

Opening Remarks

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MICHAEL JANEWAY

(Director, National Arts Journalism Program):

The title of this conference of course alludes to the time-honored struggle for “the hearts and minds of men,” as the line used to go. The proposition is that our republic—the city on a hill, inspiration to those struggling against tyranny abroad—faces the question of what we offer the world, along with our military prowess in crisis times, and how we offer it.

Early in 1941, 10 months before Pearl Harbor, Franklin Roosevelt, with speech-writing assistance from the poet Archibald MacLeish and playwright Robert Sherwood, proclaimed that America’s purpose in standing against totalitarianism was a function of commitment to four freedoms: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of every person to worship God in his own way, freedom from want and freedom from fear. And after each of the four, he added “everywhere in the world.” One of the most influential journals of the time, *Life* magazine, applauded it this way: “Not very exciting to us, such a statement, perhaps too commonplace to be taken seriously, but to the people of Nazi-occupied Europe, such words are so explosive that they imply a whole new way of life, just as their application in Asia implies revolutionary change.”

In 1977, in the wake of despair about American politics and conduct abroad in Watergate and Vietnam, a new president launched a new international human rights policy, that despite many frustrations, sent messages of hope to people in militarized dictatorships from the U.S.S.R. to South America to Asia, and reasserted America’s purposes in the spirit of F.D.R.’s four freedoms. The press, for a while, didn’t know what to make of the Carter-Vance human rights policy—whether it was real or just rhetorical—but gradually, in the communist bloc and in tyrannies like Argentina and the Philippines, officials, political dissidents, courageous artists, writers and common citizens knew. One of the ways the United States found itself suddenly vulnerable after the shock and horror of Sept. 11, 2001 was with respect to its standing in the eyes of millions of people abroad. There are many reasons of substance for that, as we’ll hear in this conference, and a major reason for communication and use of government resources.

Since the fall of communism, the United States has cut back sharply on its cultural initiatives overseas, and in the lifetimes of many of us here, those initiatives used to be synonymous, among other things, with U.S. government-sponsored travel and exhibi-

tions abroad by our greatest artists, musicians and writers. And so the world came to know in those days, that the United States was the home of Duke Ellington and Benny Goodman, Georgia O’Keefe and Ralph Ellison, and not only as one of two superpowers. The abandonment of those cultural exchange policies has been something of a missed story for the press. Then suddenly after 9/11, American policy makers began groping for ways to deal with anti-Americanism abroad in its various forms. Which brings us back to the war of ideas and the question of what it is in our culture, not to mention our command of communication techniques, we seek to sell. That, too, is a story our news media have been catching up with.

Those events, missed stories and concerns are what bring us together here. With you, we hope to recover and to reinvent a shared sense of how vital it is that the United States’ relations to the rest of the world emphasize the emblems of our freedom as represented by our culture at its best and by our art in all its creativity.

ELLEN McCULLOCH-LOVELL

(President and CEO, Center for Arts and Culture):

The Center for Arts and Culture is an independent cultural policy center in Washington, D.C., and we work to inform and improve the decisions that affect cultural life. One of our signature issues this year is cultural diplomacy. We asked, as did the Center’s Advisory Council for public diplomacy, why, when the obvious need for citizen or public diplomacy is more evident now than at any time since the Cold War, has the apparatus for delivering it been allowed to rust? Why are U.S. values and diversity and democracy so inaccurately conveyed to the world or so misunderstood? Who better to convey them than our artists and scholars, who also stand for one of our most cherished values, freedom of expression? At the conclusion of this conference, I fully expect some of you to say, “OK, we’ve debated the subject, we’ve learned a lot about it, you’ve gotten us engaged. Now what?” So I want to tell you briefly about what the Center is doing and invite your involvement.

First, we’re deeply engaged in research and public education. Two papers, one by Milton Cummings on the history of cultural diplomacy and one by Juliet Sablosky on State Department programs and support, are currently available. Three more are forthcoming: one on private sector support by András Szántó, one on

best practices by Ambassador Cynthia Schneider and another, commissioned with Arts International, by Margaret Wyszomirski that compares U.S. and other nations’ support for cultural diplomacy. The Center is also co-sponsoring two conferences—this one, and one at Georgetown University—and will host future forums. We have built a coalition with foreign policy NGOs and foreign service officers and people in the cultural arena who run and are deeply involved in international cultural programming. We’ve built the foreign policy coalition through an organization called COLEAD, the Coalition for American Leadership Abroad. This new coalition is involving state and local, cultural and internationally oriented organizations to advocate for more support and more effective programming within the U.S. Department of State. We’re also monitoring the development of the new Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, which was written into last year’s reauthorization of the State Department. And we’re continually gathering evidence of how and why international understanding is advanced through cultural understanding. As Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka said, “Politicians tend to polarize, whereas the arts tend to harmonize.” Welcome to this discussion.

NOREEN TOMASSI

(President and CEO, Arts International):

Arts International became involved in co-convening “Arts & Minds” because its subject matter—the role of the arts in fostering intercultural understanding—is at the heart of what Arts International does. We are the only private-sector organization in the United States solely devoted to the movement of arts and artists across borders, across all disciplines and across all areas of the world. Other nations have mechanisms that devote significant resources to the work of international arts exchange. In the United States, we do not have a Japan Foundation or British Council. We have the woefully underfunded international arts exchange programs housed within the Department of State, the small international program at the NEA and, in the private sector, Arts International.

One of the cornerstone programs at Arts International over the past 15 years has been the Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions, which is an outstanding example of what public/private partnership can be. It is a partnership of two major charitable foundations, The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Rockefeller Foundation, with two government entities, the Department of State and the NEA, with additional support provided by The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Through that program alone, each year approximately 130 U.S. companies tour the world, and U.S. visual artists are represented at every major international exhibition on five continents. And that is only one program at AI. Other U.S. artists travel, and international work is brought to U.S. stages through projects at AI supported by the Mellon Foundation, the Duke Foundation, the Trust for Mutual Understanding, the Ford Foundation and others.

These artists and companies, who are already doing a great deal of international work, represent our country all over the world. They are our unofficial cultural ambassadors. The question for us as we think about how to win hearts and minds and what the role

of artists can be, is really a question of how we can harness that activity, that energy and the immense creativity and power it represents and use it to good ends, to show the world that we’re more than what we sometimes seem to be.

I think it was Nietzsche, in writing about the Roman Empire’s practice of translating texts from other cultures into Latin, who warned that translation can be an act of conquest. We need to ensure in this new era, a different approach. Translation and interchange between cultures in the world we live in now must be done with mutual respect and in a spirit of real partnership if we are to preserve one of the world’s greatest and now increasingly threatened treasures—our cultural diversity—and build an image of the United States as something other than a cultural hegemonist. I believe that artists can lead this effort, in fact are already leading it, giving lie to Nietzsche’s discouraging vision and proving every day in their international work that the translation and the movement of ideas between cultures is actually an act of the imagination—and that, I think, is ultimately at the center of what we’ll be talking about over the course of this conference.

ANDRÁS SZÁNTÓ

(Deputy Director, National Arts Journalism Program):

This conference is, of course, about winning the peace. We can’t take credit for its lucky timing, any more than we can take credit for this beautiful, long-awaited spring weather.

Let me relate an experience that I recently had in St. Petersburg, Russia, which illustrated to me the nuts and bolts of cultural diplomacy. St. Petersburg, as you know, is celebrating its tercentennial this summer. We were traveling with the NAJP fellows there, and we had an opportunity to meet with the U.S. consul and his colleagues. They described to us some arts programs that the American consulate is helping to organize for this occasion. They included, among others: an exhibition on the life and times of the poet Joseph Brodsky, in both Russia and America; an exhibition at the State Russian Museum of early color photographs from the Library of Congress—the images depict life in the Russian empire before the communist revolution, and copies of the images will be donated to the Russian Museum; a show of American Western art selected from various American museums at the Marble Palace; original documents on U.S.-Russian relations at the Kunstkammer, another St. Petersburg museum. In addition, there will be a Mark Rothko exhibition at the Hermitage later this year, followed by exhibitions of works by American artists.

I admit, I was pleasantly surprised that all this work was going on. A guiding premise of our conference is that much of this activity has been scaled back in recent years. It was good to hear that some cultural programs still occur, “under the radar,” so to speak. And I was impressed by the projects. They are thoughtful examples of the kind of cultural bridge-building that governments are able to do with means uniquely at their disposal.

Such programs signal sympathy, admiration and respect for each other’s culture. In ways small and large, they promote a dialogue between nations—in this case, between nations that until only recently, were political adversaries. I like to think of cultural diplomacy as a kind of yeast that can leaven the bread of international relations. We need a lot of that right now.