



**Written Testimony in Support of FY 2013 Appropriations for
the National Endowment for the Arts**

Submitted by Stanley Tucci, actor, writer, producer, and director

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

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I am very honored to be here today before the House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related agencies to testify on behalf of an increase to \$155 million for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for Fiscal Year 2013. I have always felt that the arts are a necessity and not a luxury. A bold statement, I know. But here is why. Both sets of my Grandparents emigrated from Italy at the turn of the century. None were educated beyond the 8th grade.

My father went to Buffalo state teacher's college, now part of the SUNY system, to study fine art and then onto Columbia graduate school receiving his masters in fine art. He taught high school art for 40 years. Everything from printmaking, sculpture, silkscreen, pottery, jewelry making, calligraphy, painting and drawing. He was given a sabbatical in 1972 to study figurative sculpture in Florence for a year and we all followed. The exposure to the art, architecture, and food of Italy was life changing for me and very strongly influenced my aesthetic as an actor, writer and director.

But this aesthetic was already being formed unbeknownst to me by my exposure to art on a regular basis since the day I was born. Besides his teaching job, my father sketched, painted, and sculpted at home in the evenings after dinner, and taught art on Saturdays and summers locally to make extra money, for as we know teachers' salaries are nothing to brag about.

Along the way I was very often by his side learning to work in all the mediums he was exploring himself and teaching his students. I spent many summers in the very well equipped art room in the posh suburb of Chappaqua, New York near where we lived and where he taught. The summer school class was filled with students, some of whom had come from poorer sections of New York City to stay with families in Westchester and take art courses, a sort of fresh air program. All of them adored and respected my father because he treated them with respect by recognizing and bringing to the fore their individual artistic talents and abilities.

They had never before been given the time, the materials, the environment and the opportunity to create something of themselves, for themselves that ultimately ended up pleasing so many others around them. My point here is that art, not unlike athletics, is a sure way to find and make use of the best in all of us. I don't mean just fine art, but

music, dance, and film. For this reason we must not look at the arts as an adjunct to society, but a vital and integral part of society. Sometimes the arts make us think and see things as we have never before, sometimes they simply entertain and sometimes, if we are lucky, they do both.

A society that nourishes art will always benefit not only culturally but economically. If we look at the number of jobs that are created by the arts alone and their positive fiscal impact on any given community, city, state, or country, the numbers speak for themselves. This is too often overlooked by so many who consider the arts a drain on the finances of any social entity. But an increase in funding, even during financially tough times, will only reap benefits in the long run.

I have followed and know only too well the strained relationship that the NEA has had with Capitol hill over the years and can understand the reticence on the part of legislators to increase or even continue its funding, but I urge that the focus not be on those few works that might offend a certain group, or individual, but rather on all the extraordinary visual art, theatre, music, and film that sprang from programs, schools, museums, theatre and dance companies funded and sustained by the NEA.

Unfortunately art is not a thing easily defined. It is amorphous, interpretive, and subjective. If it weren't, it would be mathematics. Now, imagine us all going to the theatre on a Saturday night and watching someone solve mathematical equations for two and a half hours. No thank you, I'll just meet you at the party afterward.

But this inability to define art causes us great strife. Are we all to like the same music, painting or film? No. It's impossible. Why even caring husbands and wives argue about such things. Except for my films of course which everyone loves.

So art is illusive. Is it all, good? No. Is it all, bad? No. Is all dance, beautiful? No. Some of it's just indulgent and annoying. Do we wish that some conceptual art would remain just that? Yes. Can art be elitist? Yes. Need it be? No. In fact the arts are a great leveler. They bring people of all walks of life together by giving them common experiences through so many mediums in so many venues. They are an apparatus, a vehicle for healthy social interaction of people of all ages.

Like sports programs, arts programs give all children and teens, but particularly those at risk, a place to go and create something positive during those rather ambiguous hours between the end of the school day and when a parent comes home from work. They teach the intellect. They grow the imagination. They strengthen the spirit. They encourage competition. They instill a work ethic. They inspire the soul. And they make us proud. As individuals. As a culture. And as a nation. The examining and reflective nature of all artistic disciplines helps us to better understand who we are as a people, for our generation and for other generations to come.

It is true art cannot always be "good", but it can be and is good for us. As history shows us, the arts not only help define who we are as a people but they are one of the deciding

factors that clarify the distinction between a society and a great nation. I again respectfully ask the Subcommittee to increase the NEA budget for Fiscal Year 2013 to \$155 million and thank you for the opportunity to present witness testimony.

I want to also take this time to publicly recognize and thank the Subcommittee for supporting the NEA and the many New York area nonprofits arts organizations and institutions that have specifically touched my life since its inception in 1965. They have helped shape my childhood, my career and now, as a father, my children's appreciation of the arts.

Katonah Art Museum: As a Blue Star Museum, the Katonah Art Museum provides free admission to active military duty families from Memorial Day to Labor Day through a partnership with the NEA and Blue Star Families.

Classic Stage Company: The Classic Stage Company has received multiple NEA Grants throughout the years including a Shakespeare in American Communities Grant, which supports performances and educational activities that introduce middle and high school students to the power of live theatre and the masterpieces of William Shakespeare. These grants drastically increase access to the arts for underserved schools and communities.

SUNY Purchase: SUNY Purchase has been repeatedly recognized by the NEA for its excellence in theater. Multiple NEA grants over the past decade have supported the production of performances ranging from Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* to Henrik Ibsen's *Dollhouse*, making these productions accessible to SUNY students and the surrounding community.

Ensemble Studio Theater: The Ensemble Studio Theater in New York City has won several NEA grants throughout its storied history including a Challenge America Grant, a grant program for projects that extend the reach of the arts to underserved populations -- those whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability.

Jacob Burns Film Center: The Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville, New York is a prime example of the access facilitated by NEA grants. The Film Center has received a grant every year since 2007, enabling it to bring big names to a small town, and to present film series such as the International Understanding Through Film Series.

Sarasota Film Festival: The Sarasota Film Festival received NEA recognition in 2007 in part for its commitment to community involvement. The Festival hosts programs that bring the art of filmmaking to students in regional public and private schools and are completely free, fostering year-round creative and cultural development in the Sarasota region. Specific year-round programs target varied audiences including independent and student filmmakers, at-risk and under-served youth, arts organizations in a variety of disciplines, and social service agencies.

Tribeca Film Institute: The Tribeca Film Institute recently won two NEA Access to Artistic Grants for their professional development program, Tribeca All Access, which provides artists from underserved communities with access to industry professionals and other resources to help them move forward to complete their narrative and documentary projects.

SUNY Purchase Neuberger Museum of Art: The SUNY Purchase Neuberger Museum of Art is a recipient of multiple NEA Access to Artistic Excellence Grants which provide critical funding to foster and preserve excellence in the arts and provide access for all Americans.

I want to further express my appreciation for the support the NEA has given to the **Sundance Institute** which has been repeatedly recognized for its commitment to the discovery and development of independent artists and audiences and where I serve on the Board of Trustees and as a Creative Advisor at the Screenwriters and Directors Labs. Multiple Access to Artistic Excellence grants have provided critical support for the Institute's Film Forward Program, which offers emerging screenwriters, directors, producers, and composers the opportunity, support, and resources needed to successfully create new work.