



Smithsonian Institution

Cristián Samper
Acting Secretary

March 28, 2007

To Members of Smithsonian Art Museum Boards and Commissions:

I am writing to you about the recently-released report of the External Review Committee (ERC) on Smithsonian art museums and organizations. The report has been well received by many of those organizations. The same report, and its intended use, has also generated questions and concerns among some of you. I would like to take this opportunity to address the report, its intent, its formulation and its implementation.

First, as background, you may be aware that in the past the Smithsonian has invited and received advice from other external review committees or commissions, notably the Blue Ribbon Commission on the National Museum of American History and the Science Commission on our entire science program. Each proved useful for strategic planning for their respective areas.

As we began a strategic planning process for Smithsonian Arts—comprising the art museums and organizations--the ERC was formed so that the Institution could receive the views of outside experts. The ERC membership consisted of seven highly-respected current and former art museum directors. Over the course of a year, the group spent five full days visiting the museums and organizations, conferring with the directors, reviewing extensive data (including situational analyses written by our directors) and attending formal meetings to deliberate and draft the report. In addition, committee members participated in hours of phone calls and conference calls as they crafted and fine-tuned their report.

The findings and comments of the group were the committee's own. The report was written entirely by the committee. At the meeting of the Board of Regents in late January, two members of the ERC presented their report and spent an hour discussing it and responding to many questions from Regents. Some of the committee's findings and recommendations are clearly constructive while others are challenging. No one disagrees with the major premise of the report: Smithsonian art museums and organizations are rich with unrealized potential.

The opinions and concerns of those who read the report will be considered as we develop the strategic plan for Smithsonian Arts. It is apparent that not everyone agrees with the report's findings: some have strong ideas on what recommendations should and should

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not be implemented while others believe the report does not fully recognize all the strengths we possess. I can assure you that all the feedback has been recognized and will be considered in the planning process. No specific time frame has been set for implementation and integration into the strategic plan as this is a time of transition for the Smithsonian. I can assure you though, that the final plan will incorporate strategies to enhance our strengths, resolve our weaknesses and capitalize on the enormous support of our community.

Thank you for your service and support as volunteer board and commission members of the Smithsonian's art museums and organizations. We are grateful for your commitment and for your wisdom.

Sincerely,

Cristián Samper K.