
used to support works they find offensive, such as the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe. Meanwhile, the endowment's liberal defenders argue that, under the NEA, the arts have helped to reverse decades of urban decline and to bring self-esteem to the disadvantaged. To the left of that left, many avant-garde artists simply view NEA funding as their due; denial of a fellowship, in their opinion, amounts to government censorship. With a new, conservative Congress threatening to put the NEA out of its misery, the time is ripe for a thoughtful analysis of the American experiment in public arts funding.

Marquis, the biographer of the Museum of Modern Art's *Alfred Barr* (1989), does not provide it. *Art Lessons* is a relentlessly negative portrait of financial sloppiness, cronyism, personal scandal, and tolerance for mediocre art by administrators who love to proclaim the arts' social value. In Marquis's telling, the NEA was born of a coalition of Rockefeller Republicans, Kennedy liberals, and philanthropic businessmen who saw themselves as missionaries bringing a European-style culture to a benighted populace stupefied by sports, television, and other mass media. Thirty years later, she claims, the NEA has become a hopelessly inefficient, corrupt bureaucracy, enslaved to a constituency its own funds have helped to create while indifferent to the public at large. Despite its founders' missionary zeal, the audience for "high art" remains as limited as it was at the end of the Eisenhower era. The time has come, she concludes, to abolish the NEA.

Marquis's critique may hold true for certain big cities—America's half-dozen "cultural capitals" located mainly on the two coasts. The arts in such places would be little different if the NEA did not exist. But with her penchant for scandals, she ignores NEA-sponsored projects at the local level—the repertory companies, exhibitions, children's theaters, and art education programs that have changed the face of the arts in America's middle-sized cities and small towns. Moreover, Marquis's unbounded attack gives little thought to the overall predicament of art in a market society. Opera, the symphony, and art museums will likely survive with private patronage, while all else, from folk artists to avant-garde composers, will succumb to com-

petition from commercial media with huge advertising budgets and an eye to equally huge profits. The results will hardly appeal to moralists. MTV, for example, has certainly done more to disseminate vulgar taste than the worst NEA projects. Rather than write yet another chronicle of its scandals, Marquis might have more profitably entered the debate about what stands in the way of a reformed NEA promoting a healthier cultural life in America.

IN THE BELGIAN CHATEAU: *The Spirit and Culture of a European Society in an Age of Change.* By Renee C. Fox. Ivan R. Dee. 339 pp. \$28.50

Fox, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania, helped to create the disciplines of bioethics and the sociology of medicine in such path-breaking works as *Experiments Perilous* (1974) and *Spare Parts* (1992). During the late 1950s, when she visited Belgium to do research, she discovered, beyond her professional interests, a culture that intrigued her. For the next 35 years, she kept returning in an attempt to fathom what within that "conventionally 'bourgeois' society" corresponded to some "buried strangeness" within herself.

History explains some of Belgium's mystique. In 1831, following the revolt of the Catholic provinces of the southern Netherlands, the great powers of Europe created a new country. The united Kingdom of Belgium brought together two distinct and potentially divisive linguistic and ethnic communities, the French-speaking Walloons and the Flemish. What held Belgians together, in addition to external threats, were collective sentiments and symbols (which they usually deny they have)—common associations not simply with church and monarchy but with mundane objects, from the red brick of their houses to the Congolese rubber plants within them, the latter hinting at former colonial greatness. Indeed, it is the extraordinary, almost numinous sense of the house, the home—understandable in a country where security has been endangered in repeated invasions—that strikes a deep chord within Fox. "It was inside the Belgium house," she writes, "that

I found Belgium and both the professional and the personal meaning of my search."

Ironically, Fox's quest for the essence of Belgian identity took place during years when profound internal changes threatened to dissolve the social and cultural glue that has held this "artificial state" intact. Belgium's internationalized postwar economy, the fading memory of its wartime experience, and the loss of its colonies are all working to erode a once-strong sense of national solidarity. In sensible, bourgeois Belgium, one now enters an Alice in Wonderland world where everything happens in double. Each town has separate shops for Flemish and Walloon customers; a street postbox has two slots, one for letters in French, the other for those in Flemish; and activists in Flanders are even pushing for a separate system of social security. The beloved country Fox examined threatened to disintegrate under her very microscope. History kindly intervened, however, to provide her study with a happy ending. The unexpected death of King Baudoin on July 31, 1993, provoked an outpouring of mourning that transcended particularistic loyalties, suggesting that all Belgians were a national family once again. The question, though, remains: *Après Baudoin, le déluge?*

Science & Technology

THE HOT ZONE. By Richard Preston.
Random House. 300 pp. \$23

THE COMING PLAGUE: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance. By Laurie Garrett. Farrar, Straus. 750 pp. \$25

In 1993, Stephen King spooked American television audiences with *The Stand*—an eerie, seemingly implausible story about a deadly virus that quickly annihilates most of the human species. A year later, King described the nonfictional *Hot Zone* as "one of the most horrifying things I've ever read." The central drama in *The Hot Zone* occurs in a "monkey house" in Reston, Virginia (19 miles from Washington, D.C.), where animals imported for scientific experimentation are routinely quarantined. In 1989, before scientists at the "monkey house" realized that the extremely lethal Ebola virus was killing



hundreds of monkeys, some humans became infected. Fortunately, life is not (or not always) a Stephen King movie, and this strain proved to be the single variety of Ebola that does not harm humans. *The Hot Zone*, written by *New Yorker* contributor Preston, has topped the best-seller lists and inspired the movie, *Outbreak*. Yet even critics who dismiss it as simply a nonfiction thriller acknowledge that it has drawn widespread attention to the "newly emerging" viruses and bacteria that are changing our very understanding of the modern world.

Plagues and pandemics were, quite simply, not supposed to happen in the hygienic late 20th century. During the early 1960s, scientists proclaimed that they had all but won the war against infectious diseases. Research biologists tended to focus on what was happening under their microscopes and ignored what was changing in their own human world. In *The Coming Plague*, medical journalist Garrett connects Ebola and other diseases such as AIDS, Lassa fever, and the "flesh-eating" streptococcus bacteria that killed Muppet creator Jim Henson to the larger political, social, and ecological landscape