

# State and Regional Partnerships

Prior to the signing of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Bill in 1965, only 17 states and Puerto Rico had created official state arts agencies (SAAs), most of them without funds. After the bill was signed, the rest of the states and the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoa, and the Virgin Islands created agencies and with assistance from the NEA became viable supporters of their communities' cultural life.

Forty percent of the Arts Endowment's funding is distributed among those agencies and organizations. Through this federal funding mechanism, the NEA supports projects that are meaningful to local communities, while at the same time leveraging financial support from other sources.

An example of these partnerships is Hecho En Encinal, supported by the Texas Commission on the Arts. Hecho En Encinal brings the arts and arts education to the rural populations of South Texas, low-income areas whose residents are isolated from the arts activities of



Students identify and discuss the significance of their contributions to the People of Encinal Quilt, part of Hecho En Encinal's Community Quilts program.

*Photo courtesy of Hecho en Encinal*

urban centers. In partnership with the South Texas Writing Project and Cotulla ISD, Hecho En Encinal developed the Encinal Community Quilts program, an after-school and in-school writing and visual arts program. Through 96 workshops, students aged pre-K

though 5th grade learned to write creatively. Extracts of their writings about their communities were transferred onto material and used for the quilts. During the visual arts lessons, the participants learned to incorporate drawing, painting, and textiles into the design of the quilts. Adults participated in this program as well, after school and on weekends, making the finished quilts a community-wide effort and reflective of Hecho En Encinal's commitment to teach not only artistic appreciation, but also an appreciation for the heritage and cultural background of South Texas.

Another example is the Alaska State Council on the Arts' Art in Public Places initiative, which began in 1975 and consists of two distinct programs. Percent for Art mandates that at least one percent of public construction funds be set aside for public art. This includes construction of everything from airports to state ferries. The second program is the Contemporary Art Bank, which is used to purchase work from Alaska contemporary artists. These pieces can then be loaned to Alaska state offices for public display.

In addition to SAAs, regional arts organizations (RAOs) were created by state arts leaders, in partnership with the Arts Endowment and the private sector, to transcend state boundaries and give the public access to a greater and richer variety of arts experiences.

RAOs work with the NEA on initiatives such as the NEA Regional Touring program, which helps bring high-quality performing artists and companies to communities across the country with the help of federal, state, and private funds. The arts organizations also partner on NEA National Initiatives, such as Shakespeare in American Communities (Arts Midwest) and Operation Homecoming (Southern Arts Federation).

Collaborations between the Arts Endowment and RAOs also transcend our nation's boundaries. USArtists International is a program of the NEA that, with support from the JP Morgan Chase Foundation, provides support for U.S. artists to perform at international festivals. The program is managed by the RAO Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

Among artists supported by the program in 2005 was the Anthony Braxton Ensemble, a jazz group working under legendary jazz saxophonist and composer Anthony Braxton. Braxton performed at the 32nd annual Free Music Festival in Brussels, Belgium, in August 2005 in celebration of his 60th birthday. The Free Music Festival was started by WIM (Werkgroep Improviserende Muzikanten/The Belgian Association for Improvising Musicians) and has become one of Europe's preeminent international festivals for avant-garde and creative music.

Braxton presented a new composition of his "Ghost Trance Music"—individual and group improvisational music where every one of the players could introduce composed material anytime, anywhere, in any combination with improvised sections—which he has been creating for the last 10 years. The new piece is for twelve instruments, including brass, reeds, strings, percussion, and harp.

In addition to Braxton's performance, Genevieve Focroulle performed Braxton's solo piano music as part of the 60th birthday celebration, and Taylor Ho Bynum, a member of Braxton's ensemble, presented a series of afternoon events called "On the Move," which brought together dancers and musicians from both the U.S. and Europe for improvisational performances.