

MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 7, 2011, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

The Executive Committee (“the Committee”) of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution met on January 7, 2011, beginning at 5:00 p.m. in the Regents’ Room, Smithsonian Institution Building, in Washington, D.C., to discuss the activities related to the controversy over the *Hide/Seek* exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery (NPG). In attendance were Board Chair Patricia Q. Stonesifer, Vice Chair Alan G. Spoon, and Committee member Robert P. Kogod. Also present by invitation of the Committee were Regents Shirley Ann Jackson and John McCarter, Secretary G. Wayne Clough, Counselor to the Chief Justice Jeffrey P. Minear, Chief of Staff to the Secretary Patricia Bartlett, Director of the National Air and Space Museum General Jack Dailey, Chief of Staff to the Regents John K. Lapiana, General Counsel Judith Leonard, Director of Communications and External Affairs Evelyn Lieberman, and Director of Government Relations Nell Payne.

Ms. Stonesifer expressed her appreciation to the Committee members and guests for accommodating this meeting on short notice. She noted that the purpose of the meeting was not only to update the Committee on the state of affairs regarding the controversy, but also for the Secretary to present the conclusions of his internal review on the exhibition’s planning process, the development of a communications and outreach plan, and the establishment of a Regents exhibition policy review panel, as requested by the Board during its December 21, 2010, briefing.

Report of the Secretary

The Secretary noted that the public interest in the controversy appeared to wane over the holidays, but was again increasing, especially through social media channels. In particular, the Secretary said, the “hue and cry” is focused on his perceived “silence” about his decision to remove the David Wojnarowicz video from the exhibition. The Secretary noted that he had recently met with a group of Smithsonian museum directors and was receiving “good, positive feedback” on the controversy.

The Secretary reported that attendance at the *Hide/Seek* exhibition was “robust,” but added that it was unclear whether the controversy or the nearby Norman Rockwell exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum was responsible.

The Secretary noted that he has been reaching out to donors and foundations regarding the Smithsonian’s strong support for continuing the exhibition, including the Andy Warhol Foundation.

The Secretary also provided an update on the status of the fiscal year 2011 Federal budget and the implications of various actions that may be taken by Congress with respect to a continuing resolution.

Secretary's Internal Review

The Secretary explained that the exhibition planning process is governed by Smithsonian Directive 603, which, he noted, was specifically designed to deal with potentially sensitive or controversial exhibitions. While comprehensive, the Secretary explained, the Directive “leaves judgment and discretion to museum directors.” The Directive was amended in 2003 and may, the Secretary observed, need updating to account for developments in social media.

The Secretary noted that he asked General Dailey and Julian Raby, the director of the Freer and Sackler Galleries of Art, to conduct a review of the *Hide/Seek* exhibition process and to identify deviations, if any, from the guidelines established through Smithsonian Directive 603. He noted that the results of the review were shared with NPG Director Martin Sullivan; Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture Richard Kurin; and other relevant staff leaders. The Secretary commended General Dailey and Dr. Raby for their work on the review.

General Dailey noted that the Directive was promulgated to reflect the Smithsonian's particular responsibility to present exhibitions on transitional and flashpoint issues in American culture and science, and to reflect a “deep tolerance for diversity.”

General Dailey said that his and Dr. Raby's review concluded that NPG “followed the letter and the spirit” of Directive 603 in planning the *Hide/Seek* exhibition. The process, he noted, properly included the offices of Communications and Government Relations and that the museum had demonstrated a “sensitivity that this exhibit would bring some comment.” One possible deviation from the Directive, he observed, was that the exhibition's signage and object labels did not reflect authorship. He added, however, that no Smithsonian museums appear to follow that practice.

General Dailey added that the Directive did not contemplate the use of videos in exhibitions. The process established called for the use of single thumbnail images or objects in an exhibition review. As a result, he noted, reviewers may not be able to adequately review videos where the subject matter may change over time. In this case, the central leadership review team was not able to review the video. However, NPG staff, including the director and the exhibition's outside curator, did discuss the video and the merits of its inclusion in the exhibition and eventually decided to include a shortened version of the original in the exhibition.

General Dailey concluded that Smithsonian Directive 603 is “as good as any directive we have.” He stated that this exhibition, in terms of the “way it was constructed, in its scholarship, and in its planning, was outstanding.”

In response to questions by Ms. Stonesifer and Mr. Kogod, General Dailey said that he believed the Smithsonian “followed the plan” regarding the controversy after the exhibition's opening, with the exception that the Secretary was the lead speaker rather than the NPG director.

Mr. Spoon asked the Secretary and staff “look forward” on how to improve the Directive,

especially with regard on the role of the Castle in future decision-making processes. The Secretary noted that a “lesson learned” for him would be to seek more consultation before making such decisions. The Secretary noted that he is establishing a museum directors council that could be used in such circumstances in the future and assured Mr. Spoon that the council would be available to provide advice should similar controversies arise.

Communications and Outreach

Ms. Lieberman provided an overview of media reports on the exhibition and the Secretary’s decision, noting that one of the more tangible responses was the installation of a trailer in front of NPG. Called the “Museum of Censored Art,” the facility would show the Wojnarowicz video.

Ms. Lieberman then outlined media outreach efforts scheduled for the Secretary, leading up his speech to the Los Angeles Town Hall later that month, including a “strong” statement by the Secretary on the Smithsonian’s Web site.

Ms. Payne then described the status of outreach to congressional members and staff. She stressed that congressional Regents have been particularly helpful in this outreach effort.

On behalf of the Committee, Ms. Stonesifer asked that a specific outreach plan be presented to the Executive Committee.

Executive Session

The Committee then moved into executive session to discuss the charge for, and composition of, the Regents exhibition review panel.

Accordingly, the Committee approved the following motion:

VOTED that the Executive Committee, on behalf of the Board of Regents and pursuant to Section 3.01 of the Bylaws, establishes an ad hoc panel to conduct a forward-looking review of Smithsonian exhibition policies, procedures, and practices; approves the panel’s proposed charge; and appoints John McCarter as chair of the panel.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Q. Stonesifer
Chair