

DC Art Auction: A Capital Idea

By Beth Resler

The Washington, D.C. alumni club successfully blends the financial and the aesthetic

The OU School of Art has infiltrated the Pentagon—with an anti-establishment painting. P. J. Michael Johns' four-star ape general is headed for the office of Lewis A. Chatham, of the Defense Department's Office of Media Accreditation and Tours. Chatham had to escalate a fight for the painting at the Washington area OU Alumni Club's champagne art auction Nov. 3, bidding against an enthusiastic Army brat sitting behind him. "Well, if that's where it will end up, it's yours," the daughter of a career military man said when Mrs. Chatham told her where her husband planned to hang the picture.

The Chatham acquisition was one of many during the four-hour sale. By the time midnight rolled around 72 paintings, sketches, sculptures, metal casts, and jewelry had been purchased by some of the more than 250 people who had attended the first annual OU art auction in the nation's capital.

The auction was held in the American Association of University Women

building, a glassy, contemporary structure in Foggy Bottom which mingles with a highly statted and expensive section of condominiums. The 176 pieces of art listed in the program were exhibited all day Friday, the day of the auction, in an auditorium on the second floor, where the auction was held at 8 p.m.

A great deal of the credit for the very successful affair goes to Max N. Berry, a Washington attorney and an officer in the D.C. chapter of the Alumni Association. The inspiration for the auction was Berry's, and as chairman of the art auction committee, he was largely responsible for the arrangements which resulted in a most rewarding evening, aesthetically and financially.

An enthusiastic audience paid \$2,800 for the various works auctioned by Zed Williams and Benjamin Weschler, professional auctioneers from the firm of Adam A. Weschler & Son, Inc., which donated their services. All the participating artists were associated with the School of Art, thirteen as graduate students,

four as undergraduates, and twelve as members of the faculty. The money was divided among the artists, the School of Art, and the Washington club. The latter plans to contribute its share to the Alumni Development Fund.

The atmosphere was relaxed, friendly, and noisily informal throughout the evening, the only tension discernible appearing among the persons engaged in bidding for the objects which they just had to have. The audience was predominantly young, people in their thirties and forties, and most of the purchasers were also from this age group. This seemed appropriate, for practically all the art that was offered was contemporary in its approach and technique. There were a few grumbles at the lack of more traditional pieces, but the overwhelming reaction was enthusiasm for the works shown. Most were impressed with the quality of the showing.

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Auctioneers Benjamin Wechsler and Zed Williams conduct bidding on print of Beatle Ringo Starr, bought by Carl Albert for daughter.



Good humored in defeat, alumni club president Bradley McDonald and wife Ann smile after their bidding on a piece fell short.

Some people, including a few members of the committee, auctioneers, and Prof. Joe Hobbs, director of the School of Art, worried during the sale that prices were too low. Several items didn't meet a minimum price and were withdrawn. "The oils definitely did go low," said Berry, "but on the other hand, the prints and ceramics brought more than we expected. A print that might have sold in a gallery for \$5 went for as much as \$20 to \$25."

The buy of the show unquestionably was Prof. Eugene Bavinger's "Inscriptions," a gold-on-buff polyurethane rigid foam hanging of 16 foot-square blocks. Attorney Paul Daniels, after a tense round of quiet bidding, won the piece for \$260. "I couldn't afford it," a jubilant friend said in congratulating him, "but I can afford a round of champagne." And with that they retired to the refreshment table.

The price of the Bavinger piece when it was withdrawn from a gallery show for the auction, a committee member confided, had been \$750.

Tulsa World reporter Malvina Stephenson bought a second Bavinger polyurethane, "Approaching Cloud." The third, not sold at auction, was bought the next morning in Bradley MacDonald's garage. MacDonald, an attorney, is president of the OU alumni group in Washington, and the unsold works were stored in

his garage prior to return shipment to Norman. The buyer was Max Berry.

Cathy Christie, of the Washington bureau of the Daily Oklahoman, wrote that Miss Stephenson hadn't even approached "Approaching Cloud" before she had an offer from Mrs. Dick Holcomb to buy it at a profit. Mrs. Holcomb and her husband, a member of the President's commission on civil disorders, had been bidders, had lost, and had had second thoughts. "We realized we didn't go high enough," said Mrs. Holcomb. Miss Stephenson decided to keep her Bavinger, however.

Cathy also told of two of the nudes that were shown. One, "Sleeping Nude" by Fred Myers, was bought by bachelor John Meek, while another alumnus, Henry Zapruder, purchased the nude painting, "Running Figure" by Wolfgang Stoerchle, which he later returned, at the suggestion of his wife, for a more modest study of a tennis player.

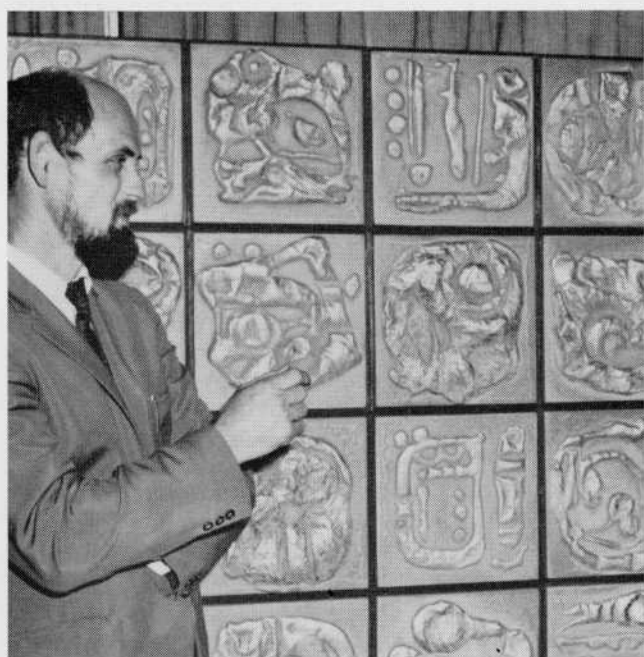
The show had an impressive big-name backing. Majority Leader and Mrs. Carl Albert, Sen. and Mrs. Mike Monroney, and Mrs. Perle Mesta were listed as its honorary chairmen. The Alberts and Mrs. Monroney, who came with Mrs. Bud Wilkinson, were present, but Sen. Monroney was not in Washington and Mrs. Mesta was ill and unable to come. (The Alberts bought a print of Beatle Ringo Starr for their daughter.) Honorary pat-

rons were Sen. and Mrs. Fred Harris and Representatives Page Belcher, Tom Steed, Ed Edmondson, James Smith, and John Jarman.

And there was even an Aggie on the committee—Helen Newman, OSU '64, a former Oklahoma City school teacher who is now a member of Rep. Albert's staff. "When Max came into the office recruiting people to work, I guess he never thought to ask where I went to school," she said.

Other committee members were Jessie A. Bloodworth, Mrs. Carter Bradley, Cathy Christie, Mrs. James C. Fisk, Mr. and Mrs. Peyton George, Mrs. Richard B. Holcomb, Stephen Janger, Mrs. Hugh B. Key II, Mrs. Paul R. McDaniel, Mr. and Mrs. McDonald, Helen Newman, John Montgomery, Mr. and Mrs. Joe C. Ray, Beth Resler, Corb Sarchet, Mrs. John J. Thomasson, Mrs. Moody R. Tidwell Jr., Mrs. Jerry Williams, and John C. Williams.

While more than 100 pieces were unsold, the committee and the school were pleased with the auction. The University and its art school received same very favorable publicity from the event, a number of people went away happy with some fine pieces of art, and the rest were impressed with what they had seen. Another auction will probably be held next year, and Max Berry says that because of the things learned from this year's show, the next one will be even better. END



Joe Hobbs, director of OU's School of Art, stands with the "buy of the show," Eugene Bavinger's "Inscriptions," sold for \$260.



Three who helped arrange the auction were (left to right) Dean Donald Clark, honorary chairman Albert, and chairman Max Berry.