

Donald Trump plans to become chairman of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as part of his fascistic campaign against “degenerate art”

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On Friday evening, Donald Trump announced he was planning to fire multiple members of the federal government’s Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts’ board of trustees and name himself chairman.

In a post, Trump claimed:

At my direction, we are going to make the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., GREAT AGAIN. I have decided to immediately terminate multiple individuals from the Board of Trustees, including the Chairman, who do not share our Vision for a Golden Age in Arts and Culture. We will soon announce a new Board, with an amazing Chairman, DONALD J. TRUMP!

Trump added:

Just last year, the Kennedy Center featured Drag Shows specifically targeting our youth — THIS WILL STOP. The Kennedy Center is an American Jewel, and must reflect the brightest STARS on its stage from all across our Nation. For the Kennedy Center, THE BEST IS YET TO COME!

The Kennedy Center’s website indicated it was

aware of the post made recently by POTUS [President of the United States] on social media. We have received no official communications from the White House regarding changes to our board of trustees. We are aware that some members of our board have received termination notices from the administration.

Per the Center’s governance established by Congress in 1958, the chair of the board of trustees is appointed by the Center’s board members. There is nothing in the Center’s statute that would prevent a new administration from replacing board members; however, this would be the first time such action has been taken with the Kennedy Center’s board.

Trump’s attack is sinister and reactionary. He is again taking pages from Adolf Hitler’s playbook, attempting to whip up his fascist base with claims about “degenerate art.”

The notion that the respectable, stolid Kennedy Center is attempting to corrupt “our youth” is delusional. Trump’s hysterical comments bear no relationship to reality, but they do reflect definite and very real aims.

The chairman of the center’s board is billionaire David Rubenstein, co-founder and co-chairman of the Carlyle Group, a private equity firm based in Washington, D.C., and also the principal owner of the Baltimore Orioles. The vice chairman is Anthony Welters, executive vice-president of UnitedHealth Group, having founded its predecessor, AmeriChoice, in 1989.

Board members include Pamela Bondi, Trump’s lawyer and new attorney general; right-wing singer Lee Greenwood; Carlos Elizondo, the Biden White House social secretary; Elizabeth Alexander, Jill Biden’s former communications director; Elaine Chao, cabinet member in the George W. Bush and first Trump administrations; Karine Jean-Pierre, Biden’s press secretary; Pamella Roland DeVos, married to the son of Amway co-founder Richard DeVos; and so forth.

What does Trump have in mind by a “Golden Age in Arts and Culture”? He doesn’t care to say at this point.

A *Wall Street Journal* article speculated about Trump’s personal tastes:

Magazine profiles of the Trumps’ \$100 million New York penthouse indicate that the president-elect and his wife, Melania, favor 18th-century French style with gilded finishes and marble walls as well as painted ceilings and sculptures featuring mythological gods like Apollo, Eros and Psyche.

Another commentator observed that “Trump is immensely passionate about portraiture—especially of himself.” Trump’s buildings too are garish and ugly, but the takeover of the Kennedy Center is less about his art preferences and far more about his ideological and political aims. Other measures taken by the new administration provide a clue as to what his cabal of fascists is planning.

The January 29 executive order, “Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling,” asserts that parents expect US schools “to instill a patriotic admiration for our incredible Nation and the values for which we stand.”

“Patriotic education” means a presentation of the history of America grounded in:

(i) an accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling characterization of America’s founding and foundational

principles;

(ii) a clear examination of how the United States has admirably grown closer to its noble principles throughout its history;

(iii) the concept that commitment to America's aspirations is beneficial and justified and

(iv) the concept that celebration of America's greatness and history is proper.

In other words, Trump is ordering, as the WSWS suggested, "the transformation of K-12 education into a system of patriotic brainwashing—with the Pentagon given an unprecedented oversight role."

By a "golden age," Trump is campaigning for a patriotic, national art, one that pays tribute to the greatness of American capitalism and its supposed achievements. Such an art is dishonest and insincere by definition, and, in fact, no art at all.

It is intended to help create an American version of the Nazi "*Volksgemeinschaft*," or "people's" or "national community," a mythological creation designed to cover over the class struggle and misdirect the population into chauvinist and nationalist channels. Art is to be oriented toward the "triumphant," "monumental" and militaristic, toward the exclusion of other peoples and toward national insularity.

The idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft* is directed against the socialist understanding that society is composed of classes in conflict. The Nazis claimed to be uniting people across class divides to achieve a national purpose, and that national unity, in the words of one historian, would "obliterate all conflicts—between employers and employees, town and countryside, producers and consumers, industry and craft."

The Nuremberg Municipal Museums website argues that

the "Volksgemeinschaft"—the "people's community"—is a radical program for reversing modern society, with its diversity of values and interests, and returning it to pre-modern conditions. The aim is to create a kind of tribal society in which a single individual with special "gifts" is empowered to decide the ideas and actions of his unconditionally submissive followers.

Hitler's campaign against "degenerate art" and the "Jewish-Bolshevik mockery of art" was an essential part of this program.

Henry Grosshans in his *Hitler and the Artists* comments that in the 1930s

the important antagonist of the modern art movement in Germany was Adolf Hitler, who saw himself as the cultural as well as political leader of the Germans. The Führer, in his view, was no mere patron of the arts, no simple presiding officer, no bureaucratic expression of the ideas of others, but the incarnation of those deep aesthetic longings that characterized the Germans, whom he often described as "a people of soldiers and artists."

Furthermore:

Hitler set the tone for official art in Germany, as he enunciated the aesthetic principles that were to govern creative undertakings in the Reich. He delivered addresses with such titles as "Art and Politics" and "German Art as the Proudest Justification of the German People" (the addresses were printed as separate pamphlets

as well as in the press), commissioned the building and supervised the operation of art museums ... and had his own paintings declared "works of art of national importance."

Grosshans cites Hitler himself:

What we experience today is the capitulation of the intellectual bourgeoisie to insolent Jewish composers, poetasters, painters, who set miserable trash in front of our people and have brought things to such a pass that for sheer cowardice the people no longer dare to say: that doesn't suit us, away with this garbage. No, against their better knowledge and conviction the so-called intellectuals in our nation accept as beautiful something set before them by those people, which they themselves must automatically feel to be ugly. That is a sign of our universal decay...

The most important interpretation of racism, and the one basic to Hitler's thought, argues Grosshans,

was what was generally known as cultural racism. According to this point of view, what Hitler called "true people's communities" produce unique cultures which express the historical aspirations that are embodied in language, religion, ethnic connections, education, and historical memories. Every people has a specific value which is peculiar to it, and any meaningful culture is the result of a closed, integrated, homogeneous system, living by its own laws and involved in its own history.

And further:

Hitler was devoted to what we must call a tribal art, and he attempted to confine German art to what he defined as the German experience, uncontaminated by distracting and confusing influences and sustained by the racial connection. Such an attitude placed him in direct opposition to modern art, which has been in the direction of a cosmopolitan awareness.

Trump and his cohorts are working along similar lines. There are absurd and megalomaniacal aspects of Trump's cultural agenda, supported by such major artistic figures as Greenwood, Sylvester Stallone, Kid Rock, Ted Nugent, Jon Voight, Mel Gibson, Kanye West, wrestling's Hulk Hogan and UFC CEO Dana White, but that doesn't make it less sinister and dangerous.

A frontal attack on art and the artists is coming. The Democrats will stand by and wring their hands. Art cannot save itself, wrote Trotsky.

It will rot away ... unless present-day society is able to rebuild itself. This task is essentially revolutionary in character. For these reasons the function of art in our epoch is determined by its relation to the revolution.



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