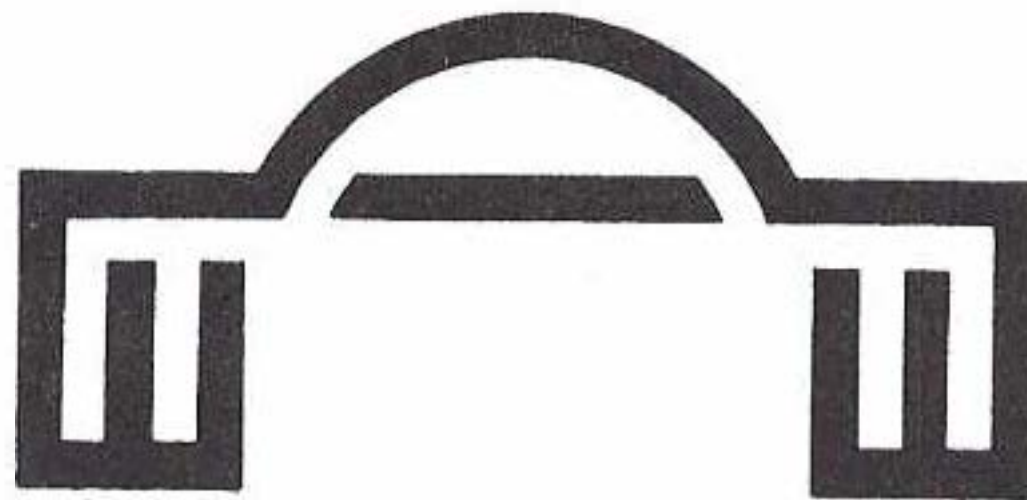




NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR
PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH INC.

NEWS RELEASE

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CENTER CRITICIZES PROPOSED ART MUSEUM POLICY CHANGES

Five proposals by the N.C. Museum of Art may curb the accessibility to the museum by North Carolina artists and the public when it opens in April, says the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research in a special arts issue of its magazine, N.C. Insight. The museum staff defend the proposals as necessary if the museum is to heighten the quality of its programs.

The museum staff propose to:

- change the N.C. Artists Exhibition from an annual to a triennial event;
- close the Collectors Gallery where N.C. artists formerly sold or rented their works;
- have no N.C. Film Festival;
- curtail the schedule of museum-sponsored traveling exhibitions across the state; and
- limit the use of the Mary Duke Biddle Gallery by blind persons.

The first three of the five proposals reflect the museum's approach to North Carolina artists and the second two affect accessibility to the museum's holdings. In all five cases, the question is how much weight the museum should give to quality and how much to accessibility.

"The N.C. Museum of Art stands at a crossroads in its history," says Michael Matros, the associate editor of the arts issue and co-author of the museum article. "But these five proposals may alienate the very people the museum exists to serve--the general public and North Carolina artists."

1. Changing the N.C. Artists Exhibition to a Triennial Event

Dr. Edgar Peters Bowron, the N.C. Museum of Art director, defends the change of the N.C. artists exhibition from an annual to triennial event. "We feel strongly that we want to show the work of N.C. artists and we will, by having a number of exhibitions," he says. "At the same time, we're derelict if we're not showing works of art that are of high quality.... 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." The N.C. Artists Exhibition has been an annual event for over 40 years.

2. Closing the Collectors Gallery

The Collectors Gallery, a place for North Carolina artists to sell and rent their works, will no longer exist in the new museum. Bowron says, "Museums are educational institutions, and most professionals agree that the sale of art is not one of their legitimate functions." However, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as well as the century-old Philadelphia Museum of Art run art-rental galleries. One of the two other state museums in the U.S., the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, also permits artists to sell their works in a sales gallery.

3. Not Scheduling 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. Author Matros says that if the museum administrators exclude this festival from long-range plans, N.C. filmmakers will be hard-pressed to find a sponsor of comparable prestige and resources.

4. Reducing the Schedule of Traveling Exhibitions

The education department of the museum is scaling down traveling exhibits, which annually have hung in libraries, schools, and the museum's 12 affiliate galleries across the state. Education Director Joseph Covington says the museum will continue statewide services, but financial constraints are forcing the museum to cut back on the traveling exhibits. Still, Matros points out that about 80,000 people a year have viewed the various traveling exhibits in recent years, while the museum topped 100,000 visitors in only one year (1978) in its old downtown Raleigh location. The Virginia state art museum offers six shows in traveling exhibitions this year.

5. Limiting Use of the Biddle Gallery for the Blind

The Mary Duke Biddle Gallery was a part of the old museum where blind--or sighted--persons could actually touch works of art, mostly sculpture. The Gallery also organized occasional shows of works by adult mentally retarded residents of state institutions. Covington says the pieces in the Biddle Gallery have been worn down over the years from too much touching. In the new facility museum staff say volunteer guides will provide a more complete museum experience for persons legally blind but with some vision by describing a wider range of art pieces.

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"Not many people realize that the N.C. Museum of Art doesn't just hang paintings; it sets the tone for art policy in the state," says Matros. "Much attention will probably be given to the new museum's April 9 opening, but attention also needs to be given to the new policies proposed by the museum staff because they break with five traditions that have served the state well."

The arts issue of Insight also takes a look at the controversial Art Museum Building Commission. One of thirty-seven boards or commissions in the Dept. of Cultural Resources, the Commission was created in 1967 to oversee the construction of a new museum. Both Museum of Art Director Bowron and Dept. of Cultural Resources Deputy Secretary Larry Wheeler are quoted as saying the Commission has outlived its usefulness and should probably be abolished by the 1983 General Assembly.

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