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**ARTISTS
SPACE**

PRESS RELEASE

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November 16, 1989

Statement of Susan Wyatt, Executive Director of Artists Space, in response to the Mr. John Frohnmayer's decision to release funds for the exhibition Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing:

I was glad to hear Mr. Frohnmayer's statement that our grant is restored. Today is a joyous occasion because it is the opening of a moving and beautiful exhibition and the publication date for a powerful and important catalogue. We are pleased to accept the grant, that the show is receiving the press attention it deserves, and the issues of free speech, free expression, public funding for the arts, censorship and self-censorship are becoming clear to the American public.

The technicality on which the restoration of this grant was based, namely the fact that it is a FY 1989 grant, does not lessen our resolve to continue to advocate and to urge the arts community, the NEA and the American people to make clear to Congress the events of the last six months. Retroactive punishment for two specific grants in the form of a \$45,000 cut to the NEA's budget (those for the work of Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe for presentations at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia and the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, N.C. for valid art work and legitimate grants) has sent a chilling message to artists and art organizations across the country.

The compromise on free expression made by Congress in response to the Helms Amendment in the 1990 Appropriation Art (P.L. 101-121), is difficult to interpret and apply. Congress must be held accountable for their actions. We urge the American public to let their elected representatives know how they feel on this issue. We were unwilling to compromise, and I don't believe we as a People should either.

Over the course of the last ten days we have consulted with legal counsel over the legal issues which have been raised by the NEA's action to withdraw or suspend this grant. That claim has been rendered moot by the NEA's action today. I would also like to point out that while we requested a change in our grant for the catalogue which we would produce with private funds, we continue to believe that the catalogue is worthy of public support. I have read David Wojnarowicz's essay many times now and each time I read it I am more and more moved by its power, its truth and its beauty. I am personally honored to be associated with it and to make it available to the public. The federal government's unwillingness to confront publicly homophobia in our society and its willingness to legislate into silence homosexuals and failure to offer safe sex information to people with AIDS in order to ensure their safety is reprehensible. I also would like to point out that while this grant was restored because it was awarded in 1989, we believe it would be worthy of support in 1990 as well.

Contact: Robert Sklar (212) 338-3870

I would like to thank everyone throughout the country who has supported us since November 3rd. We have found that art is powerful and beautiful and that free speech, free expression for artists and public funding for the arts are of tremendous value to everyone in our society.

John E. Frohnmayer, Chairman of the NEA, has been willing to engage in a hard dialogue. Reversing a decision is never easy and we hope this suggests an openness to future dialogue. I want to thank all the members of the National Council on the Arts for their participation in this important dialogue. Many thanks are owed to Inverna Lockpez and Charlotte Murphy of the National Association of Artists' Organizations. This victory is theirs as well as ours. The New York arts community has been vital in helping us to resolve this matter. Most importantly my thanks go to Nan Goldin, the artist who curated Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing and all the participants. To an extraordinary artist and friend -- David Wojnarowicz -- for his work, his courage and hard dialogue, I would like to say thank you from the bottom of my heart.

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The compromise on free expression made by Congress in response to the Helms Amendment in the 1990 Appropriation Act (P.L. 101-513), is difficult to interpret and apply. Congress must be held accountable for their actions. We urge the American public to let their elected representatives know how they feel on this issue. We were unwilling to compromise, and I don't believe we as a people should either.

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