

THE JOHN & MABLE  
RINGLING

## MUSEUM OF ART

**Contemporary Series  
Begins with Focus  
On Abstract Art****'Abstraction in Question'  
explores artistic issues  
specific to the 1980s**

The status of abstract art in the late 1980s is the focus of "Abstraction in Question," the first in a new series of exhibitions at the Museum exploring a single theme of particular importance in contemporary art.

Each exhibition in the series, called "Contemporary Perspectives," will be selected by three curators, two or all of whom will be guest curators, working with Joseph Jacobs, the Museum's curator of modern art. The curators will present their own perspectives on the issues addressed by each exhibition through their selection of work and a catalogue essay.

Guest curators for the inaugural exhibition, which opens in the New Wing on January 20, are Joan Simon, a critic and curator who was formerly managing editor of *Art in America*, director of The Broida Museum, and interim director of the Des Moines Art Center; Roberta Smith, an art critic who writes regularly for *The New York Times*; and Bruce Ferguson, a critic and curator whose most recent exhibition was the Eric Fischl show, which toured internationally.

In "Abstraction in Question," these curators show how abstract art in the 1980s does not take abstraction for granted. "The twentieth century can, in part, be described as the

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age of abstraction, for the driving force behind Modernism has often been a conversion of the subject or content of art from a represen-



**Judy Pfaff,**  
(1946- ),  
*Great Glasses,*  
1988.  
Mixed media,  
108 x 96 x 60 in.  
Courtesy of  
Holly Solomon  
Gallery,  
New York City.

tational to a non-objective focus," explains Jacobs. "Yet now that we are approaching the end of the century, abstraction has taken a back seat to figurative art."

Abstraction has not yet attained its former position as the flagship of Modernism, according to Jacobs, although it has gradually regained

some of its earlier status. "Worse yet, no apparent theoretical premise is driving abstraction, unlike in the past when theory always provided a basis for the work, as in Abstract Expressionism or Minimalism," he notes. "Abstraction appears to be in a state of crisis."

*Continued on page 2*

**What Grant Awards Really Mean to Museum Visitors****Grants and the matching funds  
the Museum provides represent  
public/private support for the arts**

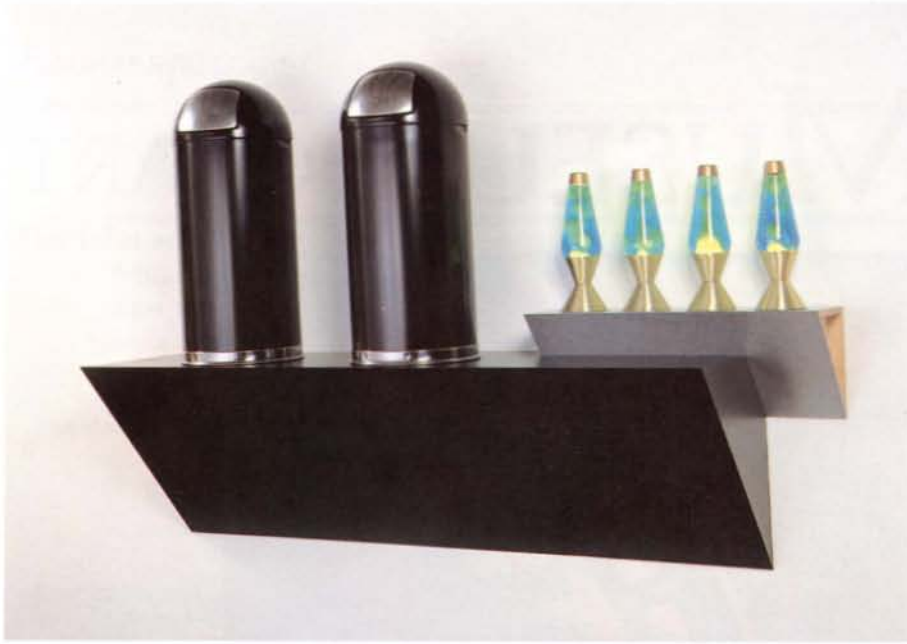
The Museum has been awarded several impressive financial grants in the past few years to help support its exhibitions and programs. But what is this money for, and what do these awards signify about the Museum's position in the national arts community?

The Museum's latest grant award was confirmed in September: \$52,000 from the National Endow-

ment for the Arts (NEA) to support the upcoming exhibition of paintings by American artist Worthington Whittredge late in 1989. This exhibition, organized by the Museum, will travel to other museums after its showing here.

The National Endowment for the Arts also provided partial funding for last winter's popular "A Taste for Angels: Neapolitan Painting in North America 1650-1750" exhibition, organized by Yale University,

*Continued on page 2*



**Haim Steinbach**, (1944- ), *00:06 (2,4 L)*, 1988. Mixed-media construction, 30½ x 90½ x 21 in. Courtesy Jay Gourney Modern Art and Sonnabend Gallery, New York City.

## CONTEMPORARY

*Continued from page 1*

In this exhibition, the three guest curators explore the issues in abstract art that are specific to the 1980s, to determine if abstraction is still a vital, valid artistic form. Each has selected six or seven artists — the most important working in an abstract mode — to support his or her position.


"Abstraction in Question" concentrates on younger artists — most under forty — who use abstraction as but one element among several within a particular work of art. "Often abstraction is merged with representational components, resulting in a new kind of abstraction," Jacobs says. "Their work is generally loaded with history, as it subverts and/or embraces historical references."

The exhibition also includes several artists who for the past twenty years have defined the issues

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that would become critical for the abstraction of the 1980s, and whose works are therefore especially pertinent now.

Among the well-established artists represented in the exhibition are Richard Artschwager, John Chamberlain, Roy Lichtenstein, Elizabeth Murray, Judy Pfaff, and Gerhard Richter. Younger established artists include Ross Bleckner, Tony Cragg, and Terry Winters; the exhibition also includes works by such emerging artists as Robert Gober, Peter Halley, Annette Lemieux, Haim Steinbach, Philip Taaffe, and Rosemarie Troeckel.

"Abstraction in Question," which runs through April 2, comprises about fifty works, primarily paintings, with some sculpture and photography. A fully illustrated, 125-page catalogue features essays by the three guest curators, defending their selections, and by Jacobs, who organized the exhibition. 

## GRANTS

*Continued from page 1*

and is helping to launch the Museum's new "Contemporary Perspectives" series in January, with the "Abstraction in Question" exhibition.

Other NEA Grants will help the Museum acquire two works of contemporary art during the current fis-


cal year, through the Museum Purchase Plan, and are helping to fund the conservation of two seventeenth-century Museum tapestries. The docent education project, including lectures, workshops, and study groups, is also funded by the NEA.

The Museum has received support from other organizations, as well. For example, a grant from the Institute of Museum Services is making possible a survey of the Museum's collection of prints and drawings, with an eye toward making many of these works available for public viewing for the first time.

The Museum has also received funding on an ongoing basis from the Mellon Foundation to support the curatorial research necessary to plan various programs and exhibitions, as well as the research into Ca' d'Zan's history and original decor.

"Each of these grants represents recognition of Museum programs by panels composed of museum professionals from around the country," explains Susan Benedetti, the Museum's grants coordinator. "Museums nationwide are competing for these awards, but only a few are selected to receive them."

An important — and frequently overlooked — element of this type of funding is the fact that the money awarded in each grant must be matched by the Museum, with funds raised by the Museum Foundation. In this way, the projects being funded represent a partnership between the public and private sectors, via contributions from both.

"The recognition by major national funding agencies and organizations of the importance of the Museum's collections and the excellence of its staff is most rewarding," says Museum Director Dr. Laurence Ruggiero. "I'm certain our donors and our community will meet the challenge this recognition creates." 



## Programs Bring Museum Experience to Children

A new series of monthly programs for members' children and grandchildren, each designed for a specific age group, offers them an opportunity to enhance their appreciation and understanding of the Museum's collections as well as to explore their own creativity.

In October, upper-elementary children toured Ca' d'Zan, escorted by Michael McDonough, curator of historic buildings. The children were then provided with art materials and encouraged to paint or draw their impressions of Ca' d'Zan.

A November program for middle- and high-school students was developed in conjunction with the current exhibition, "Projects 2: Allan McCollum, Perfect Vehicles 1988."

The December program, "The Museum at Night," involves parents as well as children, and will be held on December 1, from 7 to 8 p.m.

This program will focus on the mythical stories depicted in the sculpture in the Museum courtyard. Families will tour the illuminated courtyard, considering the artists' intent in creating each sculpture.

"We recently surveyed members about the ages of their children and grandchildren; this information has been entered into our computer, so we can now send out invitations to the proper age group for each program," explains Susan Hazelroth, school programs manager. "The programs are free to members' children. Each session is limited to thirty children, however, so we strongly recommend early reservations."



Curator Michael McDonough explains architectural significance of Ca' d'Zan to Lakeview Elementary students.

## Director's Corner

by Dr. Laurence J. Ruggiero

It's been nearly seven years since the Board of Trustees, the Florida legislature, and several key public officials committed themselves to the Museum's repair and restoration — at a total estimated cost of nearly \$20 million.

Thus far, work costing millions of dollars has been implemented, and the 1991 target date for completion is drawing close.

Most of the completed work has been structural and mechanical in nature, with only a few projects clearly visible to the visitor. While the entry mall improvements and some of the exterior work is apparent, a great deal of time, effort, and money has been devoted to "invisible" yet essential tasks such as reinforcing walls, erecting and repairing structural supports, installing new roofs, and completely replacing and upgrading heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning systems.

All this work, mandated by the Board and the legislature, was necessitated by nearly five decades of deferred maintenance, which created conditions that were not only substandard from the point of view of state building codes, but an imminent threat to



the Museum's collections, visitors, volunteers, and staff.

Other deterioration has kept the quality of the presentation of the Museum's collections far below the levels considered standard in the museum industry, and clearly far below the level of quality of the Museum's collections themselves.

This year marks the beginning of the final phase of the project, highlighted by repair and restoration of the more-visible elements of the Art Galleries and Ca' d'Zan as well as the reinstallation of the Circus Galleries.

In the next newsletter, I will discuss the basic ideas adopted by the Board, the staff, and the legislature to guide this important restoration. Meanwhile, keep watching . . . and please excuse the dust and inconvenience.



## Fourth-annual Museum Gala Promises Glamour, Fun

Following on the success of the Museum's October Un-Gala Gala, it's time to start planning for the annual black-tie Gala, coming up in January.

This year's Gala will be held on Saturday, January 21, at the Museum. Cocktails will begin at 7 p.m., followed by dinner and dancing.

Tickets for this elegant, formal evening are \$250 per person.

Thanks go to the committee members who made this year's Un-Gala Gala such a successful event. More than 700 people attended the Un-Gala Gala on Saturday evening, October 8, enjoying a buffet dinner and dancing until after midnight.

## Meet the Staff:

# Financial Officer Barbara Bruening Finds Strength in Numbers



**Barbara Bruening**

The Museum's financial operations have been professionalized and substantially upgraded in the past two years with the Director's appointment of chief financial officer Barbara Bruening to manage and oversee these important changes.

One of the most significant upgrades has been the automation of the finance department, completed in February, 1987. All financial records and billing are now

computerized, which has streamlined accounting procedures considerably. And a new budgeting system, inaugurated early last year, now gives the Museum's department heads greater responsibility for creating and controlling their own budgets.

The finance department itself has also been reorganized to provide better internal controls and a smoother flow of operations.

In addition, a new reporting system now divides expenses between departmental operations and inter-departmental programs, to facilitate billing and payments and keep expenses better in line, and most importantly to maintain restricted funds properly. "This reporting system functions as a tool to help manage the operations of the Museum's various departments and determine what they really cost, as well as to establish priorities in meeting the departments' objectives and to assure donors that their contributions are well spent," Bruening explains.

In addition to overseeing the Museum's financial operations, Bruening, who joined the Museum in June, 1986, and was appointed chief financial officer by the Director in May, 1987, supervises the personnel department, the Museum shops, and the restaurant operation. She brings a unique background to her current position: a registered nurse, she began her career supervising a coronary intensive-care unit in a hospital in her native St. Louis.

"I worked in nursing for about 2½ years," Bruening notes. "Then I began to realize that the part of the job I was best at and enjoyed the

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most was analyzing the medical data and working with the high-tech life-support equipment — tasks that took advantage of my analytical abilities and mathematical skills."

Deciding to capitalize on those abilities, Bruening enrolled in the University of Florida's School of Business, earning an M.B.A. degree with a concentration in finance. While a graduate student, she worked with one of her professors in writing financial-management textbooks.

"After graduation I interviewed for the typical business-school jobs in banking and finance," Bruening recalls. "Then I saw a notice on a bulletin board about an opening in the Museum's financial department. I came to Sarasota, and fell in love with the Museum at first sight."

Today Bruening enjoys putting her business and financial skills to work "in a different way than just looking at the bottom line," as she puts it. "The finance department is here to support the main focus of the Museum — its collections," Bruening says. "Of course, it has been extremely important to get the financial operation in the best possible shape, but we are ultimately just a means to an end, which is bringing the collection to the public in the best possible way. That's what makes my job particularly rewarding." 

### The New Museum Guidebook: The Perfect Gift!

Need a unique idea for a gift for friends or family this holiday season? Choose *The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art*, the new four-color book on the Museum and its founders. You can purchase copies at any Museum shop, or order them with this coupon and have the Museum mail them for you.

Please include check or money order for \$9.95 for each gift copy (Museum members pay only \$8.95), plus \$4.55 per book, total \$14.50, (\$13.50 for members) for postage, handling, and sales tax. Order early for holiday giving!

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