

April 18, 2011

Our work at Arts Midwest invites us to explore new cultures and art forms, and challenges us to refine and expand our programs. In the following pages, we offer a timely—if not varied—update on the state of the federal arts funding environment, our support to the visual arts, and a special feature on Agatsuma, the Japanese performing arts ensemble currently on tour with Arts Midwest World Fest. As always, we remain committed to bringing fresh, vibrant, and creative arts experiences to our communities through our visual, performing, and literary arts programs.

## PUBLIC FUNDING FOR THE ARTS

In mid-February the U.S. House of Representatives passed an appropriations bill that would have reduced the current Fiscal Year 2011 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) budget by \$43 million. After much negotiation, the final budget agreement included a \$12.5 million (7%) reduction. We will continue to monitor the budget process as funding levels for Fiscal Year 2012 remain unknown. In March, Wisconsin's Governor Scott Walker presented his 2011-2013 biennium budget, which includes the elimination of our State Arts Agency partner, the Wisconsin Arts Board, and its subsequent consolidation into the Department of Tourism. If passed, his bill would cut six positions, eliminate the popular Percent for Art Program, and count the remaining state funds as marketing dollars.

While the Fiscal Year 2011 budgeting process could have been much worse for the NEA and our State Arts Agencies, we are deeply concerned about the repercussions of these cuts to arts funding. As a partner of the NEA and the Wisconsin Arts Board, these reductions have a damaging impact on Arts Midwest's capacity to bring vital arts opportunities to your communities. We believe the arts are a powerful force that fuels our economy, enhances our education, and makes our communities great places to live, work, and play. To learn more about these changes, and find simple ways to voice your opinion, please contact representatives at your State Arts Agency or visit the websites of advocacy organizations such as Americans for the Arts: [www.artsusa.org](http://www.artsusa.org).

## WING YOUNG HUIE

In December, Arts Midwest supported the touring of *Identity and the American Landscape: The Photography of Wing Young Huie*, an exhibition of Minnesota photographer Wing Young Huie's work in China. Both David Fraher and Wing had the opportunity to travel to China for the opening of the exhibition, which marked the first visit to China for this American artist. Wing kindly sent the following letter about his experience:

I had never been to China. As a Chinese-American going to the Motherland for the first time in this exquisite manner—as an accomplished artist with a retrospective traveling exhibition made possible by Arts Midwest and the U.S. Embassy in Beijing—was an extraordinary experience I will be digesting for a long while.

It came at a propitious time, having spent 35 years creating a collective portrait of the American acculturation experience, photographing thousands of strangers in my home state of Minnesota and throughout the country. And **to share those perspectives with my ancestral home—at a time when it is going through an historic change and redefining itself—is an imperial opportunity rare for an artist.**

Much of what drives my particular occupation, and preoccupation, stems from the ethnocentric complexities of growing up in Duluth, Minnesota, the youngest of six children and the only one in my family not born in Guangdong, China. My hyphenated identity shifted in a culture where I was perceived as being somewhat less than white, while with my Chinese relatives I was considered more “American” than Chinese.

My immigrant father was my first photographic subject. I was twenty and he was eighty-three, enjoying his retirement after a lifetime of hard labor. He had worked his way up as a non-English-speaking, teenage immigrant to become a successful restaurateur. Because my father never took a day off I didn’t know him well, so scrutinizing my father through the camera lens was exhilarating. In a way it was the most intimate experience I ever had with my father, whose cultural references were quite foreign to me, the Minnesota-born and bred son, who never learned to speak Chinese well.

So it was with this back-story that I arrived in Beijing. It would be difficult to fully articulate, or summarize a trip (albeit short), that I had been anticipating my whole life. In some ways it reverse-mirrored my experience growing up in Duluth, where I stuck out appearance-wise but inside I felt I belonged, while in China I blended in, but was confronted by my foreignness.

That tension of the exotic/familiar imbues much of my work, and perhaps it is the driving dynamic of every culture, America and China alike. Suffice it to say, I came away with more questions than answers. Who decides who is the “other?” Who decides who “we” are? What are the commonalities of any countries’ citizens? Or are polarizing differences the true globalization?

And how much of the gulf between perception and reality is the result of photographs, sold to us by the forces of marketing, media, and popular culture? How does the consumption of that daily imagery form how we think of each other and ourselves, individually and globally? In the face of all that, how can we truly reveal our authentic selves?

Arts Midwest was thrilled to support this exhibition. Wing’s work challenges us to explore issues of social disconnection, offers us an invaluable opportunity to engage audiences in building community dialogue around “otherness,” and catalyzes the ongoing exploration of our individual, national, and collective identities.

## THE AGATSUMA ENSEMBLE

Arts Midwest has long been a supporter of cultural exchange between the United States and Japan. This year, our Arts Midwest World Fest tour of the Agatsuma Ensemble coincides with the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

As the ensemble began their tour throughout the Midwest so soon after these tragic events, we knew our communities would want to help the relief efforts. To honor these incredible artists, to provide an opportunity for our communities to contribute, and to respond to the growing need of friends and families back in Japan, Arts Midwest created a special fundraiser for the American Red Cross Japan Relief Fund.

We encourage you—our friends, donors, and partners—to make a contribution to the relief effort. Our goal is to raise \$5,000, and to date we have raised \$3,239. All donations will go directly to the American Red Cross. For more information about the campaign, to contribute to the relief effort, or to learn more about this incredible ensemble, please visit [www.artsmidwestworldfest.org](http://www.artsmidwestworldfest.org).



The Agatsuma Ensemble conducts a workshop in Marquette, Michigan in Spring 2010.

## STAY CONNECTED

As always, I hope this update finds you well, and I encourage you to visit [www.artsmidwest.org](http://www.artsmidwest.org) for further details on how our work across the Midwest, the nation, and the world is supporting the artists and arts organizations in your community. In the coming months we will be sharing important updates on our 24<sup>th</sup> annual Midwest Arts Conference, introducing new international programs, offering our fifth metro-wide forum for Twin Cities arts organization through our Arts Learning Xchange program, and launching our 2012-2014 Strategic Plan.

To stay current on these and other programs, please subscribe to our RSS feed, find us on Facebook, and check out our website. Thank you for your continued support, and I hope to see you soon!

Sincerely,

David Fraher  
Executive Director