

Advocacy Alert

act now!

IF YOU'VE WRITTEN, WRITE AGAIN

The battle over the National Endowment for the Arts' reauthorization rages on. (See article on page 5 in the current issue of Reflex.) On June 27th, the NEA's beleaguered chairman John Frohnmayer visited Seattle, addressing some 1000 arts and business leaders at the Corporate Council for the Arts' annual luncheon. Just prior to his speech, about 40 arts administrators walked out. According to David Mendoza, director of Artist Trust, the walkout was staged "in solidarity with artists who create risk-taking work and the organizations which present that work, as they now face the threat of loss of NEA support."

Frohnmayer, who has been criticized heavily for not taking a stronger stand in support of controversial art, said that the arts community bears some of the blame for bringing on the Endowment's current political crisis. He likened the arts to the spoiled youngster who says Keep sending money, Mom and Dad, and we'll tell you what we're doing with it later: "Accountability is the name of the game, and we must re-establish our

contacts with Congress." He added, "We've let the belief in the value of the arts among the general public lapse, and perpetuated the myth that what the Arts Endowment funds is for the elite." It's a matter of education, he said; "We need to communicate."

FROHNMAYER IS APPARENTLY UNWILLING to take the lead in that education effort. Earlier that day, he told a small gathering of local arts advocates that in the current political climate, some grants which received peer-panel recommendation would not be funded because they were too controversial. Mendoza said, "He told us there were other considerations besides artistic merit." At a reception the next day, he said that restrictions to the Endowment were inevitable, and in coming years we could work to remove them. In a private conversation about Karen Finley, Frohnmayer described her as a problem case because conservative columnists had politicized her work. Someone needs to counter that through education, he said, but that takes time. Shouldn't the Endowment lead that effort by funding her? A wan smile in response.

How is the arts community supposed to educate the general public about the artistic merit of Karen Finley's work, or that of any other risk-taking artist, if they are denied funding by the NEA? Until now that's been the Good Artmaking Seal of Approval; it looks like it will soon be the "Safe" one. Frohnmayer, who is between a rock and a hard place, is putting us in the same position.

Write, call, or telegram your Congress-people today—voice your support for re-authorizing the NEA, without restrictions.

—Julie Johnson

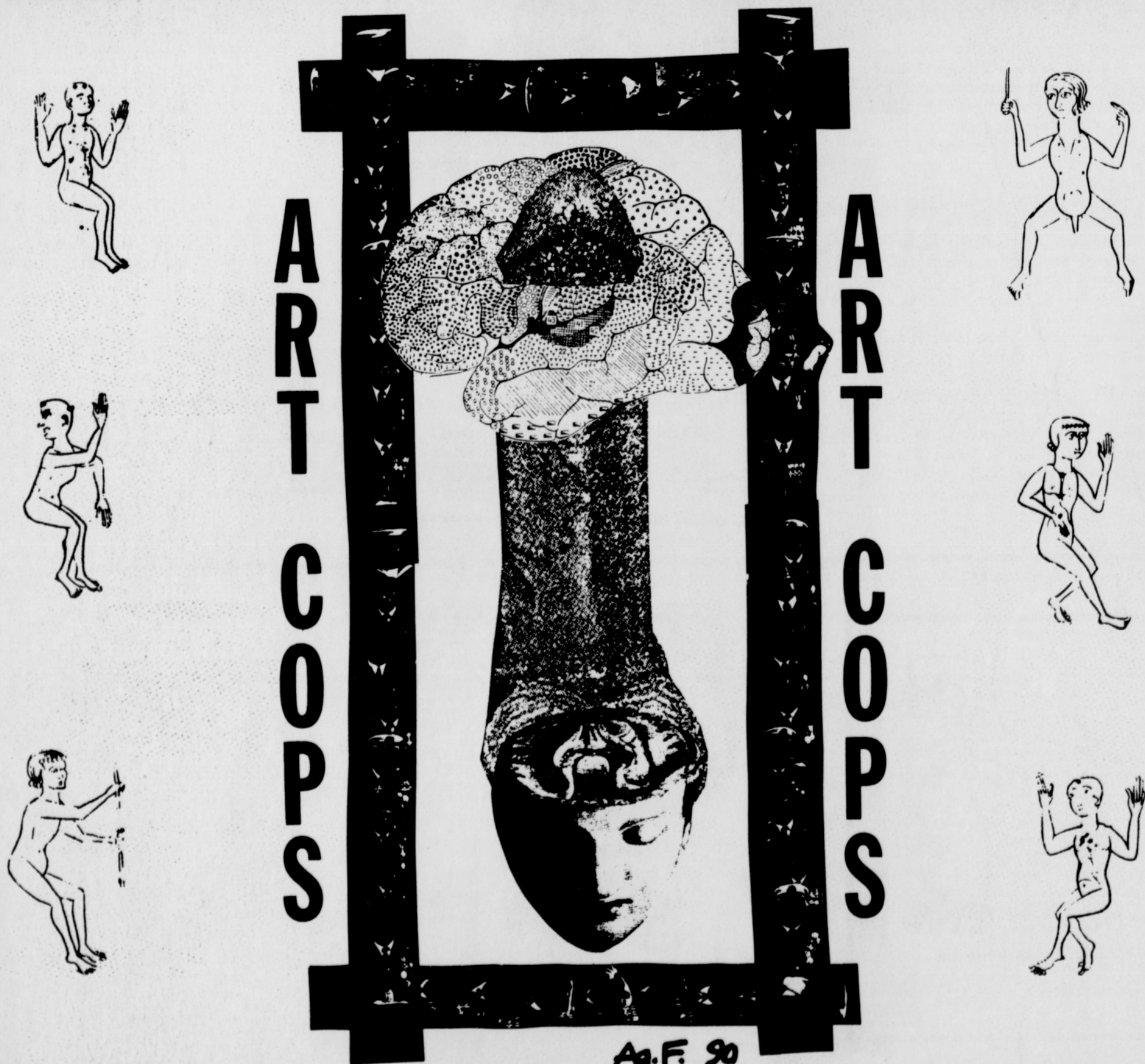
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Hans Haacke, Untitled (based on photograph by Tom McGovern)

"An erosion of the artistic focus," said John E. Frohnmayer, the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, as his reason for the suspension of a grant supporting the exhibition "Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing" at Art Space in New York.



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