

# State of the Arts

The cultural bubble of the 1960's has never really burst; contrary to rumor and recession, the arts are flourishing in America. It is a curious, perverse flowering, in which creativity and nihilism are often equated, but what both fine and performing arts lack in easy comprehensibility is made up in intellectual ferment, productive energy and very real achievement.

This tendency has been given additional thrust by the Bicentennial, which has produced a galaxy of exhibitions on American art and history, with rare insights into the relationships of past and present, of European roots and American contributions.

It is tragic that just at this time of supremacy the arts are seriously threatened by a shortage of funds and support. State Arts Councils, firmly established in the last decade, are forced to deal with drastic budget cuts. Private and business help for the arts is drying up. Museums, seeing endowments evaporate, seek radical solutions, such as the Museum of Modern Art's entry into real estate, cushioned by an innovative cultural trust. Libraries close their doors, institutions shorten their hours, programs are truncated, opportunities disappear.

Those palaces of culture that the 60's built with such profligacy are struggling with awesome deficits at the same time that artistic activities undreamed of ten years ago fill their halls. Museums still expand with striking buildings, while their exhibitions must be underwritten by corporate donations.

But programs continue, with ingenuity substituting for extravagance. More than half of the construction grants given by the National Endowment for the Arts are going for the adaptive use of existing buildings, from New York's Sailor's Snug Harbor to the Old City Hall of Lincoln, Nebraska. Movie theaters become concert halls, railroad stations are turned into community cultural centers, landmarks are given new creative life. In adversity, the arts are pulling a heritage together.

If all this is happening in economic extremis, the arts are clearly one of this country's major strengths and sources of vitality. Recognizing this, New York City has put its cultural and economic assets together in a newly established Department of Cultural Affairs. But the role of the arts needs restudy on every level. At a time of extraordinary achievement, support is more urgent than ever.