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From the Editor: A Day with Rocco Landesman

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photo: Courtesy of the New World Symphony

February 16, 2010

The other day I was lucky enough to tag along with the new chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Rocco Landesman, as he paid a visit to Miami. It was one of the recent rainy days, so the city itself was not showing the way it can in our more usual fierce bright white sunlight. But the chairman (and all his staff calls him that, which is actually a little scarily almost totalitarian-sounding) didn't seem to notice. (He did happily borrow my Marimekko umbrella at one point and made good use of it, however.)

The day started at the Design and Architecture High School (DASH) where the passionate and committed Stacy Mancuso, who is principal there, led us from classroom to classroom showing off the work of (and exposing Landesman to the full-fledged charm and talent of) DASH's students. It was in a graphic design class that he announced a competition for a new "Art Works" logo for the NEA – a perfectly choreographed moment, followed within two hours by a nationwide press release. See the full press release [here \(http://www.arts.gov\)](http://www.arts.gov).

The DASH visit was followed by a whirlwind bus ride to Wynwood and the [David Castillo Gallery \(http://www.davidcastillogallery.com\)](http://www.davidcastillogallery.com), home to at least a half-dozen of Miami's finest home-grown artists. A quick detour took us to [Locust Projects \(http://www.locustprojects.org\)](http://www.locustprojects.org), currently showing a provocative installation called *An Uneven Floor* by Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova, and then to the [De La Cruz Collection \(http://www.delacruzcollection.org\)](http://www.delacruzcollection.org) where Rosa De La Cruz immediately charmed the chairman by explaining that she treated visitors to her remarkable new museum as if they were guests in her house. Immediately following, the group moved to the Little Haiti Cultural Center to see the terrific exhibition called *Global Caribbean* (up through March) curated by the Miami-based Haitian artist Edouard Duvall-Carrie.

Next stops were at the New World Symphony – a once-in-a-lifetime hardhat tour of the new Frank Gehry building mid-construction (shown) – followed by the Bass Museum, the Miami City Ballet and the Wolfsonian-FIU. The rain, far from stopping seemed to get worse by the hour, but the visits were exhilarating enough to compensate. The day concluded with a panel discussion at the Wolfsonian-FIU led by the wise and witty Dennis Scholl, the lawyer-collector-patron who now runs the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation \(http://www.knightarts.org\)](http://www.knightarts.org)'s arts programs (and publishes a truly informative blog, as well). Still the panel discussion was a letdown after a day of highs – lots of interesting questions and answers but nonetheless more about the institutional delivery system of the arts than the actual fact of the arts, which always seem to have a life of their own.

Still, Landesman got a good dose of the real thing and at one point commented that he indeed felt like he was getting a glimpse of the future, as every institution he visited offered a look at new ways of bringing arts to an ever-larger public audience.