

MEMORANDUM

April 9, 1981

TO: Development Committee, Board
of Trustees Bennington College

FROM: Lois Chazen, Chairman Art Auction Committee

The art auction at Sotheby Parke Bernet, March 11, 1980, was an evolutionary product of two earlier auctions to benefit the college. From the beginning the purpose was twofold: to demonstrate the standards of excellence and originality in art for which the college is known and also to raise money to endow a regional scholarship program. All three efforts were produced by the hard work of a small committee, augmented and cheered by an equally small administrative staff at the college.

The Little Red School House raised \$22,000 at an art auction at Sotheby Parke Bernet two years ago. The Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, with the help of an enormous committee, well over 100, numbering among them many of the prime movers in the New York and international set, has averaged about \$150,000 in earnings each year for their benefit. The Bennington College Art Auction Committee netted \$174,232 in cash proceeds and new acquisitions for the benefit of the college.

Most benefit auctions have low or no reserves. To protect our artists, many of whom are current and former faculty, it was necessary to keep our reserves high, quite close to the gallery prices. The long-term benefits in protecting the artists' market have been great. The notion that the college loses interest in its alumni and ex-faculty once they leave was dispelled. Some went on to work for the 50th anniversary campaign and others, including Kenneth Noland, have told me they would be willing to donate major works to our Acquisitions Program once that becomes established.

The auction also had a number of collateral benefits.

... In deciding upon which pieces in the college collection were to be used, it became apparent that there was no catalogue of the college art holdings. Much effort had been put into inventories, but clearly more work had to be done, to locate, photograph, identify, refine, evaluate, insure and protect the entire collection. This is now in progress.

... The college policy in past years was not to collect art. However, now that we have a splendid resource in VAPA and in the Usdan Gallery, it seems appropriate that significant efforts should be made in this area. The list of artists who taught and worked at the college is illustrious. Many are devoted to the college and are prepared to make major gifts. So imbued with the former philosophy, Isaac Witkin asked me, "Would Bennington really want to keep my work?" The foresight of Joe Murphy and Susan Lewis are to be congratulated. With their strong interest and support of the Art Acquisition Committee chaired by Gene Goossen, and an innovative approach to collection, the college should be able to revitalize its image in the world of art.

... Collectors and alumni who own contemporary and art of all periods have been alerted through the art auctions that the college will accept work of quality in lieu of or in addition to cash gifts.

... Through the efforts of the Auction Committee, we now have three Paul Feeley paintings in our collection. Last year we had none.

... Alumni and friends of the college who have not been active in college affairs for many years and who were contacted to take part in the art auction have been refreshed in their enthusiasm to take part once again.

^{ago} ... In connection with the 50th Anniversary Fund, two years' plans were initiated to do a major travelling art exhibit of Bennington related artists. Seven to ten artists were ~~to be~~ selected by a distinguished guest curator. The exhibit was planned to tour for one year to eight or nine museums in areas of high alumni concentration. Collateral events of an artistic and fund-raising nature were to be carefully planned with help ~~of~~ our Public Relations Advisory Council. This idea met with great interest outside of the college community. It was tabled for lack of manpower when the art auction at Sotheby's was scheduled sooner than anticipated. With the support of the Art Acquisition Committee, and before NEH and NEA funds are markedly curtailed, we might re-consider this project.