

TESTIMONY FOR JOINT COMMITTEE ON ARTS AND CULTURAL RESOURCES  
ROBERT SWAIN - EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER  
KANSAS ARTS FOUNDATION  
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Hello Members of the Joint Committee on Arts and Cultural Resources. My name is Robert Swain. For most of my life, I have considered myself an artist and over the past 7 years I have also become a dedicated advocate of the arts. My advocacy efforts extend from my professional life as an artist and art gallery owner and to my personal life as a volunteer and board member for numerous art organizations and causes.

I have not come to you today with a detailed statistical survey or an in-depth scientific analysis of the "state of the arts" in Kansas. And certainly, I do not profess to know everything there is to know about Kansas arts and artists. What I can attest to is what I have learned over the past several years through countless conversations with artists, art lovers, art haters, and art agnostics. I believe these interactions have given me good insight into how my fellow Kansans think about art. These are conversations that have impacted my own understanding about art and so I thank you for allowing me to address your committee today; for indulging me as I share a few of these thoughts and ideas about art as they have been expressed to me by my fellow Kansans.

First, let me say that the idea of "art" is not necessarily easy to define. That's because, unlike science or logic, a true artistic experience is often times *beyond words*. An old art teacher of mine used to say, "Science hits you between the ears, but art hits you right in the heart." This way in which art strikes an emotional chord is where its value and uniqueness lie. Art can inspire people, move people to action and communicate truth in a deep and personal way that cannot be duplicated by science or logic. Societies that choose to devalue art do so at the risk of becoming rigid and sterile, devoid of both creativity and joy. As I have visited with thousands of fellow Kansans over the years, I have been pleasantly surprised by their nearly universal understanding of this idea.

There are two thoughts about art which I have come to believe are held by a vast majority of Kansans. The first is quite basic; very simple and not in the least controversial. Though it has been expressed to me in various ways, I believe it can be summed up as follows, "***The arts can and should be an integral part of our Kansas culture.***" Mothers who help with school art projects believe this. Business people who buy artworks for their work spaces believe this. Teenagers who save up for concert tickets and seniors who attend Sunday afternoon jazz performances believe this. Former members of the *Kansas Arts Commission* and current members of the *Kansas Arts Foundation* believe this. In fact, virtually everyone believes this and to suggest otherwise would be both untrue and unfair.

The second idea is, I think, a bit more controversial. But I have come to believe that it too is an idea held by a majority of Kansans. That idea is this: **“If it is financially viable to do so, a strong majority of Kansans would prefer a private arts funding model over a public arts funding model.”** I have heard various reasons for this. I’ve listened to concerns about tax revenue being used for art and I’ve survived longwinded diatribes about the inefficiencies of public administration. And there has been plenty of pure political rhetoric in the reasoning as well. However, the most consistent reason I’ve heard for supporting this idea is the nearly universal belief that “art” falls into the same category as “free speech” and “religion”- that is, ideas that should be protected from government and not controlled by government. Kansans tend to feel that “something’s not quite right” about having the state determine which art is, (or is not), worthy of financial support. Unfortunately, funding decisions made by bureaucrats are oftentimes viewed suspiciously regardless of good and honest intentions. My experience tells me that Kansans overwhelmingly would prefer that artists, art supporters, and art patrons be the ones making decisions about art and arts funding.

Of course, the key to this belief is the phrase, “If it is financially viable”. Is it financially viable to privately fund a statewide arts program? From where I sit right now, the best answer I can give you is, “I believe so.” To be honest, I cannot yet say, “I know so”. As you heard from KAF Vice President Sandra Hartley, the *Kansas Art Foundation* is working hard to make a privately funded arts organization a reality. To build the organization from nothing into what it is today has been a monumental task but there is still much work to do. Our next challenge is to start offering arts programming and awarding grants while at the same time ramping up our fund raising efforts. I believe an **artist in residence** program which matches artists with communities will one of the first KAF programming efforts to come to fruition. In regards to funding, the KAF will ultimately mount a statewide capital campaign that will support the bulk of all future funding for the foundation.

In the meantime, Kansas arts organizations have continued to carry out their missions. Fortunately, most arts groups in the state received only a small percentage of their overall funding from the Kansas Arts Commission. In many cases, they have been able to replace lost KAC funds with ramped up internal funding efforts. Here in Topeka where I live and work, and in many locations around the state, the arts scene has continued to grow and thrive. We have a wonderful network of arts organizations in Kansas – and not just in the more heavily populated communities. Some of our most successful arts communities are in small towns and rural areas. Truly, I am in awe when I see how our arts communities have continued to grow in the face of uncertain economic times. I continue to expect the larger private sector to pick up the slack while we work at the Kansas Arts Foundation to build an effective and well funded arts organization and I look forward to the day when there is absolutely no question about the success of the arts in Kansas. Thank You.