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Navigating the intersection of art and life

A discussion on integrating art into everyday life comes to Charlotte.

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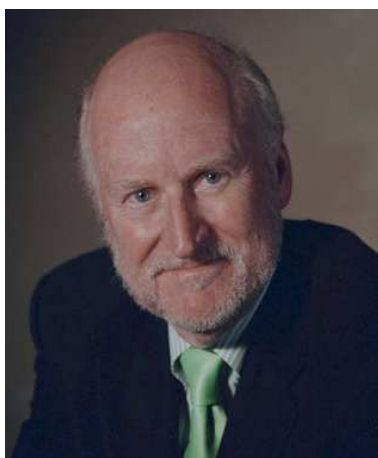
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Michael J. Solender for Neighbors of the City. His column is called 'neighborhoods'



Landesman

If you were lucky enough to be in attendance earlier this month at the N.C. Dance Theater Uptown, you would have been treated to a lively exchange between National Endowment for the Arts Chair, Rocco Landesman and several performance and visual artists with ties to the Charlotte community.

Landesman visited Charlotte as part of a national learning tour in which he is exploring the intersection between arts, education, innovation and creativity.

He is trying to get a better feel for the impact of arts on communities and how the National Endowment for the Arts can best support programs, projects and artists to integrate art and culture into the everyday fabric of our lives.

The free panel discussion was hosted by The Arts & Science Council and facilitated by Dennis Scholl of the Knight Foundation. Also participating were McColl Center artist in residence; Shaun Cassidy, Innovation Institute artist, Lawrence Baxter, Innovation Institute alumni; Dwight Davis, N.C. Dance Theatre choreographer; and Rebecca Carmazzi, N.C. Dance Theatre principal dancer.

Landesman said the long-standing corporate measures of success, such as revenue and profitability, might in some cases not be appropriate yardsticks in evaluating an artistic creative process. Arts organizations, according to Landesman, must be willing to take greater risks and even occasionally fail, using strictly financial measures, in pursuit of creating meaningful art.

Recognizing that arts cross many aspects of community life and are not solely stand-alone components in our society, Landesman said he is reaching out across federal agencies to find financial resources, especially to those that aren't typically thought of in connection with the arts.

He mentioned National Endowment for the Arts' collaboration with Housing and Urban Development, Department of Transportation and the Department of Education, which is exploring an Arts in Education initiative.

"We're looking to create arts districts across the country through an initiative called Our Town," said Landesman.

As outlined in the National Endowment for the Art's 2011 appropriations request to Congress, Our Town has three primary elements:

Plan and develop arts districts, promote the arts and artists as important parts of community life and support efforts to maximize the economic potential of the arts.

Place the art of design at the center of the development and enhancement of public spaces and the identification of solutions for more livable communities, while being sensitive to environmental impact.

Promote the arts as core to community livability by enhancing the availability and accessibility of the arts, particularly in new settings.

Landesman said that significant economic benefits are seen in communities where arts districts proliferate. Theaters, galleries, music venues and the like draw tourism, retail and other business and accompanying jobs. This notion drew consensus from the panel.

Jones said that artists bring vibrancy to the community. She said that by making their work more accessible, artists can bring experiences such as dance, opera and visual art to those who might not ordinarily have the opportunity. Baxter, formerly of Charlotte and now a Durham resident, said access to concentrated pockets of art and artistic experience made for a richer and more vibrant community.

While several panel members said they felt Charlotte supported artists, they acknowledged the Queen City has not yet fully realized the potential that exists here and see many opportunities to better weave arts into the fabric of our community.

For those in the audience, the session was a unique way to envision the intersection of art and the real world up close and personal.

Michael J. Solender is a freelance writer based in Charlotte. Have a story idea for him? Contact him at michaeljsolender@gmail.com.

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