

In a series of events the first week of April 1983, the new home of the North Carolina Museum of Art will open on the western edge of Raleigh. Arts patrons, political dignitaries, arts professionals, and the public will each have their moments—luncheons, speeches, education day, artists day, and founders reception. When the photographers and television crews gather at the long-awaited ceremonies, they will probably rely on wide-angle lenses. Such a prism can bring all of one dramatic corner of the \$16 million building into the frame while cropping out the Polk Youth Center correctional facility, a landscape of temporary buildings, and the field out of which the new structure rises. And such a resourceful lens will allow for a close-up view of each segment of the April grand opening.

The N.C. Art Society, for example, has its own Art Society Day (April 8). This private, non-profit association of citizens, which functions as a volunteer membership arm to the art museum, might well view that day as the culmination of a 60-year old dream. The 5,000-member Art Society launched the idea of a state-owned and -operated museum with its formation in 1926, 21 years before the first state appropriation for the museum. Joining the Art Society members will be

prominent individual patrons, people like Gordon Hanes and Mary D.B.T. Semans. Certainly, these philanthropists will be pleased to see the doors finally swing open to huge halls where their gifts will hang secure in a new home. North Carolina political leaders of the last 20 years will be invited to the "official" opening on April 5, where they can bask in the concrete realization of years of both high ideals and hard-nosed haggling.

The combined resources and tenacity of the Art Society, arts patrons, and political leaders made possible this dramatic 181,000 square foot edifice—the expansive galleries, the large formal staircase, the series of balconies balanced along a four-tiered structure. But when the music stops on Friday, April 8—after the final patron has called it a night at the Art Society's \$125 per-person, annual Beaux-Arts Ball—who will then stroll through the galleries, down the staircase, and along the balconies? On the weekend of April 9-10, the doors will finally

open to the public, the citizens of the state whose taxes supported the museum with \$1.9 million in operating funds for 1982-83. Who will these museum visitors be? What will they see and feel? How will their lives be enriched? Put another way, who benefits from this state-supported and state-run museum?

Beginnings

In 1961, 14 years after the legislature voted \$1 million for works of art and 5 years after the N.C. Museum of Art opened in the Highway Building in downtown Raleigh, the N.C. General Assembly delineated the functions of this "agency of the State of North Carolina." The N.C. Museum of Art, the legislators charged, shall "acquire, preserve, and exhibit works of art" and "conduct programs of education, research, and publication designed to encourage an interest in and an appreciation of art on the part of the people of the State."¹ For 20 years,

from 1961 to 1981, the art museum staff worked toward these four purposes in temporary quarters totaling less than 50,000 square feet. Still, the collection gained prominence, the museum began to acquire a reputation, and attendance grew, topping 110,000 in 1978 and staying at 98,000 in 1979.

The North Carolina Museum of Art at a Crossroads

by Michael Matros and Bill Finger

The museum's programs expanded to meet the legislative charges and the expanding patronage. The Collectors Gallery opened, where visitors could buy works by artists, usually from the state. An annual North Carolina exhibition, begun by the Art Society years before the museum existed, continued. Traveling exhibitions toured statewide, with museum art appearing in such settings as libraries in rural counties. The Mary Duke Biddle Gallery opened, featuring sculpture for blind visitors. The Art Society enlarged its membership. And the education program grew, attracting schoolchildren from around the state and establishing the museum as a mandatory stopover on the Raleigh tour. The busloads of boys and girls trooped by the museum's star holdings—past the four smiling children in John Singleton Copley's "Sir William Pepperrell and

Michael Matros is associate editor of this issue of N.C. Insight. Bill Finger is the editor.

His Family" (1778, oil on canvas, 1947 state appropriation) and the pristine baby in Peter Paul Rubens' "The Holy Family with St. Anne" (c. 1633-35, oil on canvas, 1947 state appropriation).

In 1967, just six years after charging the art museum to acquire, preserve, exhibit and interpret works of art, the legislature created an Art Museum Building Commission, whose 16-year-old life should finally end this April (if it submits its final report; see sidebar on page 26). As the new building slowly became a reality, so did a new structure, staff, and program evolve. In 1980, the legislature established a new museum board of trustees to share control of museum operations with the secretary of the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources (DCR). Then, in 1981, the new board, chaired by Gordon Hanes of Winston-Salem, and Sara Hodgkins, secretary of DCR, hired a new museum director, Dr. Edgar Peters Bowron, with museum experience in Kansas City, Minneapolis, Baltimore, New York, and Rome.

"When I arrived," Bowron remembers, "I was very disturbed by not only the quality of some of the [staff members] but by their total lack of experience in art museums." So he began assembling a battery of art historians, several with Ph.D.s and most from outside the state. Eight of the first nine persons listed on the art museum's official staff biographies, including all the curators, arrived in 1982, from the Portland Art Museum in Oregon, the Montgomery (Ala.) Museum of Fine Art, the National Gallery of Art (Washington), the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Richmond), the Royal Oak Foundation (New York), and the Walters Art Gallery (Baltimore). Of these nine, only the curator of ancient art had ever worked in North Carolina. In short, this is a new museum—a new board from around the state, a new staff from around the country, and a new building.

Can this new enterprise measure up to the legislative mandate and the public expectation? "We're a very young institution," says Bowron, with just over one year in North Carolina under his belt. "I don't perceive that the public feels strongly about this institution, that this institution has insinuated itself into their hearts. It's not a point of pride in the way the other

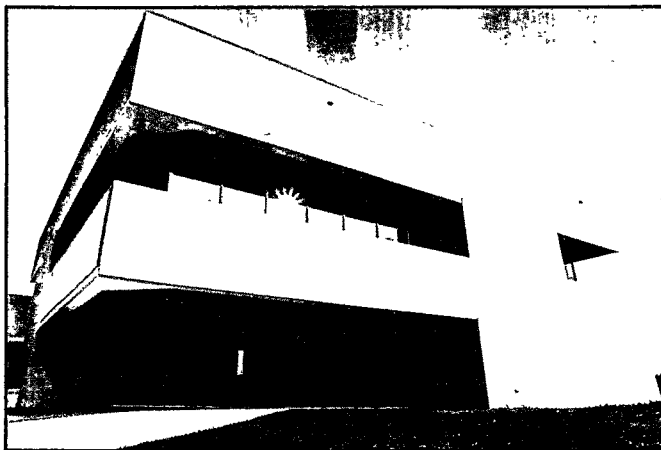
institutions that I've been involved with have been. In Kansas City, taxi drivers taking people in from the airport would make the point of saying, 'You're only here for a few days, but you absolutely must visit the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum.'"

If Bowron hopes for the same taxi-ride talk from the Raleigh-Durham airport, he's got his work cut out. In his proposals for the next five years, Bowron may well alienate many potential supporters by:

- * changing the N.C. Artists Exhibition from an annual to a triennial event;
- * closing the Collectors Gallery;
- * failing to include the N.C. Film Festival in its long-term program;
- * curtailing the schedule of museum-sponsored traveling exhibitions; and
- * limiting the use of the Biddle Gallery by blind persons.

Bowron and his staff defend these actions with an emphasis on *quality*—a word that appears again and again in interviews with staff members and in the written proposals being circulated by the Bowron administration. "In accordance with the new focus of our Museum on selectivity, quality, and scholarly documentation," writes Mitchell Kahan, the curator of American and contemporary art, "the major effort on our part in regard to art of this state will be employed in the solo shows and limited group shows of work by North Carolina artists."²

The North Carolina Museum of Art stands at a crossroads, probably the most important one since 1947, when the General Assembly made its original appropriation for the museum's core collection. Will it seek to become a quality, general-purpose museum, emphasizing art from throughout the world? Will it focus on the strengths of the Tar Heel art community? Or will it try to do both? Understanding how a museum makes such choices requires a brief review of the museum's efforts in acquisitions, preservation, exhibitions, and interpretation—the four-part mandate of the legislation sanctioning this museum as well as the four central aspects of any art museum.



Acquisitions and Preservation

The museum collection began long before a "museum" existed. In 1925, arts patrons in the state, many from wealthy North Carolina families, began assembling a new art collection under the aegis of the N.C. Art Society. In 1928, New York philanthropist Robert F. Phifer, a North Carolina native, bequeathed his art collection to the Art Society, together with a trust fund. After trying for years to persuade the state to sanction and support an art museum, the members of the Art Society finally succeeded. In 1947, the General Assembly became the first state legislature in the United States to set aside funds for an art collection—a \$1 million grant to be matched by private donations.³ The Samuel H. Kress Collection, gathered by the founder of the Kress variety store chain, provided the match with a noted group of Renaissance and baroque paintings.

The Phifer and Kress donations, together with the state-funded purchases, form the collection's greatest strength: a European collection of national reputation and significance, including works by the Italian Renaissance masters Botticelli and Raphael, French artists Monet and Chardin, the English portraitist Gainsborough, the Spaniard Goya, and the Dutch and Flemish artists Rubens, Jordaens, and Van Dyck. Dr. David A. Brown, curator of early Italian painting at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., calls the North Carolina museum's collection of European paintings "truly remarkable, all the more so because it was formed so recently." This European emphasis helped lure Bowron, a specialist in Renaissance and baroque art, to the director's position.

Over the years, the collection grew and broadened, shaped mainly by private donors and the N.C. Art Society. Additional state appropriations have also contributed, but in varying amounts. The acquisitions budget reached \$200,000 for each year of the 1973-75 biennium, but by 1982 this figure had fallen to \$25,000, an extremely modest amount for any significant art purchase. Today, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the N.C. Museum of Art is a *general museum*, exhibiting works from many cultures—American,

Egyptian, Greek, Roman, African, Oceanic, pre-Columbian, and others—and in various media—paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints, and decorative arts. The American collection includes works by the 19th century Hudson River painters and 20th century avant-garde artists Georgia O'Keeffe, Robert Rauschenberg, and Frank Stella. Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Hanes donated the Stella painting, *Raqa II* (1970, synthetic polymer on canvas) which the museum is using as a logo on its grand opening promotional materials.

The museum hopes to expand the collection in three areas, according to chief curator William Chiego: 1) give more breadth to the 19th century European collection; 2) add some significant pieces to the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian collections; and 3) provide "some connective tissue," as Chiego puts it, to the American 20th century collection, "which has some recent gains thanks to Gordon Hanes." But expanding the museum's collection in this time of high-priced art takes careful planning and money.

"It's very difficult now to just go out and buy anything you want," Chiego says. In addition, donors sometimes have pet areas of art which don't coincide with museum priorities. Several avenues for expanding the collection according to priority areas exist, including raising funds by selling existing works (through a process called

de-accessioning), stimulating donors to concentrate on particular types of art, and making purchases in areas where prices are not highly inflated.

Bowron recently de-accessioned a work "which I would not have hung but put in storage." This was only the sixth de-accession in the history of the museum, indicating the extent to which the museum collection has come to have a sense of inviolability. Prominent museums sometimes utilize de-accessioning to tighten their collections. In 1982, for example, Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, the country's leading museum of Byzantine art, sold a painting by Matisse and one by Picasso so that it could buy a rare 14th century icon of St. Peter. The museum's benefactor, Robert Woods Bliss, had left the Picasso and the Matisse to the museum, but "said they should be sold at some time in the



N.C. Museum of Art
Peter Paul Rubens, *The Holy Family with St. Anne* (c. 1633-35). Oil on canvas.

future to acquire Byzantine art," Dumbarton Oaks Director Giles Constable told *The New York Times*. The N.C. Museum of Art has a "like-for-like" de-accession policy: money from a de-accessioned work is used to buy art of the same genre or period.

Encouraging gifts in a particular area and concentrating on non-inflated types of purchases may well allow for some expansion. Chiego and Kahan, the American and contemporary art curator, say that good buys can be found in contemporary American art. And Kahan, in particular, wants more North Carolina art. "There is always a good deal of gift potential here," says Kahan, who brought substantial collections of folk art into the Montgomery Museum of Fine Art.

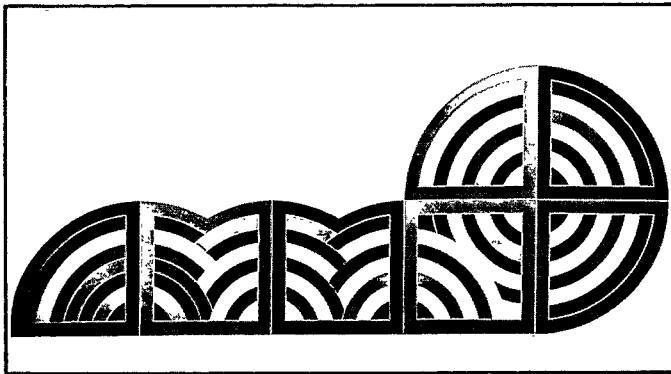
In addition, the sculpture market, unlike that for 19th century European paintings, for example, "is such that one can still acquire important pieces," says Chiego. A five-year draft plan, submitted by the museum staff to its Board of Trustees and the Department of Cultural Resources in December 1982, mentions, for example, possible purchases of works by French sculptors: "a terracotta sculpture, especially a Clodion, a Marin, or Saly ... busts or figural pieces by Lemoine and Pajou ... a major academic bronze by Mercie, a Rodin of medium scale ..."⁴

Chiego points out that the 164-acre museum grounds lend themselves to a variety of outdoor sculpture opportunities. The five-year plan, however, does not provide an overview of how the museum grounds might develop. Bowron explains that such decisions must wait until the building commission completes its landscaping plans. Should the museum work toward a dramatic sculpture environment like, for example, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden—part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.—or the privately endowed Brookgreen Gardens near Pawley's Island, South Carolina? Kahan wants a project modeled after Artpark in Lewiston, New York, where sculpture is widely placed over the acreage.

Whatever new directions the collection takes, it will have to be well cared for. The collection "is not in the best of condition," says chief conservator David Goist, who arrived in 1982 from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

"We've done a lot of remedial things over the past summer to stabilize it, to buy some time to get things up on the wall—to wait until we can gradually work through the collection, based on a priority system." Goist says that working through the collection will take 20 years. Some works require only remedial work, equivalent to minor surgery. But many need major treatments: removing and replacing the deteriorated canvas or wooden panel upon which a work was originally painted, "in-painting" by a conservator where pigment has flaked away, and removal of dirt and varnishes. Major treatments should last 50 to 70 years, says Goist.

The emphasis on expanding the collection and the need for conserving it dramatize a fundamental aspect of this museum. "Of the number of things that define a museum," says Bowron, "the first and foremost is the quality of its collections—their breadth, quality, scope, and importance." While this is true in many museums, including such majors as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and smaller ones like the North Carolina museum, others concentrate much more on temporary exhibitions.



Frank Stella, *Raqa II* (1970). Synthetic polymer on canvas.

These museums often emphasize the importance of stimulating interest in contemporary art and allowing their visitors the maximum exposure to various collections. The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA), a private museum in Winston-Salem, exemplifies this school of thought. SECCA has no permanent collection at all, relying instead entirely on temporary exhibits.

Exhibitions and Interpretation

In locating the various permanent collections and the space for temporary exhibits, Bowron and his staff decided to showcase 20th century art. The museum has four levels, the top floor for offices and the lower three for exhibits—the entrance level, below it the "main" level, and below it the "lower" level. Entering the building, a visitor will see the museum's permanent 20th century collection, paintings and sculpture by American and European artists. The contemporary art contrasts sharply with the entrance-level exhibit in the old museum—the permanent Renaissance collection, now to be shown one level below the entrance, along with Egyptian, classical, and early American pieces. Meanwhile,

the temporary exhibits will focus on 18th, 19th, and 20th century art. The emphasis on more recent art in exhibit placement serves at least two functions, says Bowron. It stimulates interest in contemporary art among possible donors. It also emphasizes a modern touch, in concert with the modern design of the building, for the large crowds of visitors anticipated for the museum's first year (Bowron is hoping for 250,000).

The new museum features two new galleries—one for contemporary art and one for North Carolina exhibits. Both will rely mainly on shows by individuals or small groups of artists. The contemporary gallery, located in a balconied, two-story area that reaches from the "main" up to the "entrance" level, will include mostly avant-garde artists, says Kahan, beginning with the photographer André Kertesz in June 1983. The North Carolina Gallery,

on the "entrance" level, will emphasize paintings, sculpture, and graphics, although a pottery exhibit from Jugtown is also scheduled for 1984. The first special exhibition in the gallery—in July 1983—will feature Yanceyville painter Maud Gatewood, and an exhibit of work produced at Black Mountain College in the 1930s and 1940s is tentatively planned.

The other significant new space in the museum is a 272-seat auditorium in the Nancy Susan Reynolds Education Wing. The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation offered a \$1.5 million grant to the state in the late 1960s to stimulate interest in a new museum building. The state matched the grant in 1967 and appointed the building commission to begin work on a new museum. (The state eventually spent \$10.75 million on the building, and private donations for the structure totaled \$5 million. See sidebar

Building by Commission

by Ferrel Guillory

When the General Assembly created the Art Museum Building Commission in 1967, surely legislators didn't envision a project lasting more than a decade or intend to award anyone a long-term grant of power. The General Assembly probably had in its collective mind simply a duplication of the procedures that led to the construction of North Carolina's modern Legislative Building.

Sixteen years later, the Art Museum Building Commission still exists, with its date of termination remaining uncertain. And Thomas J. White of Kinston retains the chairmanship, having been appointed by Gov. Dan K. Moore and having held the position without interruption through the terms of Governors Robert Scott, James E. Holshouser, Jr., and James B. Hunt, Jr.

The commission, therefore, has become an extraordinary example of North Carolina's predilection for government by commission. Under government by commission, authority to accomplish a task or to set certain policy is delegated to a panel, often with appointments made by several different officials and, most importantly, with no one person directly accountable to the people.

White himself, then a state senator, introduced the legislation creating the museum building commission. The law gave the commission extensive powers to carry out the museum project. The commission had power to employ architects, to enter into contracts on behalf of the state for constructing and furnishing the facility and to receive gifts from foundations, corporations, and individuals.¹

The law also gave the commission authority to select a site for the museum. But, in one of the few checks on its power, the law provided that the commission obtain approval from the governor, the Council of State and the State Capital Planning Commission for its chosen site. The original legislation called for a museum in Heritage Square, an area of downtown Raleigh near the state Capitol. The legislature later amended the law to permit the museum to be placed outside downtown Raleigh.

The controversy over the site of the museum turned

into a classic struggle. The commission wanted to put the museum on the outskirts of Raleigh, near the Polk Youth Center, contending that the facility needed uncongested space. However, a coalition of groups, including Raleigh city officials, several newspapers, and art and educational interests, argued for putting the museum downtown, making it part of the state government complex and helping to invigorate the core of the capital city. In the end, after efforts in the legislature and the state courts to block the commission failed, the museum was placed in the suburbs.²

The struggle, which went on for nearly six years, spotlighted how a major capital construction project must be looked at as more than merely a building. It must also be seen in terms of the fabric of a community. Nowhere in the law did the museum commission have instructions to consider the museum in this wider context. Its mandate was to build a museum.

The history of the museum building commission also illustrates how a single individual with power—and the will and know-how to use it—can cut through the dispersal of power inherent in government by commission. Not only was Tom White a veteran state legislator but he had also served for a decade as the chairman of the Advisory Budget Commission, the most powerful of North Carolina's governmental commissions. Members of the museum commission "never really challenged him," says Dr. Lawrence J. Wheeler, deputy secretary of the Department of Cultural Resources who has reviewed minutes of the commission meetings. "They knew he could get the money out of the legislature."

While still serving as chairman of the Advisory Budget Commission, White pulled off an extraordinary series of maneuvers to arrange for the suburban site for the museum. In a period of 21 days, White got the necessary approvals from four separate agencies for the transfer of Polk Youth Center land, completing the deal on the last day of Gov. Scott's term. Since the building commission held meetings only quarterly, White had

Since 1972, Ferrel Guillory has been a political reporter for The News and Observer of Raleigh, as the chief capital correspondent and head of the Washington bureau. Now associate editor, he is responsible for the editorial page.

below.) The large education wing provides space for a variety of programs, from concerts, lectures, and slide shows to children's programs and film showings.

The museum's largest audience is always going to be children, says Education Director Joseph Covington, because of the many school tours which come to the museum. But the museum wants to appeal more to adults. "Visiting museums is a lifelong endeavor," says Bowron. "Somehow in this state people feel that museums are for children. It is the adult audience that I want. These people will bring their children and encourage their children. Here [in North Carolina], it is just the reverse. This is not a museum-going state. Parents in this area and around the state need to realize that they have a right to be here as part of their cultural heritage." The museum staff considers itself a small faculty

in art history and is emphasizing such adult programs as "Saturday symposia" in its plan for the education wing. "Art history isn't a subject young children are capable of mastering," Covington says.

The Controversies Ahead— Quality, Access, or Both?

Except for the controversy surrounding the building itself, the exhibition and interpretation plans of the Bowron administration have generated the most opposition. Five areas of concern have surfaced, three regarding the museum's approach to North Carolina artists and two regarding accessibility to the museum's holdings. In all five cases, the balance hangs in how much weight one gives to quality and how much to accessibility.

long stretches of time in which he was able to act upon his authority as chairman. When it suited his purposes, White also called the commission into closed session.

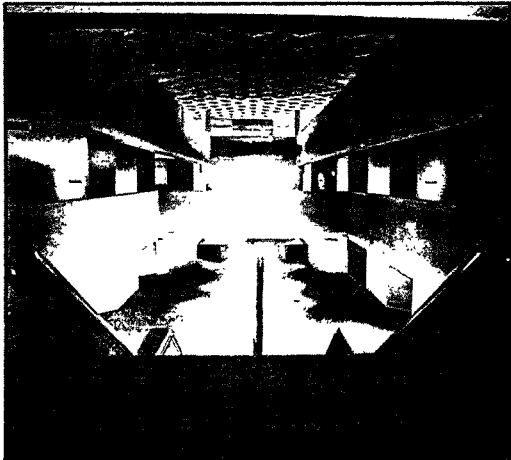
How has it been possible for White to hang onto the building commission's chairmanship? The original legislation set no time limit on terms for the commission members. In a 1973 revision, the legislature made clear that the governor, the House speaker, and the lieutenant governor would have appointments as vacancies occurred, but it also provided: "The initial members of the commission shall be the members of the existing Art Museum Building Commission who shall serve until the completion of the duties assigned to the commission."³

It was only in 1980, when a board of trustees was established to govern the museum, that the legislation spelled out the terms for terminating the building

commission.⁴ This law said the building commission could continue to function until the museum was both dedicated and completed, until the art collection is exhibited or stored in the new facility and until the commission submits its final report to the General Assembly. So loose is this language that the building commission could continue to function for months after the museum's scheduled opening in April 1983.⁵

Perhaps there will never be another project quite like the art museum. But the state's experience with the museum clearly calls into question whether a commission rather than a regular state agency should supervise the construction of a major building. And the experience also suggests that the state legislature pay more attention to balancing the need to give enough power to get things done with the equally important need to ensure that those with power have accountability to the public. □

Some galleries planned for the new N. C. Museum of Art were never built because of budgetary constraints. Although museum officials anticipate more construction in the future, they say that proper exhibition space is now limited. This view from the grand stairway will be obstructed to museum visitors by a large partition erected to provide extra space for paintings.



Michael Matros

FOOTNOTES

¹N.C.G.S. 140-5.3

²In a review of this article prior to publication, former Sen. White said: "The delay cost the state an estimated \$2.5 million in escalation of building costs and services."

³N.C.G.S. 143B-59

⁴N.C.G.S. 143B-61.1

⁵In interviews with Michael Matros, associate editor of *N.C. Insight*, Museum of Art Director Edgar Peters Bowron and Department of Cultural Resources Deputy Secretary Lawrence Wheeler said the building commission's existence is no longer necessary.

"The building commission should be dissolved as rapidly as possible," Bowron said. "I don't see any function that the building commission fills now that the state of North Carolina doesn't have entire agencies equipped to deal with, whether it's fixing the leak in the roof, whether it's the legal problem with Middlesex Construction [the original contractor], or whether it's the operation of the building. It's just unarguable that the building commission has outlived its usefulness."

"It outlived its usefulness," Wheeler said, "really after the selection of the site." He added that he had talked with several individual members of the building commission who felt that the building "would be better administered at this time by the board of trustees and the state."

1. **The N.C. Artists Exhibition.** An annual competition for over 40 years, this popular exhibit is now scheduled as a triennial event. This format "will make it a more sought-after exhibition in which to be included," contends Mitchell Kahan. "It will also guarantee that each show will be viewed as a sort of 'new development in North Carolina art' exhibition."

Many artists in the state disagree. "I consider it one of the museum's principal functions to serve and encourage living artists in North Carolina," says Jerome Kohl, a Raleigh photographer and previous award winner at the North Carolina exhibition. "A triennial exhibit would lose all momentum," says Kohl. "Artists would forget it exists."

Bowron defends the change in format by emphasizing the museum's new attention to quality. "We feel strongly that we want to show the work of North Carolina artists and we will, by having a number of exhibitions. At the same time, we're derelict if we're not showing works of art that are of high quality.... To show works of third-rate artists, whether they're North Carolina artists or Texas artists, is as much an injustice as if I were to put out third-rate Dutch paintings. Just because an artist happens to pay taxes or reside in North Carolina doesn't mean that he or she automatically should receive representation in the museum. It's a question of talent, quality, and distinction."

The new North Carolina Gallery will showcase state art of high quality. But only solo or specialized shows are planned, like the Maud Gatewood, Jugtown, and Black Mountain exhibits. Neither the museum's draft five-year plan nor interviews with Bowron and the principal curators give any indication that the museum will seek out and show a broader cross-section of work from the state's artists—except once every three years.

2. **Closing the Collectors Gallery.** A popular feature in the old museum building, this place for North Carolina artists to sell and rent

their work will no longer exist. When Bowron announced this change, he met immediate opposition from artists as well as the press. Answering an editorial against the action by *The News and Observer* of Raleigh, Bowron wrote in the paper's October 7, 1982, "People's Forum": "Museums are educational institutions, and most professionals agree that the sale of art is not one of their legitimate functions. North Carolina has a number of successful commercial galleries that can better meet this need, leaving to museums the educational role that only they can fulfill."

The same month Bowron's letter appeared in the Raleigh newspaper, an article called "Bringing the Museum Home" ran in *Esquire* magazine. The story detailed how museums "as crusty and venerable as the century-old Philadelphia Museum of Art" run art-rental galleries. And these museums—which got the idea from the granddaddy of the rental trade, the

Museum of Modern Art in New York (renting since 1951)—rent for the same reasons that the North Carolina Museum of Art ran its Collectors Gallery. "Rental galleries, which are usually staffed by volunteers and paid for by those low rental fees, are a cost-effective way for museums to help buoy the local art scene, assuage a little guilt, and add a line to an artist's biography," says *Esquire*. "Those who use the rental services are indirectly creating a

benign climate for the continued health of contemporary art." *Esquire* calls the arrangement a "mutually rewarding three-sided exchange."⁵ The artist, the public, and the museum all gain—the same three groups that benefited from the old Collectors Gallery.

Local artists seem to side more with *Esquire* than with Bowron. "To survive as an artist you have to sell," says Richard Fennell, an artist on the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro who has had a number of works shown and sold in the Collectors Gallery. Fennell, like the photographer Kohl, says that few galleries exist in the state where they want to



John Singleton Copley, *Sir William Pepperrell and His Family* (1778). Oil on canvas.

N.C. Museum of Art

show their work.

The Secretary of Cultural Resources, Sara Hodgkins, stands firmly behind Bowron in his controversial decision. "When they started the Collectors Gallery, there weren't many places for the North Carolina artists to sell," Hodgkins says. "But there are many fine galleries now that are in the business of selling art. I feel sure that the museum will cultivate and work hard at a good relationship with North Carolina artists."

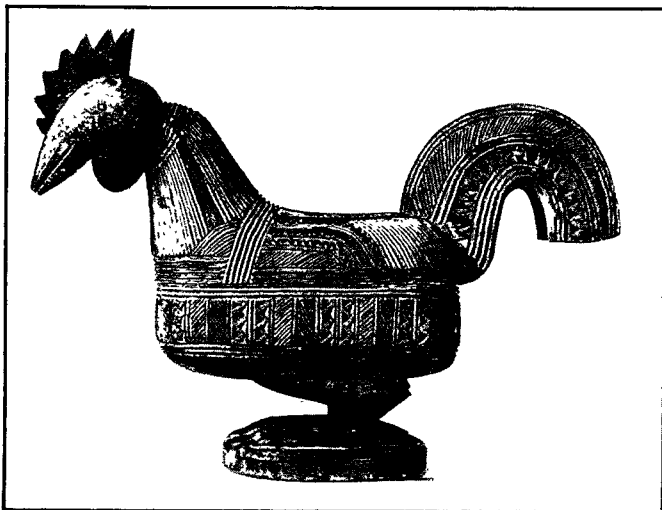
3. The N.C. Film Festival. With no formal announcement, the museum staff did not schedule a N.C. Film Festival for 1983 and has no definite plans for reviving the popular event. Many think this particular festival provided an important outlet and landmark event for encouraging new filmmakers, an opportunity now taken away. "Perhaps 1983 will produce a new sponsor for this event, the sort of outlet that's crucial to the next generation's Spielbergs and Fassbinders," wrote film reviewer Godfrey Cheshire in the January 6, 1983, issue of *The Spectator*, a weekly catalogue of cultural events in the Raleigh-Durham area.

Bowron says that he was not aware until reading an earlier *Spectator* article that the museum had sponsored a film festival—an indication, he says, of the festival's lack of permanent standing among museum programs. The museum took on the festival only a few years ago and has not had sufficient staff or money to organize a permanent yearly competition. Nonetheless, North Carolina filmmakers have few opportunities to exhibit their work before the public and to gather for workshops and conferences. If the museum administrators exclude this festival from its long-range program, these filmmakers will be hard pressed to find a sponsor of comparable prestige and resources.

4. Reducing the schedule of traveling exhibitions. The education department is scaling down the traveling exhibits, which annually have hung in libraries, schools, and the museum's 12 affiliate galleries around the state. Education Director Covington says the museum will continue statewide services, but finances are

forcing the museum to cut back on the traveling exhibits. By necessity, they usually included second-best works, says Covington, but even then proved expensive and potentially harmful to the art.

The new staff wants to meet standards of quality not met in previous years, says Covington, when the staff spread itself too thin and organized programs without sufficient attention to—he again stresses the word—quality. The new building should be the center of the museum programs, says Covington, where the collection, which is of fundamental importance, can be seen in its best environment. But such a perspective may disappoint a lot of people. About 50,000 people a year have viewed the various traveling exhibits in recent years, says Lorraine Laslett, coordinator of statewide services, and another 30,000 a year have attended the museum's exhibitions in affiliate galleries. Even at its peak, the downtown museum topped 100,000 visitors in only one year (1978). In its last full year of operation, attendance dipped to 50,000, as the museum closed, gallery by gallery.



Yoruba tribe (Nigeria), ceremonial dish in form of a rooster. Wood, pigment.

N.C. Museum of Art

5. Limiting the use of the Mary Duke Biddle Gallery by blind persons. Covington says the pieces in the Biddle Gallery have been worn down over the years from too much touching. He wants to limit touching mainly to raw materials in workshop areas. In the new museum, explains education staffer Laslett, volunteer guides (docents) will provide a more complete museum experience for persons

legally blind but with some vision by describing a wider range of art pieces. For the completely blind person, an occasional piece of sculpture will be included for touching in the Biddle Gallery. Covington says he plans to use the gallery for more general educational purposes, including some programs for people with hearing impairments.

According to Bowron, most visually impaired visitors would prefer to be brought into the mainstream of the museum, and he says that "only a handful of blind people" visited the Biddle Gallery in recent years. Nevertheless, the Biddle Gallery established its reputation and

indeed its special place in the museum by including mostly sculpture that could be felt—by blind and by sighted persons—for a multi-dimensional art experience. The Biddle Gallery also organized occasional shows of works by adult mentally retarded residents of state institutions. Asked about the importance of including sculpture for blind persons in the

Biddle Gallery, Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans said the Biddle collection “was given for that purpose” by a number of contributors. If implemented, Covington’s proposals would change the character and purpose of the Biddle Gallery. Bowron says that the situation right now is “fluid.”

Facts and Figures on the N.C. Museum of Art

The N.C. Museum of Art, an agency within the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, received \$1.9 million in FY 83 from the General Assembly. In addition, since 1977, the museum has raised \$6 million in donations and endowments. The privately incorporated N.C. Art Society, which operates as the museum’s membership arm, administers an endowment of \$2.3 million, called the Phifer Fund, whose earnings are spent only for purchases of art, usually for the museum. Foundations also contribute to the museum. For example, the Andrew Mellon Foundation in New York has made a grant of \$100,000 (through 1986) to support planning costs of exhibitions and publications related to the permanent collection. The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation in Winston-Salem made a grant of \$111,362 (1981-83) to support establishment of a development program. Private donations go through the North Carolina Museum of Art Foundation, administered by its officers. When the museum opens in April, it will have 91 employees, including curators, exhibition designers and preparators, educators, guards, and administrative staff. A 22-person board of directors shares museum supervision with the secretary of Cultural Resources. (See chart on page 9 for a summary of the board’s statutory purpose and appointment method.)

In 1926, a group of citizens established the N.C. Art Society (originally called the N.C. State Art Society). From 1926 to 1947, this group collected what was to become the core collection of the North Carolina

Board of Trustees Chairman Gordon Hanes (l.) with Museum Director Peter Bowron.



Michael Matros

Museum of Art. In 1947, the state appropriated \$1 million for purchases of art, the first such action taken by any state. The membership arm of the North Carolina Museum of Art, this organization had revenues of \$170,000 and expenses of \$150,000 in FY 1982. While it is not a state agency, it uses donated space in the new museum building and has a 25-member board of directors established by North Carolina statutes. (It is unusual for a private board to be set up by public law. See chart on page 9 for a summary of the board’s statutory purposes and appointments method.)

The Museum of Art (NCMA) opened on Morgan Street in downtown Raleigh in 1956. It closed gradually in 1979-82 to allow for a move to the new museum building on Blue Ridge Boulevard on the western edge of Raleigh. The new building will open to the public on April 9, 1983. Museum admission is free.

The museum staff considers its European painting and sculpture collection among the most important in the country. Major works from this collection are frequently on loan to prestigious museums such as the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., where NCMA’s Raphael painting is now on display. Other collections include Egyptian, Greek, and Roman antiquities; objects from African, Oceanic, and pre-Columbian cultures; and American art, including work by North Carolinians. For other information on the museum’s collection, exhibition, and interpretation policies, see main article.

According to the *Official Museum Directory 1983* of the American Association of Museums, there are only two other state art museums in the country—the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond and the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida. The Virginia Museum, founded in 1934, has an annual operating budget of \$4,755,000, of which \$3,970,000 is a state appropriation. Other revenue comes from the museum foundation, special programs, and admissions (voluntary, but suggested at \$1 for adults). In addition, approximately \$1 million in private donations is spent to purchase art each year. It is a general museum, with collections from 15 world cultures. In the past, it has offered a biennial juried competition and exhibition for Virginia artists. Artists selected for the show have been permitted to sell their work in the museum’s sales gallery. The museum organizes a traveling exhibition program which this year offers six shows of works from the permanent collection for display in various Virginia communities.

The Ringling Museum in Sarasota operates on a \$1.7 million annual appropriation from the state of Florida and about \$2 million annually from private contributions and endowment revenues. Admission for adults is \$4.50, except on Saturday, when admission to the art collection is free. The Ringling Museum, which became a state museum in 1946, features European painting and sculpture. It also includes a museum of circus memorabilia and the Asolo Theater. It organizes no juried competition of state artists and offers no art sales gallery.

—Michael Matros

Conclusion

Peter Bowron and his staff have ambitious plans to improve the quality and scope of the North Carolina Museum of Art. To expand the collection, preserve even the existing pieces, and infuse the dramatic new building with notable exhibitions will cost lots of money. This museum — with an annual operating budget of \$1.9 million from state funds and a privately funded development office still in its infancy — will have difficulty accomplishing such goals, much less gaining a national reputation. For fiscal year 1982-83, for example, the legislature granted the museum only \$32,000 for special exhibitions (temporary, on-loan shows), barely enough for one minor show. (See sidebar on page 30 for more on budget and structure.)

The museum is attempting to formalize its private fundraising efforts. In the past, the N.C.

Art Society has coordinated the museum's membership and financial development functions. But the museum staff has begun to take over these tasks through its own development office. "I would be surprised if there weren't a merger [between the museum and the Art Society] within the next five years, possibly within two years," says Art Society Treasurer Peter VanGraafeiland of Raleigh. Or the Art Society might become more independent of the museum, says VanGraafeiland, serving

perhaps as a statewide visual arts support group.

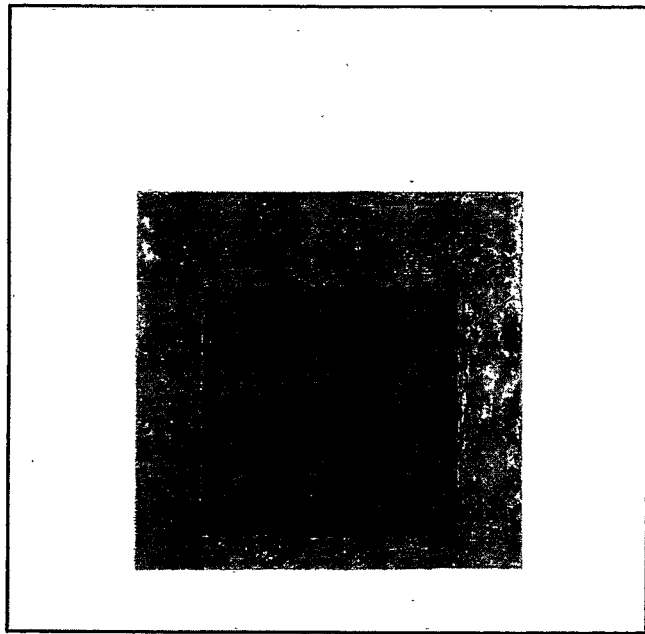
Whatever funding vehicles Bowron and his staff rely on—from increased state appropriations to an endowment structure established by individual donors—the test of quality must be met, says Bowron. "The museum should collect and exhibit works of art that represent the very best of an artist, of a period, or a moment in history. We always said before—the museum and the people who preceded me—'We don't have a Greek marble sculpture, we don't have an African mask.' And the idea has been, well, just any old African mask will do. It is the level of

discrimination, the level of discernment, of connoisseurship that concerns me. That's where I want to make my stand."

Bowron has assembled an experienced and ambitious staff to help him take this stand. He has the Secretary of Cultural Resources behind him and a brand new \$16 million facility before him. To accomplish all that they want to do, Bowron and his staff will need all of these assets. But in formulating policies emphasizing "only the best," they plan to curtail programs that over the years have attracted significant constituencies. This insistence on quality above all else may alienate some potential supporters, especially North Carolina artists and filmmakers. Persons accustomed to viewing the museum's collection in their own towns and those excited by "seeing" a sculpture with their hands may also wonder why better quality means less accessibility.

Despite making some hard and potentially

damaging choices, Bowron seems to know what he's up against. "We are competing for people's leisure time is what it comes down to," says Bowron. "We are competing with the natural beauty of this state, with UNC football and basketball, with television. We feel we are a legitimate, a very rewarding expenditure of people's time. And best of all it's free. But, we've got a long way to go." □



N.C. Museum of Art

Joseph Albers, *Homage to the Square: Michoacan* (1961).
Oil on board.

FOOTNOTES

¹N.C.G.S. 140-1.

²*Long-Range Planning 1981-86 (Draft)*, submitted to the Secretary of the Department of Cultural Resources and the Board of Trustees, December 7, 1982, p. 49.

³In 1934, the Virginia legislature had provided funds for administration of its new museum, but not for art purchases.

⁴*Long-Range Planning 1981-86 (Draft)*, p. 32-33.

⁵*Esquire*, October 1982, p. 41.