

**ANN ARBOR FILM FESTIVAL TARGETED
AS PART OF LARGER ANTI-ARTS AGENDA**

Festival Continues Its Commitment To Independent Film

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ANN ARBOR, Mich., May 4, 2006 – The Ann Arbor Film Festival remains committed to bringing independent and experimental film to Southeast Michigan despite attacks by certain special interest groups that are working to cut all arts funding in Michigan.

Because of the sometimes-controversial nature of the work exhibited at the Festival, special interest groups are attacking the AAFF to achieve the stated goal of de-funding museums, art institutes, symphony orchestras, and even community libraries.

As the oldest experimental film Festival in North America, the Festival has received funding from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA) for the last two decades. Yet last week, the Festival was targeted in an amendment that was drafted in the Michigan House Appropriations Subcommittee that reads: “The Department (History, Arts and Libraries) will not award funding to the Ann Arbor film Festival, or its successor, for a period of two fiscal years beginning October 1, 2006.”

While the AAFF is working to remove the language in the amendment from the ultimate legislation – the State Senate has yet to pass a budget bill - the question as to whether the AAFF will receive funding by MCACA has already been decided. Because of the content restrictions that are part of MCACA funding and the political atmosphere that has led to the recent attacks, the Festival board of directors has voted unanimously to not apply for funding for at least two years.

“We need to protect our international reputation,” said AAFF board president Jay Nelson. “And, while we’re grateful to the MCACA for its past support, we have to be on guard for anything that will compromise our artistic integrity. The experimental works we show are often cutting edge and controversial so it makes it difficult for us to live within the letter of the MCACA rules and also live up to our long term commitment to quality programming.”

“The arts in the US remain ever-vulnerable to transparent political pandering,” said AAFF board member and Dean of the University of Michigan School of Art and Design, Bryan Rogers. “Our small Festival struggles to stay operational and we don’t have the resources to counter-attack the moneyed forces at play. Our best energy must be dedicated to producing the Festival.

Ann Arbor Film Festival

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“Public funding for the arts, however miniscule, multiplies the common cultural wealth,” Rogers goes on to say. “We can't allow the Festival to be complicit in supporting an agenda, which in the larger sense, probably has little or nothing to do with the content of the arts. It's one thing for the Festival to be attacked. It's altogether different to use the Festival to attack all public arts funding.”

The attack on arts funding ignores the myriad studies that show a healthy arts community is an asset for economic development and helps attract the educated, creative work force that businesses and states all want. In fact, the AAFF has been a good investment for Michigan taxpayers. For example, in 2006, the Festival received \$13,650 from MCACA, which helped bring \$58,575 into Michigan from submission fees from out of state filmmakers.

The Festival is also helping Michigan with its goal of generating more revenue from cultural tourism. In the past two years, the AAFF hosted 79 filmmakers visiting from out of state – 14 from outside of the United States. Those numbers do not include the many audience members and panelists who come to Michigan to take part in the Festival.

Says Ann Arbor Film Festival Executive Director, Christen McArdle: “At our filmmakers’ reception on the Saturday of the Festival, I was sitting at a table with filmmakers from Rwanda, the United Kingdom, Canada and New York. None of them had ever been to Michigan before; all were having a great time and enjoying the Festival, all talked about coming back. These artists will go back to their communities and tell their friends, family members and coworkers about this renowned Festival in Michigan. They all know how hard Michigan is working to better the local film industry, and bring production to Michigan. Their words will carry weight.”

AAFF board president Jay Nelson says that, while foregoing MCACA funding will create a significant economic hardship for the Festival, the board feels that this is the right thing to do.

“We’re a small non-profit and replacing these dollars will not be easy,” Nelson says. “But we’re planning a fund-raising campaign to help replace the MCACA money and, at the same time, to strike a blow for artistic integrity and enable us to fully exercise our First Amendment rights.”

Finally, while the board’s unanimous resolution is to not apply for MCACA funding for at least two years, if the content restrictions aren’t lifted, the AAFF will probably not seek further MCACA funding.

Says Nelson, “If the rules aren’t changed, we must move on.”

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About the Ann Arbor Film Festival

The Ann Arbor Film Festival is open to film and video of all categories that demonstrate a high regard for the medium as an art form. The Festival's mission is to provide a worldwide public forum for moving image exhibitions, to promote the moving image as an art, and to offer educational outreach.

Founded in 1963, the Festival is the oldest of its kind in North America, and has screened works by such enterprising filmmakers as Kenneth Anger, Sally Cruikshank, Brian DePalma, Barbara Hammer, Lawrence Kasdan, George Lucas, Yoko Ono, Gus Van Sant, Agnes Varda, Will Vinton, and Andy Warhol.

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