts says, increasingly, yes.

Nine in ten Americans believe that students should receive an education in the arts throughout their education. They believe it is critical to their future success. And eight in ten Americans believe that students should participate in the arts throughout the community as well.

We know that a majority of Americans approve of doubling federal spending in the arts, and want continued arts funding by local and state governments. That is great to know as we push for those efforts—that we have friends in communities across the country. And American voters are more likely to vote in favor of a candidate who wants to increase federal spending on the arts than against them. So we will be at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions this summer, and we will have a forum in both places with about 300 delegates, and we will learn from, and influence, them.

We're in a contentious election season—a contentious time in this country in general. Our country is in transition, and in a world in flux, well over half of the population believes that the arts are a positive experience in a troubled world. In a world that feels increasingly partisan, two-thirds of Americans say the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity, and help them understand other cultures better.

We are better with the arts in our lives than without them. We are healthier; we are more engaged citizens.

Earlier this year, after seven long years of work, we all saw the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which includes the recognition, for the first time in federal legislation, of the arts as a core academic subject. This is a major accomplishment, and all of you made it possible with your great work, your stories, and your advocacy.

As former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, “Arts education is an equity issue and a civil rights issue”—and he’s not alone in that assessment.

It was just under two years ago that Ferguson erupted in anger after the death of Michael Brown. In reaction, artists created pieces like the *Mirror Casket* and *All Hands on Deck*. Because of art and creative expression, the rising rage forced many to confront what it means to be—and not to be—privileged.

For us, at Americans for the Arts, that has meant two years of research, engagement, and soul-searching led by Abel Lopez, our board chair, and Margie Reese, the head of our Cultural Equity Board Task Force, on the part of both our board and staff to determine how we can be working more strongly and intentionally toward cultural equity. I'd like to acknowledge Abel and Margie by asking them to stand, and to ask the rest of the Cultural Equity Board Task Force to stand as well. Finally, I'd like to acknowledge some of the staff who has been leading this effort, particularly Clay Lord and the other members of the staff Culture Committee.

“All the arts, all the people” has been our steadfast declaration about equitable access to the transformative power of the arts. It is an aspirational phrase—and one we all must strive to meet.

Access to a full creative life is essential to a healthy and democratic society. And where there are systems of power that grant privilege and access unequally in a way that creates inequity and injustice, we must all stand up to change them.

Our core belief that all people should have equal access to the arts has never wavered, but the political, social, and economic circumstances in which we carry out our mission are constantly evolving. We all must evolve, too.

We at Americans for the Arts owe a debt to the board members, staff members, and members of the field who have, since our founding in 1960, continued to place issues of diversity, inclusion and equity front and center, and have helped not just Americans for the Arts, but our whole field, evolve over time. There are too many to mention, but we are grateful to them all.

In April of 2016, having engaged more than 3,000 stakeholders, our board unanimously approved a new Statement on Cultural Equity to guide us through our action, hone our focus, and set up mechanisms to hold ourselves accountable.

Our Statement is headlined with this commitment:

To support a full creative life for all, Americans for the Arts commits to championing policies and practices of cultural equity that empower a just, inclusive, equitable nation.

What's that mean? Internally, it means we're going to build the skills necessary in our staff, board and advisory bodies to be a culturally conscious organization; work to understand and fix inequities inside our policies and systems; and commit time and resources to increasing opportunity for our staff, board, and advisory bodies over time.

To know more about where we were starting, we are conducting an in-depth organizational assessment from which we will take action. This work has been led by a team of staff members drawn from throughout the organization, with guidance from Carmen Morgan of ArtEquity.

While it is ongoing, this work has already sparked new hiring policies and a commitment to ensure that all staff, board members, and advisory councils have access to trainings that increase their cultural consciousness and make them stronger anti-racist, anti-inequity allies within the next year. We expect to take more action once we see the results of our internal assessment in September.

Externally, it means we're working to help make sure everyone we serve has access to the training they need to make their organizations equitable; improve and widen the cultural leadership pipeline; continue to create and share equity-related research; and advocate for public and private sector policy at the intersection of arts and equity.

The newly released Local Arts Agency Census has begun to give us all a better understanding of the current LAA field—it tells us that you, like we, know there's more work to be done.

Only a third of local arts agencies think they have an appropriate level of diversity in their organization—and many of you are doing something about it. Two-thirds of you are actively

working to increase the diversity of organizations and individuals you reach. Three quarters of you have policies in place to consider diversity in grant review processes, and a third of you have already adopted a formal diversity or equity policy.

You have been out in front on this work, and we want to support you. That's why we're happy to be starting the process by embarking on three new large-scale efforts—the first of what we assume will be many.

- The first is Equity 360, a program designed to compile research, training, resources, and support for you, to help you make your work more equitable. We're launching Equity 360 this summer with a first module on equitable grantmaking developed by Animating Democracy with the support of the Nathan Cummings Foundation. We will be developing other categories of work in the coming years.
- The second is a collaboration between the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and our National Arts Marketing Project that pilots a five-year capacity building initiative for arts marketers in the state. Trainers will work with a specific mandate to work in rural and suburban communities and with culturally specific organizations. We hope to expand this model into other states over time.
- The third is called Title I + the Arts. As an outgrowth of the Arts Education State Policy Pilot Program, we and our local and state partners are scaling up efforts to use the arts as a mechanism for achieving the goals of Title I. Three states have already shown leadership in statewide implementation, thanks to policy and advocacy efforts of members at the California Alliance for Arts Education, Arizona Citizens for the Arts, and the New Jersey Arts Education Partnership. Ultimately, this work could unlock billions of dollars to use arts education as a mechanism for ensuring an equitable, excellent education for all.

In addition, we'll be expanding the amount of scholarships we offer, re-examining our leadership programs to ensure we aren't reinforcing privileged or discriminatory systems, and continuing our commitment to broad, highly-accessible digital and regional field education for our members through ArtsU.

And we look forward to supporting you in your journey, as we all do our part to carry forward towards fulfilling the promise of “All the Arts, All the People.”

As many of you have no doubt heard, when I was in high school, a mile from here, I studied ancient Greek ... I wasn't good at it, so I only studied it for a day and a half. Like any good arts administrator, I came away from it not with a new language, but at least with a good quote. It is called the Oath of the Athenian Citizen. It seems appropriate today:

“We commit this city to be not as good as, but better than,
Not as beautiful as, but more beautiful than,
When it was committed to us.”

That is what the arts do. That's what *you* do. So in these coming days, celebrate the power of the arts to help transform communities and to ensure a full, creative life for all.

Reflect. Evolve. Consider a revolution. The arts have power, and as Robert Gard, one of the local arts movement's founding fathers, said, "The arts can change the face and heart of America."

Martin Luther King said the arc is long. Let us all progress together along it, and find the justice and equity that exists on the other side.

Thank you for all that you do.