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#### CONTENTS

## A Silver Lining: Twenty-Five Years of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts

FRANK MUHLY

35

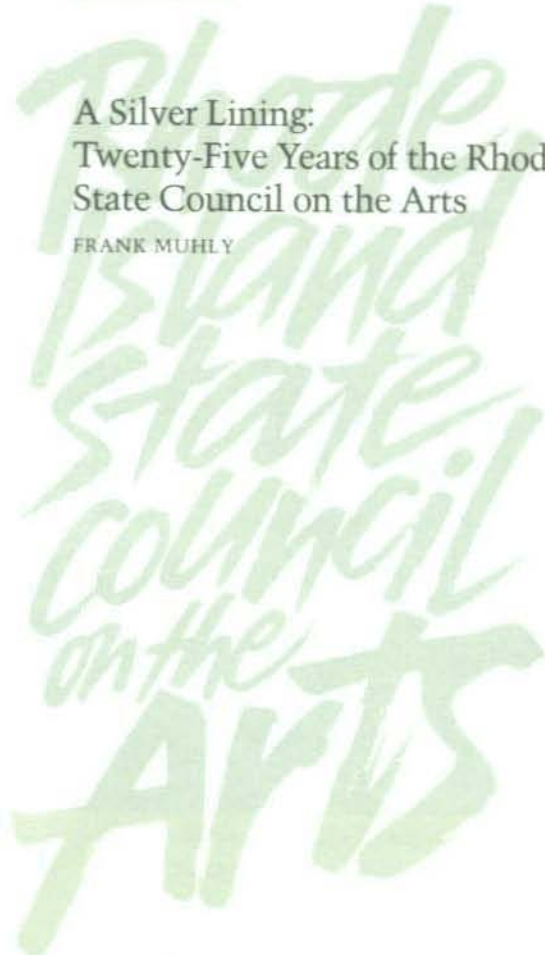






Figure 1.  
"Vermont 118, 1987," a photogravure by  
Aaron Siskind. The late Aaron Siskind was  
one of forty-nine distinguished recipients of  
the Governor's Art Award, which honors  
individuals and institutions who have  
made signal contributions to the life of the  
arts in Rhode Island. Collection of the  
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of  
Design; gift of Paul Taylor in memory of  
Aaron Siskind. Photo by Cathy Carver.

## A Silver Lining: Twenty-Five Years of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts

FRANK MUHLY

In a brightly lit workroom in the Adult Correctional Institutions, a prisoner works on a drawing. Down the hall a door swings shut, with the sound of metal on metal. The level of background noise indicates more than anything else how precious privacy is here. And yet the man works on, intent, oblivious, pursing his lips in concentration. In a sense, no teacher has ever had a more captive audience, but the artist running this workshop knows that only her wits and her honesty hold this man's spirit at attention.

In a workshop in the basement of his house, a Hmong musician, a master of his instrument, assembles a traditional flute—a *kheng*—whose form has gone unchanged in his native country for thousands of years. He drills holes in a carefully selected piece of bamboo and cleans the edges with his finger. Then he inserts another length of bamboo as a reed. Next to him a young man, his apprentice, watches every move in silence.

In a neighborhood community center, a student from an inner-city high school dribbles down the basketball court, something he's done a thousand times before. Suddenly he fakes and whips the ball behind his back. The flashy pass wings out of bounds, into the hands of a dance teacher. She asks him to do it again, this time without the ball, and this time consciously remembering the moves he makes. Together they will translate the unconsciously graceful moves of a schoolyard athlete into a stylized piece of choreography, and in the process they will make a classroom of youngsters feel in their bodies that dance is as demanding and rewarding as any sport.

What binds these activities together is that they are all underwritten by the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts. In fact, without RISCA's support they very likely would not be taking place at all. In classrooms, in studios and workshops, in conference centers, in the boardrooms of corporations, and in the halls of the State House, RISCA has become a familiar presence. In twenty-five years the Arts Council has changed the cultural landscape of Rhode Island. It has initiated and overseen programs to bring art into the schools, the prisons, and the workplace; it has brought art to the public, and the public to art, in exhibits and concerts and festivals, making the liberating tools of art accessible and affordable to millions of Rhode Islanders, from children to senior citizens.

The visible measures of the council's accomplishment—rising attendance figures, positive economic impact statements, a varied and successful grants program—are impressive in themselves. Even more important, however, is the council's success in rescuing art from the elitist image it enjoyed twenty-five years ago, a success RISCA accomplished by bringing the color and movement and creative power of art directly into the main currents of public life. As Claiborne Pell, its premier congressional sponsor, intended, the work of the Arts Council has simply become part of the fabric of Rhode Island. What the Arts Council and its supporters mark in this anniversary is how far the council and



its programs have come in twenty-five years—and how far they still have to go in the next twenty-five years if they are truly to continue to fulfill their mandate.

In the United States, government support of the arts sometimes seems to be a creature sprung from the pages of a medieval bestiary, a creature with the body of a lion and the head of a rooster, for this support attempts to harness two different sensibilities, two opposing energies, for a common good. As an agency caught in the middle of this lively experiment in the marriage of art and politics, and answerable to the urges of both, the Arts Council has had a colorful, and sometimes controversial, history. Like some works of art, it has been alternately exuberant and conservative, brash and cautious; and sometimes, like Walt Whitman, it has frankly had no choice but to embrace contradictions.



There was art in Rhode Island before the existence of the Arts Council, although it might not have been apparent from reading the newspapers. In the 1950s the arts, like a midday roast, were considered proper fare only for Sundays. Notices of openings and reviews of plays and films and concerts would appear in the weekly women's section of the *Providence Journal*, but usually with datelines from Tanglewood or Boston or Broadway or Hollywood. When there was a featured profile of some native Rhode Islander in the arts, chances are it would be a piece on an author or actor who had left home to seek fame and fortune elsewhere. The arts and artists of the Rhode Island School of Design, a font of creativity at the foot of College Hill, continued to percolate, and occasionally an article about them would surface in the press. In general, however, the implications of the coverage were clear: in its importance to the life of the state, art was somewhere above the domestic sciences of cooking and gardening, of interest



Figure 2.  
Underwritten by a number of Arts Council programs, inventive touring companies in dance and music appear at the state's colleges and universities.

Figure 3.  
Three participants in the Puppet Workshop.  
Photo by Tom Chambers.





only to women and men of leisure. A reader of the newspapers of the day would conclude that art, whatever it was, usually occurred elsewhere.

During the first half of the 1960s a separate Amusement and Arts section appeared in the *Providence Journal*, but it was included in the women's section, and it was primarily concerned with Broadway plays and Hollywood films. In terms of exposure, the visual arts tended to be the province of local art shows and clubs. In Providence, however, one local initiative would grow into something much more significant.

When the Providence Kiwanis Club was thinking about mounting a local art show in the early 1960s, it sought a partner in the Junior Chamber of Commerce. The Jaycees were indeed receptive; in fact, as one of their officers remembers, they thought the idea was so good that they appropriated it themselves and ambitiously expanded its scope. Under their sponsorship the show became a serious statewide competition. Nationally known judges screened entries and awarded substantial prizes, and the process culminated in a gala exhibition—hundreds of pieces of painting, sculpture, and drawing displayed under tents in Burnside Park next to Kennedy Plaza. It felt as if the circus had come to town. Those were more innocent—and more prosperous—times in downtown Providence. In the street display windows of the Outlet and Shepard's department stores, artists whose work had not been admitted to the official show hung their creations anyway, in a good-spirited *salon des refusés*. It said a great deal about the arts in Rhode Island that this giant show had had its genesis in the ad hoc impulse of a local service club, and it said even more that the well of talent it had tapped and put on display was so surprisingly rich and abundant.

In those days public support for the arts was expressed through the legislature in a curious system of logrolling by no means unique to Rhode Island. Near the end of a legislative session, an omnibus bill would be rolled up to the door, and into it each interested legislator would shoehorn his favorite worthy activity—a private orchestra, for example, or a theater group. Each art program thus had its own budget request, its own line item, and each, in theory at least, was equal to the others. As a system, this had the advantage of fostering a close relationship between a handful of arts organizations and their sponsoring legislators, but it left a great deal to be desired in the way of accountability. Twenty-five years later the same three Rhode Island cultural eminences—Trinity Repertory Company, the Rhode Island School of Design's Museum of Art, and the Rhode Island Philharmonic—still receive direct state aid for the educational component of their programs.

Recognizing the need for a better mousetrap, in 1963 Governor John Notte appointed the Rhode Island Cultural Arts Commission, chaired by lawyer-legislator Pat Nero, to coordinate the arts in Rhode Island. This modest commission was the forerunner of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts. For the first few years of its existence its mandate was fairly simple; one of its principal functions, for example, was the creation of a comprehensive calendar of arts events throughout the state. But the commission was also charged with the exploration of more weighty matters, like the possibility of a state museum (among the backers of this idea were local artists who felt shut out of RISD's museum and the yearly arts festival in downtown Providence). At that time there was no national coordination of arts activity, but there was something in the wind in Washington. Barnet Fain remembers with amusement a meeting of the League of American Symphony Orchestras that he attended in Washington as a representative of the state's Cultural Arts Commission. The meeting featured a debate about whether





private arts organizations should support a bill then before Congress, a bill that had exciting and unsettling implications for the future: it was a proposal to establish a national endowment to support the arts in America, and one of its sponsors was Rhode Island senator Claiborne Pell.

Looking back today, Senator Pell remembers how serendipitous the establishment of the endowment was. "I was always interested in the visual arts," he recalls, "and my dear friend Senator [Jacob] Javits was interested in the performing arts, and we each had little bits of legislation we had introduced for two separate foundations. Then we thought, 'This is ridiculous: let's combine these foundations and get it through that way.'"

It still took a number of legislative sessions to shepherd the arts endowment through the Congress, although the process was helped when Pell and Javits aligned themselves with another Rhode Islander, Barnaby Keeney, the past president of Brown University, who was then working in Washington as head of the new humanities endowment. The National Endowment for the Arts was created in 1965. For Pell, a sponsor, it was not only a particular satisfaction in itself but an example of the nation's prevailing sense of optimism and confidence. "It was a very heady time," the senator remembers. "I think we passed more creative legislation during those years than we have in all the years since."

To head the new federal agency, Congress appointed Roger Stevens, a stockbroker, Broadway producer, and Democratic party supporter. The rationale for his mandate was gracefully spelled out: "While no government can call a great artist or scholar into existence, it is necessary for the federal government to help create and sustain not only a climate encouraging freedom of thought, imagination and inquiry, but also the material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent." "Material conditions"—money, in other words—would do nicely as a tangible expression of the government's concern.

During those first years, however, the resources of the new National Endowment for the Arts were hardly equal to the stirring rhetoric of its enabling legislation. In fiscal 1966, the second year of the endowment's existence, Stevens had only \$2.5 million to distribute. By way of comparison, the Ford Foundation that year gave out \$85 million in support of symphony orchestras throughout the country.

Pell and his Senate cosponsors had looked to the structure and guidelines of the already existing New York State Arts Council when they drafted their national legislation. To be eligible for the federal money that was allocated to the states in the new arts-endowment legislation, each state was now required to establish its own arts council. The enabling legislation that was drafted for Rhode Island's State Council on the Arts charged the agency with the tasks of stimulating the arts throughout Rhode Island, recommending new programs to meet new needs, encouraging the growth of local arts councils, and encouraging and protecting freedom of artistic expression. While recognizing the importance of the arts in the general culture and heritage of the state (and their increasing importance in what the drafters sanguinely saw as the "increasing leisure time" of Rhode Islanders), the legislation also firmly allied the new agency with the educational mission of the state. In the years since then, the Arts Council has taken this latter component of its mandate very seriously.

John Chafee was Rhode Island's governor when the National Endowment for the Arts was created. "I came from a household where I have to candidly admit that the arts were not prominent," Senator Chafee now remembers; "tennis, wrestling, horseback riding, hockey—but not the arts." Nonartistic it might have been, but



Chafee's sports-rich upbringing had provided him with a sense of timing and adroit maneuver, skills that four years as governor had not dulled. In 1967 he responded to the challenge posed by the new legislation—and its inherent prospect of a windfall for Rhode Island—with a sportsman's instinct for the open man downcourt. In his composition of the state's first 'official' arts council, he put together a team that could compete on a national level.

As chairman, he appointed Barnet Fain, already a member of the Cultural Arts Commission. Politics was not an issue. "I didn't know then, and I don't know now, whether Bunny Fain is a Democrat or a Republican," Senator Chafee recalls. "I just knew that he always had a lot of common sense, and I had a lot of confidence in him." That first council, a distinguished group, included architectural historian William Jordy of Brown University; Danny Robbins, the director of the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design; collector Joseph Fazzano; and Anne Utter, a community leader in the arts from Westerly.

The money arrived—in a trickle at first, but then in a more dependable and useful stream. The total federal allocation in 1967, the first year of RISCA's existence, was \$3,625. By the fourth year it would become \$111,000. To the surprise of many, the initial grants had no strings attached, quieting some fears that Uncle Sam was going to dictate what he wanted done with his gifts. The way was clear for an enterprising state arts council to show the National Endowment some ways in which the benevolent fertility of its money might profitably be applied to the roots of the arts.

As a newly minted state agency, the Arts Council was assigned quarters that were less than Medicean: for the first few years RISCA's offices were located just down the hall from those of the state Transit Authority in the old trolley car barn on Melrose Avenue in Providence. But despite these modest accommodations, the council's early years were auspicious. From the beginning it was clear to the council that Rhode Island, by the good fortune of the National Endowment's parentage in Washington, and by the historical accident of the state's small size, was in a particularly favorable position. In the general tide that was lifting all boats, Rhode Island's were poised to rise faster than most.

"We saw ourselves as a model agency," Fain remembers. "We were a small enough state that federal money would make a real difference here. We saw ourselves as a proving ground, and we sold that idea to the National Endowment. We said, 'Why not come to Rhode Island where your money will have an impact across the board?' And they did."

Those first years of the Arts Council's life saw a number of ground-breaking grants from the NEA, and some equally innovative programs that originated in Rhode Island and became models later replicated elsewhere. In 1973, for example, Rhode Island became the first state to award grants to institutions without tying the money to specific programs; and Providence and New Orleans became the first recipients of funds to subsidize theater experiences for school children, a program that became known as Project Discovery. This experimental program was jointly administered by the NEA, the United States Department of Education, and local departments of education. Of the pilot projects from the National Endowment's earliest years, it is the only one still running.

The chairman of the Arts Council and its executive director, Hugo Leckey, enjoyed a close working relationship, and there was strong support from Congress, from the Rhode Island legislature, and from local artists. In addition, for better or worse, the National Endowment in Washington had not yet developed the insulating





Figure 4.  
The Arts Council has underwritten twenty-five years of classical music in Rhode Island, including the Music in the Mansions program of the Newport Music Festival. Photo by John Hopf.

layers of bureaucracy that every federal agency eventually accretes. "In those days," Fain recalls, "you could pick up the phone and call Roger Stevens in Washington. And talk to him."

Perhaps the biggest coup of the first decade of RISCA's existence occurred in 1969, when the council won the largest grant the National Endowment for the Arts had yet given out: a three-year grant, providing \$350,000 each year, to promote the arts in education. The aim of the program was to bring into the state's classrooms the inspiring—and disquieting—presence of individual working artists. The NEA and the Arts Council hoped to concentrate the artists' energies on this new and delightful problem of integrating the arts with the education of the next generation of citizens. The pilot Arts in Education program was run out of Arts Council offices, but it had its own separate budget.

If it was difficult to choose artists, it was often even more difficult to choose the schools to which they would be sent, and in which they would appear one morning to work their magic. Often they found their assigned room had been given to someone else, or a special assembly had preempted their class time. Once, a visiting artist simply set up his easel in the hallway and, with

students streaming past him, got down to work. It was a challenging program to administer—by trial and error the director, Arthur Custer, had to divine what mix of artistic talent and individual school program would likely prove stimulating, but not combustible—but it was an impressive program to observe in action. The encounters between students, the visiting artists, and the schools' permanent art teachers were often baffling, but always exhilarating.

The Arts Council learned many lessons, big and small, from observing the first three years of this program. It learned, for example, that elementary school teachers—because they were already generalists, and hence accustomed to thinking across the lines of the disciplines—were often the most innovative hosts for the visiting artists. The council also learned that the energy and excitement of the project were vital and contagious. When the first three-year pilot grant expired, the council applied for and received the first of its own Arts in Education program grants, with the provision that *its* artists would be paid a full-time salary.

By all accounts the first years of the Arts Council were an exercise in harmony. The dew was still fresh on the ideal; the council faced the intoxicating prospect of increasing funds and a field wide open for innovative programs; and Fain and Leckey were as fully in step as a vaudeville soft-shoe dance team who had been



on the road for years. Fain worked the Rhode Island legislature and the National Endowment, while Leckey, a writer, quietly nurtured what he calls “the subtle network of associations” that, even then, was one of the strengths of Rhode Island’s art community. As tempting as it might have been to measure the council’s success only by its burgeoning budget, a more subtle wind was blowing across the arts landscape—a sense of cooperation, of promise. “For us, really, the money wasn’t as important as the environment we were creating,” remembers Leckey. “That was far richer than anything we could have created with all the money in the world.”

When Anne Vermel became the agency’s second executive director in 1972, the state arts councils were just beginning to become a potent political force around the country. Although some observers suspected that the staff of the National Endowment in Washington was not particularly enthusiastic about the individual state programs, NEA chief Nancy Hanks clearly understood that block grants to the states were a good way to retain the good will of the Congress. During this period Hanks traveled from state to state, sometimes shoring up a fledgling program, sometimes actually encouraging a state to start one. At any appropriations hearing in Congress, Hanks also realized, fifty voices representing fifty separate state arts councils would be a formidable choir, even if they didn’t always follow the lead of the NEA on any particular issue.

In Rhode Island, innovations continued, aided by the council’s careful nurturing of its excellent relationship with the National Endowment and the state legislature. The new director had a background in theater—she came to Rhode Island from managing the Hartford Stage Company—and so where her predecessor’s style had been self-effacing, Anne Vermel took office with a different sense of the dramatic potential of her position. She became known in the arts community and in the legislature, usually affectionately, as “the Red Queen,” and not only because of the color of her hair. “That’s right, ‘Off with their heads!’” she remembers with a laugh. “At that time in my life I guess I was impatient with bureaucracy, and maybe I didn’t understand politics as well as I do now.”

As the council’s budget expanded, its connections to the legislature became even more important. By 1973 RISCA was receiving \$138,000 from the state and \$245,000 from federal allocations. Both locally and nationally its programs were seen as innovative and successful. After Barnet Fain stepped down as chairman in 1974, the position was filled first by Norman Tilles and then by Vincent Buonnano. It was to these men that the council now looked for leadership and advice in navigating the corridors of the State House.

Whatever Anne Vermel might think in retrospect about her lack of tact in the “political” aspects of her job, the perception on the ground at the time was that she brought to the workings of the Arts Council a flamboyant energy and an imaginative sense of the bully pulpit she had inherited. The *Providence Journal* ran a feature on the new director during her first weeks in office. Under an attractive photo of a smiling Vermel, her legs crossed insouciantly, ran the caption “The Woman With Half A Million Dollars to Give Away.” Whether you were an artist, a politician, or simply a taxpayer, it was hard not to sit up and take notice.



Meanwhile, the Arts Council had moved from Providence to a gracious nineteenth-century mansion in East Greenwich. The Lyle House had been donated to the RISD museum on the condition that it remain open to the public. Council chairman Fain struck a deal with RISD museum director Daniel Robbins, himself one of Governor Chafee’s original appointees to the council, through which the Arts Council would use the house for its offices while keeping the



Figure 5.  
Participating in a program in which students learn from other students, this young Hmong musician served as a resident artist in a school in Providence. Photo by Winifred Lambrecht.



main room open as a museum. As offices went, the gracious Lyle mansion was a decided improvement on the Melrose Avenue trolley barn, and its charm seemed to make up for its rather isolated location.

In 1973 the council for the first time began to give grants-in-aid awards to individual artists, with no strings attached. It was among the first arts councils in the United States to do so. In addition, two new programs were established: Arts and Aging, and Arts in Corrections. The innovative Arts in Education program was strengthened, and over thirty thousand people attended the first New England Regional Community Arts Festival, sponsored by the council at Roger Williams Park.

Five artists were hired by the council to serve as resident professionals in their fields and as ambassadors to the state's various art communities. Their job was to travel around Rhode Island and keep the council informed about new ideas in their disciplines; to stir things up; to develop programs. They were expected to be on their toes. One artist in residence in the visual arts, taking a break from his labors at Lupo's, a downtown watering hole for the raffish set, caught a performance by Bo Diddley. The artist happened to be conducting a series of silkscreen workshops at the Adult Correctional Institutions at the time, and knowing something of Mr. Diddley's past, he remembered that the famous rhythm-and-blues singer had had his own experiences with the prison system. He immediately called Cleveland Kurtz, the Arts Council's director of the relatively new Arts in Corrections program, who joined him at Lupo's, and sitting at the bar together, they convinced the singer, and his impatient manager, to stay in Rhode Island a little longer than they had planned. The next day Bo Diddley gave an unscheduled hour-long concert to a cheering crowd at the ACI.

These artists in residence breathed new life into the council's activities, and their comments, one participant recalls, contributed to a kind of creative lunacy at staff meetings at which new programs or guidelines were discussed. As salaried employees, the artists were guaranteed, at least on paper, a quarter of their time free to work on their own art; but no matter how much Vermel and her staff tried to honor this guarantee, it often disappeared beneath the demands of schools and communities clamoring for the artists' presence.

An artist in residence also came to be expected to help provide a liaison with the state's local arts councils. Some of these were already established, as in Lincoln, for example, or in Westerly, where the tradition of local support for the arts was symbolized by the Westerly Art Center and the summer arts festival and exhibit. (Anne Utter, one of the charter members of the Arts Council back in 1967, had been appointed precisely because of her leadership in this strong Westerly program, which was already in full stride when the state council was just learning to walk.) Other local councils, such as those in Warwick and Woonsocket, were just beginning to develop programs in their neighborhoods. The Arts Council might send an artist in residence and one or two staff people out to these community-based groups to share ideas about successful programs or pitfalls. Established local arts councils were proud of their allocations from town governments—one observer remembers how salutary it was to see arts supporters publicly defending their place in a town budget in competition, say, with gypsy-moth control or other essential services—but now, for the first time, money from the state Arts Council could supplement the local councils' private fund-raising efforts. For the participants in this relatively early art networking in Rhode Island, there was a reassuring sense that a very useful structure was being put into place, a democratic filtering of federal money down through the



Figure 6.  
This image graced the cover of a collection of photographs taken by prison inmates, one of a number of projects funded by the Arts in Corrections program with the cooperation of the state's Department of Corrections.  
Photo by Bruce Johnson.





*Figure 7.* The innovative Everett Dance Company has worked in Arts Council programs with the elderly, with Rhode Island's disabled community, and in a series of collaborative residencies in schools. Photo by Peter Hemenway.

*Figure 8.* Two Senegalese drummers, participants in an Arts Council apprenticeship program, perform at a cultural fair at the International House in Providence. The fair was partially supported by RISCA grants for multicultural activities. Photo by Winifred Lambrecht.



state council to active local groups. The size of Rhode Island made it possible not only to feel this interconnectedness but to see it firsthand in local art projects, all in a day's drive, from Lincoln to Westerly.

For better or worse, by 1975 the gears of the Arts Council were thoroughly engaged with those of the state government. The size of the council's budget alone guaranteed that; in 1974-75 its operating budget reached \$665,000. As the tide of required paperwork lapped higher around their ankles, some staff members began to feel a tension between the freewheeling past of the agency and what looked like its more corseted future. Anne Vermel, for example, began to feel that it was one of her jobs to "protect" the artists who were funded by the council from real or perceived interference from outside. In managing the increasingly complicated flow of paper and in defusing incipient crises, three staff members in particular—Agnes Slater, Arthur Newman, and Estelle "Cookie" Verte—became indispensable. During this time Estelle was beginning almost twenty years of continuous service to the council.

Vermel was an activist director, quotable and photogenic in public and breezily confident in her handling of council business. It was therefore perhaps inevitable that during her tenure many observers noted the balance of power and initiative on the council shifting perceptibly to the director's side of the scale. Taken by itself, this development only reflected the ebb and flow of responsibility that occurs in the management of any organization; but by establishing, no matter how subtly, a tradition of a strong directorship, it perhaps set the stage for some moment in the future when an assertive chairman with his own agenda might challenge this tradition.



When Anne Vermel moved on at the end of 1975 to become artistic administrator of the San Francisco Opera Company, Robin Berry, her lieutenant, was appointed to take over her position. Berry was already familiar with the arts in Rhode Island, since she had been on the Arts Council's staff for two years, charged with setting up the council's Expansion Arts program in minority communities, coordinating dance programs, and overseeing Happenings, a six-stage regional art and music festival in Roger Williams Park.

It seemed to Berry in 1976 that some feathers had been ruffled in the State House, and that if she wanted to implement the vision of her predecessors and launch the council's new programs, some fence-mending was in order. Consequently she set about using her considerable charm and intelligence to repair old alliances and forge new ones within the state agencies whose cooperation was essential to the council. Under Berry and chairman Vincent Buonanno, outreach became important and accountability a watchword. As solicitous as she was of the legislature's good will, however, Berry consciously set out to create an even wider constituency within the arts community itself as a countervailing check and balance to the influence of the State House. She created more peer review panels, enlisted more panelists, and expanded the number of grants to bring as many people as possible into the funding dialogue. Under her direction the council's publicity campaign began to reach smaller newspapers and local weeklies.

In 1975 Rhode Island was one of only two states (Connecticut was the other) to receive grants from the Commerce Department for establishing a program through which local artists would be deployed to create and support enrichment activities throughout the state. With one eye on the Muses and the other on the State House, the council disbursed \$250,000 during the next few years to over two hundred artists in forty-five diverse projects around Rhode Island. Artists climbed scaffolds to restore the gilt inside Providence's City Hall, and they sat on the floor to paint murals in elementary schools; the program helped agencies as diverse as the Providence Preservation Society and the Rhode Island School for the Deaf set up arts programs, and with true ecumenical fairness it funded both a choir in Trinity Methodist Church and a series of workshops at the Jewish Home for the Aged. The Public Arts Employment program—or PEP, as it was affectionately called—was, to be sure, a child of the WPA, born out of a late surge of 1960s governmental activism; but it was also an expression of the conviction, at some level of public policy, that artists were a potentially useful but underutilized economic resource, and that their energy could be paternally harnessed for the common good.

Yet it was not always so evident that politicians closer to home subscribed to the same beliefs. In 1975 Rhode Island governor Philip Noel proposed to slash the state appropriation for the Arts Council by almost \$400,000. A write-in campaign expressing community support for the council and its programs, organized by arts advocate groups, succeeded in deflecting this initiative, but it was a bad omen nonetheless.

In many other ways 1975 was a difficult year in the arts community. One of Rhode Island's proudest institutions was shaken by internal squabbling. Trinity Repertory Company had risen to national acclaim on the vision of its director, Adrian Hall, and the talent of the actors and actresses he had trained and nurtured. Hall was noted for his daring in selecting plays that would challenge his actors and his audience, but in the process he had been pushing the patience of his executive board, whose decisions the larger board of the Foundation for Repertory Theater usually rubber-stamped when it met, 150 members strong, in Trinity's upstairs theater. The executive board had watched with mounting concern as



Hall's theatrical experiments went repeatedly over budget and seemed likely to drive away the company's most faithful supporters.

In 1975 Hall outdid even himself. During a short period he staged a whirlwind series of plays, capped by a production of an original musical, *Aimee*, a dramatic evocation of the life of the evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson. The script called for a Model A Ford, and Hall bought one and built a reinforced ramp so the car could be driven around the theater. For Trinity's executive board, this excess was the last straw; it planned to fire Hall and ask for ratification from the whole foundation at the annual meeting. But Hall's supporters nominated an alternate slate of officers, thus inviting the foundation to turn the existing executive board out of office and to replace it with a new board sympathetic to Hall's approach. In a bit of drama appropriate to the institution, this maneuver was only narrowly defeated at the annual meeting. Hall then constituted his own governing board, the Trinity Persona Company. Now the original board owned the building, while Trinity Persona essentially owned the talent within it. Splitting the administration of the company was a daring and dangerous solution to what seemed to be an irreconcilable conflict. It would be years, in fact, before the rift between the two boards was healed, an event that occurred only when Bruce Sundlun of the Outlet Company came aboard and effected a reconciliation.

The Trinity struggle showed how easily one of Rhode Island's proudest arts organizations could be shaken—by a difference in vision or, perhaps, by artistic hubris, but also by the pressure that falling receipts put on an institution's sense of what it owed to art and what it owed to the community. At an arts fund-raiser in Providence that year, Arnold Gingrich, the editor of *Esquire* magazine, hopefully declared that "business and art go hand in hand." More realistically, Bradford Swan, the *Providence Journal's* cultural critic, presciently observed that support for the arts was always going to be a dicey affair. Swan wondered in print whether a dedicated tax might not be the best way to arrange long-term arts underwriting. It was easy, of course, to editorialize—critics don't run for office—but the opinion was an acknowledgement of more difficult times ahead.



By 1976 it had become apparent that what Lyle House made up in charm, it lacked in convenience. The Arts Council had had only three full-time employees when it first occupied Lyle House, but now there were seventeen full-time and part-time employees, squeezing past each other in only two rooms. The staff and, increasingly, the artists who were part of RISCA's expanding programs came to feel isolated from the metropolitan excitement of Providence and its easier access for the public. Moreover, some others had come to feel, the East Greenwich location had about it the faint air of elitism that the council had been at such pains to avoid. In 1977 the staff therefore moved from these elegant suburban quarters to more utilitarian, blue-collar offices on Westminster Mall in downtown Providence.

That year, the tenth anniversary of its founding, the council received \$312,000 from state appropriations and over \$320,000 from the National Endowment. Prudently commissioning its own survey of the economic contribution of the arts to Rhode Island, the council discovered that the nonprofit arts industry had a \$60 million impact on the state economy. During these years the council seemed to some observers to temper its panache with a dose of political realism; suddenly factors like audience-attendance figures and the geographical distribution of funded programs took on new importance. To involve the public even more directly, the council held twelve public hearings throughout the state as part of a five-year plan.





Figure 9.  
The renowned Westerly Chorus is one of a dozen Rhode Island choral groups receiving direct grants and technical services from the Arts Council. Courtesy of the Westerly Chorus.

Thus the Arts Council marked its tenth anniversary in 1977 with a noisemaker in one hand and a bottle of aspirin in the other, celebrating its accomplishments and looking ahead prudently at the same time. In this it was only responding to contradictory currents on the state arts scene. The United Arts Fund, the reliable conduit through which local contributions had been funneled to the arts for the past decade, began its eleventh campaign in Rhode Island with the goal of raising \$312,000, but it could gather only \$171,000 in the state. In a report whose language itself was a sobering reminder of how far the Arts Council had to go in elevating public discourse about its role, a state auditor observed editorially that the Arts Council still had to prove "that Art just isn't for the snobs." After the audit was made public, one of the Arts Council's own members, Joseph Digati of Bristol, made the rather unsettling statement that the council should reduce the number of its members from twelve to three, since only a few people made the important decisions anyway.

Politically, therefore, the council was careful to dot its i's. At the behest of the State House, a financial watchdog was assigned to the council staff to monitor the expenditure of state-allocated funds. Staff members were surprised to observe that representatives of Governor Garrahy's office might appear at Arts Council headquarters to escort the director to a luncheon meeting, an expression of solicitude no one could remember witnessing before.

Robin Berry was a political realist—"Well, we didn't make any mistakes," she remarked with relief to one staffer at the end of her first year—but she was also an enthusiast. "I was a true believer," she recalls. "I

wanted to give people the power to *do* something, not just to observe art from the outside." She wanted people to break out of the grids that normally circumscribed them, but sometimes even she was surprised by the liberating effect of art. Once she was present when Brian Jones, Rhode Island's evangelist of tap dancing, had just finished a dance workshop at a senior-citizens' center. Suddenly one of the older residents literally leapt out of his wheelchair, challenged Jones to a tap-dancing duel, and then traded step for step with the astonished visiting artist, fifty years younger than he.

Relations with the legislature and the governor had been effectively recemented by 1979. The council had strengthened its ties to the State Department of Education so successfully, in fact, that Richard Latham, the council's director of the Arts in Education program, moved to a newly created position within the state government itself. Robin Berry also moved to a newly created position about this time, becoming the wife of Rhode Island's commissioner of education, Tom Schmitt, and leaving the state with him when he accepted a post in Washington, D.C.

In 1980 the Arts Council received a lesson in institutional gratitude courtesy of the artistes who administered Artists Internationale, a group devoted to opera in Rhode Island. At a grants-review session in June, the Arts Council denied operating support to Artists Internationale, citing the failure of the group to demonstrate



adequate management and its refusal to submit a promised audit in time for the council's deliberations. In July the group sued, arguing that it had been "arbitrarily and capriciously" turned down in its request for \$65,000. To the dismay of the council, the Rhode Island Superior Court ruled that over \$300,000 in council grants had to be frozen pending a hearing on the suit. Fortunately, in vindication of the council's decision in this case, the court dismissed Artists Internationale's request for an injunction less than a month later. The incident was a lesson in the sense of entitlement that some grantees felt toward the Arts Council in its role as a public agency disbursing public money, and it also put the council on notice that its grant-making activities could be brought under abrupt and painful scrutiny. The episode might have ended a good deal worse: one of the principals in Artists Internationale subsequently left the state precipitously, leaving behind a trail of broken engagements and unsecured checks.

After Berry's departure for Washington, the council looked close to home for its next director. Diane M. Disney had been actively involved in several civic organizations in the state and had been working as a consultant for a number of nonprofit agencies—the Arts Council among them—when chairman Daniel Lecht appointed her director in the fall of 1980. Disney was a daughter of the South, but it was the spirit of Lighthorse Harry Lee rather than the South of genteel teas and shaded verandas that remained in her makeup. She had a reputation as an effective administrator, and she knew her way around the boardroom.

In 1981, during her first year as director, her network of contacts led Disney to build bridges outward from the Arts Council to the boards of other Rhode Island nonprofit groups. She knew how important it was, and how difficult it could be, for smaller, less experienced arts organizations to feel confident about the application procedures at RISCA. In partnership with Douglas Jansson of the Rhode Island Foundation, Disney took what she calls their "dog and pony show" on the road, giving seminars on management, marketing, grants writing, and development to public and private groups around the state. Out of this collaboration came a pivotal study of the state arts environment for the Rhode Island Foundation. Today Disney looks back at her grassroots arts-development projects as one of the most fruitful legacies of her tenure as director.

Dr. Winifred Lambrecht, an anthropologist and photographer who had grown up in Africa and had traveled widely in Third World countries, was hired in 1982 to coordinate the new Folk Arts Program, a project financed by a recent grant from the National Endowment. Rhode Island had always been an ethnically diverse state, but traditional artists tended to be known only within their own communities. As assimilation eroded the differences among Rhode Island's older cultural minorities, such as the French, the Portuguese, and the Italians, support systems for their unique artists disappeared as well. Now, in the 1980s, the establishment of the Folk Arts Program roughly corresponded with the appearance in Rhode Island of new ethnic groups from Southeast Asia, refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand who had been displaced by the aftershocks of the Vietnam War. At first their presence barely registered on the traditional cultural networks. Many Rhode Islanders were unaware, for example, of the sizable Hmong community that had arisen in Providence until samples of a traditional Hmong art form—*pandau*, bright squares of cloth embroidered with geometric patterns or scenes of village life in Southeast Asia—began appearing in a handful of retail outlets. For the fledgling Folk Arts Program, whose staff suddenly had to school themselves in the subtleties of unfamiliar Asian traditions, it was a natural opportunity to introduce into Rhode Island's cultural mainstream an exciting new array of forms in music and art.

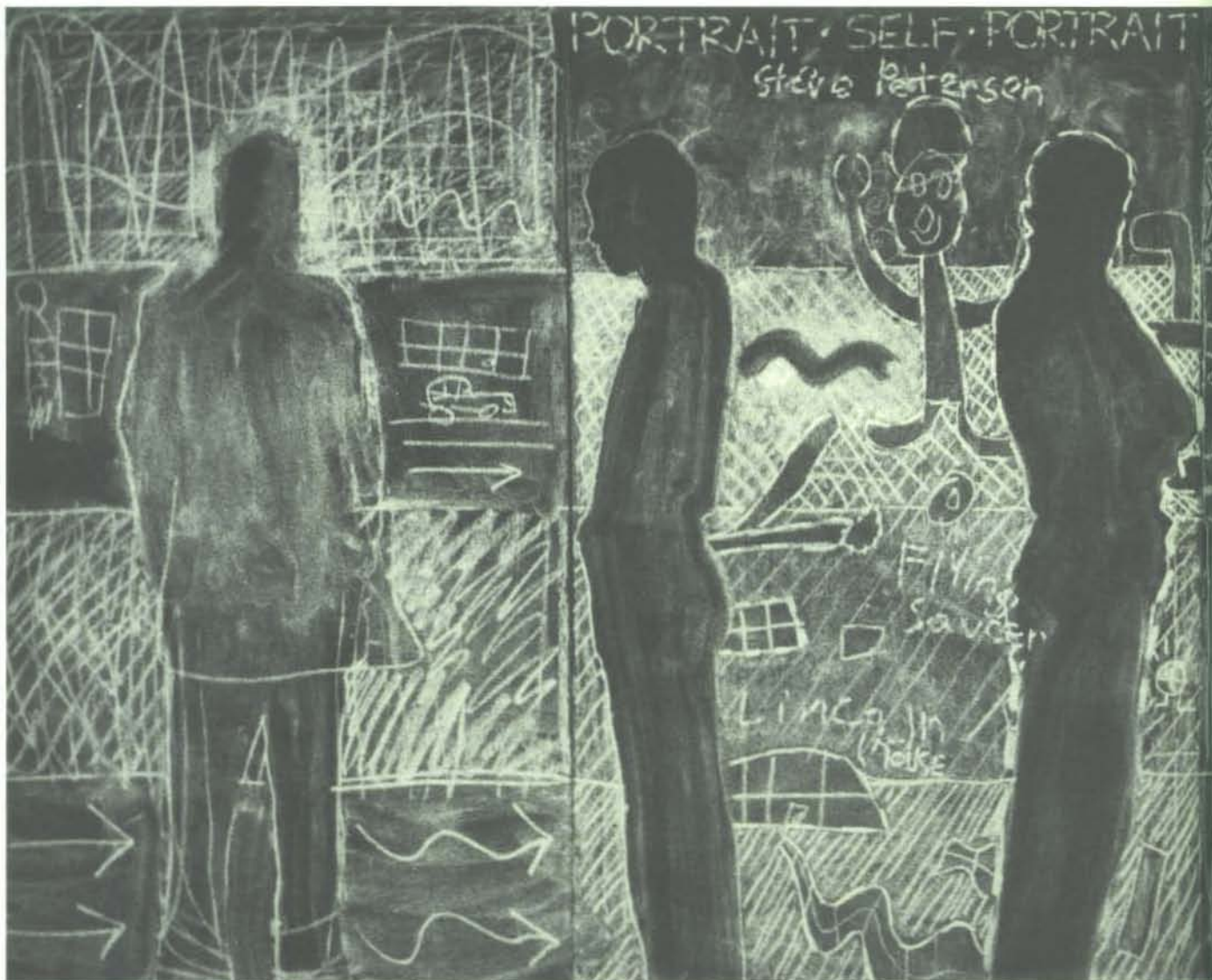


Figure 10.  
The anchor of the state's musical heritage,  
the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra is  
one of the three institutions that receive  
major Arts Council support each year.  
Courtesy of the Rhode Island Philharmonic  
Orchestra.



Meanwhile, Disney's interpretation of her responsibilities was bringing her increasingly into conflict with the chairman of the council, Daniel Lecht, a man whose vision of the proper balance between chair and director did not, evidently, include someone as outspoken and assertive as Disney. In part, the tension was simply a conflict of personalities. But in another sense, the storm taking shape was a structural one; it would reveal a hidden flaw in the fundamental makeup of the agency, and, ironically, it would reflect on the council's extraordinary success and visibility.

In the earliest years of the council, when both its staff and the governor's appointees were riding a buoyant budget and a wave of optimism about what could be accomplished, the arts—when they were visible at all—had a small and fragmented constituency. Claiborne Pell, for example, remembers how hard a sell it was for him, as a young senator, to argue in Congress for their support. "The arts were always a little suspect, a little *avant garde*," he recalls. "Now they've become a respectable part of the life of the community." Not only had the arts become respectable in Rhode Island by the early 1980s, but the agency charged with nurturing them had become highly visible and membership in that agency (to the amazement of some observers) prestigious. In addition to its more ineffable appeal, the Arts Council now had a total operating budget of almost a





million dollars a year. A vibrant and visible “product”—the arts—and a respectable budget were an attractive combination, and perhaps it was thus inevitable that leadership of the council could be seen as a politically desirable plum.

Daniel Lecht had lobbied hard to be appointed to the council in 1979, and a year later he had campaigned hard to be elected its chairman. It was no secret that he relished the prerogatives of the chairmanship and saw himself as a person who was going to bring a self-made, successful businessman’s savvy to what he sometimes referred to as “his” Arts Council. He was proud, for example, of demanding that applicants become fiscally accountable, of requiring that they put their own houses in order before they applied for grants. As president of Rhode Island Lithograph, Lecht had worked with visual artists in designing and printing portfolios and posters, and he thought he knew the strengths and weaknesses of local artists. It was his opinion that Rhode Island artists had to work harder to become recognized in their fields, and that they had to fight to get what they wanted, just as he had. He had no intention of being a figurehead chairman.

In January 1982, just fourteen months after she had been hired, Diane Disney resigned as RISCA’s director. Although she steadfastly refused to comment publicly on the reasons for her forced resignation, citing only “differences of opinion,” other board members told the press of the sense of conflict on the council, a conflict not only of personality but of management style. An agency that had always tried to keep the spotlight focused on the artists and the programs it was funding suddenly found itself in the headlines, sometimes theatrically. A memorable *Providence Journal* profile of Lecht during this period featured a photograph showing him holding aloft on his fist one of his pet cockatoos, with man and bird twin images of flamboyant confidence.

Into this turmoil a note of stability was introduced, then withdrawn. Iona B. Dobbins was appointed acting director of the agency, but then, by fiat of the chairman, she was excluded from the running for the permanent directorship. In the fall of 1982 the post instead went to Christina White, a former assistant to Robin Berry. For the next year and a half White attempted to keep the council on an even keel, despite the fact that the state appropriation had dropped almost \$50,000. During that time the council managed to hold the line, giving out, in even dozens, twenty-four general operating support grants to small, medium, and large institutions and underwriting forty-eight long-term residencies in the Arts in Education program and forty-eight grants for project support.

In 1983 Rhode Island’s Republicans proposed an alternate state budget. In it, along with other cost-saving blows aimed squarely at the cultural solar plexus (like the abolition of WSBE, the state’s public television station), the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts was eliminated entirely. Although the council’s supporters, including the editors of the *Providence Journal*, rallied around the agency, the Republican sally was emblematic of the battering that arts funding was facing, both in the states and in Washington.

Then, in February 1984, less than two years after she had been appointed, Christina White too was abruptly dismissed by Lecht, in circumstances that prompted some council members to complain publicly that they had not been sufficiently consulted in what they saw as the high-handed dismissal of two directors within two years. Lecht still seemed to be firmly in charge of the council, but there had been a troubling series of allegations aired in the papers about favoritism in the grants process and irregularities in deadlines. In troubled times like these, sometimes the best a staff member could do was to hunker down and hope the storm would blow over.

Figure 11.  
This blackboard self-portrait wall was created by clients of the Groden Center’s Lincoln House during a RISCA-sponsored six-year program for emotionally disturbed persons. The program was coordinated by artist Peter Boyle. Photo by JZP.





Unfortunately, the wind picked up. Another substantive crisis was now taking shape on the council. Two years earlier Lecht had worked to get legislation passed that extended the chairman's term. In Lecht's mind, this had been only a procedural clarification of an awkward element in the bylaws: a chairman was scheduled to be elected every time the governor appointed a new slate of council members, but since, in practice, appointments did not always issue from the capitol in a timely fashion, a chairman might find himself forced to run again for the position only a few months after he had been elected. To other council members, however, the legislation was another example of Lecht's unhealthy control of the agency. In 1984 Lecht ran for his second three-year term as chairman, but this time, to his surprise, there was opposition.

Rowena Stewart had been director of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society when she was appointed to the Arts Council, and the dissident faction on the council coalesced around her, somewhat to her bemusement. Originally Lecht had been an ally in her efforts to get funding for African-American arts programs. "Dan was for us," Stewart remembers. "He'd publish things; he made substantial donations of time and services, so basically he was a person who cared about art in the black community." What Stewart discovered once she took her seat on the council, however, was how tightly Lecht controlled the agenda, and how he seemed to take for granted her support and that of the council's other new members.

In the spring of 1984 the nominating committee, with Lecht's approval, submitted a new slate of officers, but in the chairman's absence the council voted to subject the appointments to an election. It was an explicit challenge not only to the proposed appointments but also to Lecht's assumption that he would be handily reelected chairman. To the surprise of some, and to her own amazement, Rowena Stewart emerged as a rival candidate for the chairmanship. One vote of the twelve-member council ended in a 6-6 deadlock, and a second vote scheduled for a few weeks later was postponed. The crisis deepened at a council meeting in July. After two and a half hours of heated discussion, Lecht called a recess and left the meeting, ostensibly to seek the advice of the attorney general in resolving the conflict. The chairman's supporters left with him. The six remaining members were then called to order by Marjorie Lee, the vice chairman, and just as promptly they unanimously elected Rowena Stewart as chairman. Pacing outside in the hallway, Lecht found himself outmaneuvered. For the next few months he contested the legality of the election, and as the case wound through the courts, the Arts Council had two chairmen.

Lecht had appointed Iona Dobbins earlier in the year as permanent director. She and Lecht had already scored a major coup when their combined lobbying efforts had convinced the legislature not only to rescind a second deep cut in arts appropriations but actually to increase the council's budget by \$75,000. After this considerable feat Dobbins could only look on from the sidelines, with a nervous glance over her shoulder at the legislators whose support she had just secured, as the double-headed Arts Council spun itself almost weekly into the headlines.

In typically Rhode Island fashion, the man whose beat it was to cover cultural affairs for the *Providence Journal*, Channing Gray, had once been on the other side of the looking glass, as the Arts Council's publicity director. He was thus both a knowledgeable and an interested observer. The brouhaha at the council was Channing Gray's Watergate. He was even—catnip to a reporter—asked to leave a meeting that should have been open to the public. When he recently called up his bylined articles about the Arts Council from the *Journal* computer, it ticked along at seven or eight articles per year until he typed in "1984"; then the computer hiccupped and the screen filled with dates and dramatic headlines: "Power Shift at



Arts Council"; "Council Deadlocked"; "Council Agenda Stranded in Storm"; "Council Seeing Double: Lecht on the Ropes"; "Arts Council Dilemma Unresolved"; "Leadership in Limbo"; "Court Leaves Arts Council Up the Creek"; "Council's Great Chair War."

Thankfully for Gray—who had just about reached the bottom of his bag of appropriate metaphors—and mercifully for those who had watched the council's paralysis in embarrassment, the issue was finally resolved on 6 November 1984. That day's headline ran simply, "State Supreme Court Rules Stewart Head of Council on the Arts."



For supporters of the arts and supporters of the Arts Council, it had been a sobering six months, no matter which faction one supported. Some observers saw the crisis as the result of the creeping politicization of the agency, of a council whose members' credentials might be less important than favors they were owed or had to repay. Others, noting that the crisis had been precipitated by the chairman's abrupt firing of two executive directors, saw the conflict in a historical context, as the inevitable collision between professional arts administrators—who were, after all, a relatively new breed—and board chairmen who were, in the best sense, amateurs of the arts, and often inexperienced in the mine field that public arts funding could become.

Looking back now, Lecht remembers the donnybrook affectionately, comparing the divided council to a two-party system with a loyal opposition, and even venturing that all the publicity during his tenure as chairman was a good thing for the council. "At least," he suggests, "it kept us in the eye of the public." But for many other observers, it was a moment in the sun they would gladly have forgone.

In any case, two structural components had to be fixed. The bylaws were amended so that the council would henceforward consist of thirteen members, not twelve; in the future, anyway, the council would not be hamstrung for six months by another paralyzing deadlock. A second amendment then made explicit what had been understood up until Lecht's tumultuous term: the council's executive director could be removed only by approval of the council. In the twenty-five-year history of the agency, these have been the only two changes in its bylaws.

After this minor civil war, healing was in order. During the year that she served as chairman, Rowena Stewart took *her* show on the road. "I thought it was important for the people to regain confidence in the council," she recalls, "so we had meetings in places that had never seen the Arts Council before. I never will forget how thrilled people were to see the council members who made these decisions about grants." As someone who had come to the council from outside the arts community, Stewart remembers being surprised at how little power the council actually had to improve the lot of the smaller arts organizations she had wanted to champion. "After some of the larger, established arts organizations absorbed their portion of the grants," she laments, "there was so little left."

Apportioning grants is, in fact, a problem—both of reality and of perception—that bedevils every grant-making agency. Successful grant winners and popular programs attract continuing support and come to depend on it. With a few other truly statewide resources in Rhode Island, the Rhode Island School of Design's Museum of Art, Trinity Repertory Company, and the Rhode Island Philharmonic have traditionally been among the highest-funded programs in any given year. The bulk of the money, however, is distributed in much smaller slices—in fiscal year 1991, for example, to almost three hundred other individuals and institutions. Many of these smaller grants are proportionately large in relation to the needs of



their recipients, but others are more like honoraria, enough to confer recognition but not large enough to make a difference. The tension between the largest beneficiaries and the smallest is likely to become more strained in an era of shrinking budgets and decreased expectations.

In 1985, as the dust was settling from the crisis of the preceding year, Rowena Stewart left the state to become head of the Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum in Philadelphia. During this time Iona Dobbins emerged as a crucial element in the council's recovery. The new director had worked behind the scenes at other organizations—as coordinator for volunteers at Trinity and as Rhode Island representative of the New England Foundation for the Arts—but now upon her fell the job of establishing continuity in the council's programs and of restoring equanimity in its relations with the public and the legislature. She proved to be both a tenacious advocate for the arts in the State House and a steady and determined ally of the next chairman, Diana Johnson, in their efforts to restore the credibility and good name of the agency.

Diana Johnson came to the council in 1985 with a dual background in the arts and business; she had been assistant director of the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design and then a vice president of Fleet Bank. She resolutely turned her back on the Arts Council's past. "This is the here and now," she remembers telling people who wanted to rehash the last few difficult years. "This council has an enormous potential to do good."



Figure 12.  
Len Cabral, a traditional storyteller, holds a class of Moses Brown students spellbound as a performer in the Arts in Education program. Photo by Winifred Lambrecht.

Figure 13.  
A third-grader in Newport's Coggeshall School concentrates on making a mask during an Arts in Education program sponsored by special grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. Photo by Kathryn Whitney, Newport Daily News.

Figure 14.  
A celebration both of the arts and of community, Rhode Island's First Night has become as eagerly awaited by young and old as New Year's Eve itself.





Johnson was concerned, first of all, to set the agency's house in order. "I had to make the institution deserving of the money it was asking for from the state," she recalls, "and I had to do it quickly." Restoring equity was paramount. A grievance procedure was established to avoid the kind of trial-by-press-release that had smeared the council's reputation when allegations of closed-door meetings, missed deadlines, and favoritism in the awarding of grants had surfaced during the early 1980s. The grants process was opened up as a way of restoring its credibility and establishing an even broader base for the council. Johnson's most innovative moves were the bridges she built to the business community; for example, four prominent Rhode Island companies—Fleet National Bank, Old Stone Development Corporation, the Providence Journal Company, and Rhode Island Hospital Trust—were persuaded to underwrite individual grants in four different disciplines, freeing up money for other awards as well as opening up the possibility of a continuing relationship between artists and businesses. The council also sponsored a new group, Business Volunteers in the Arts, as an attempt to convince two different constituencies that they shared many values.

In 1983 the National Endowment for the Arts had moved from single-year to multiyear funding for state agencies, provided those agencies could submit an acceptable long-range plan. With so much of its energy focused inward during the turmoil of the Lecht years, the Arts Council had been unable to come up with such a plan. Now, in 1985, the NEA approved the new plan drawn up by the council and granted multiyear funding status to one of its flagship programs.

Meanwhile, the United Arts Fund had gone out of business, a victim of difficult economic times and the high overhead involved in raising money. Some of the fund's major beneficiaries determined that they would have better luck, and retain a higher proportion of the financial contributions they received, if they raised money directly. Iona Dobbins had begun to convene meetings of past supporters of the fund to see what structure might be put into place to fill the gap left by its demise. The working groups discovered that Rhode Island corporations were still eager to support the arts, but they were not eager to set up their own funding entities; even the strongest corporate hearts quailed at the prospect of reviewing hundreds of grant requests. Fortunately, however, the Rhode Island Foundation—which had experience in underwriting the state's major cultural organizations, and which had in fact recently commissioned a study of the Rhode Island arts scene—was in a position to act.

In 1984 the Rhode Island Foundation had responded to a call from the National Endowment for the Arts for a challenge grant in the Community Foundation Partnership program. The NEA would contribute \$50,000 over three years, to be matched by \$100,000 in local contributions. Slightly over half of the money would be earmarked for operating support for smaller and medium-sized arts groups, but the rest was destined for expansion arts programs throughout the state, programs involving black, Asian, Cape Verdean, and Native American artists and arts groups working outside mainstream arts organizations. The foundation's new Rhode Island Arts Fund made its first awards in 1985. Since then it has become one of the National Endowment's most successful programs in its outreach.

By 1986 RISCA had become a million-dollar agency in combined appropriations, and it had regained its poise and its punch in time for a gala celebration of its twentieth anniversary—the Year of the Arts—in 1987. In addition to a series of exhibits and shows, including a major Newport Art Museum exhibition of the work of hundreds of grant winners from the council's last two decades, there were other more tangible expressions of political favor. The governor earmarked







Figure 15. *Rites and Reason*, with its distinctive "research to performance" model, is one of several nationally recognized theater companies in Rhode Island underwritten by RISCA grants. Courtesy of Rites and Reason.

Figure 16. Through its apprenticeship program and its sponsorship of neighborhood arts festivals, like this one in Smith Hill, the Arts Council supports traditional crafts new on the Rhode Island landscape. Hmong weaver Yang Fang Nhu later received the National Heritage Award. Photo by Winifred Lambrecht.



\$250,000 from the state lottery for use in statewide arts activities and threw his support behind legislation that mandated a 1 percent arts expenditure from every construction budget for future public buildings.

In taking stock, Governor DiPrete proudly pointed out that in this anniversary year of the Arts Council, the arts community in Rhode Island now numbered more than seventy-five nonprofit organizations and institutions and could claim more than seven thousand people making their living from the arts. If it had been a corporation, Arts Inc. of Rhode Island would have been one of the biggest employers in the state.

This somewhat surprising news coincided with the release of a study, commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts, which showed that for the first time since anybody had cared to count, the attendance figures for arts activities in the United States now equaled those for spectator sports. On any given night, of course, the sports fans at the Providence Civic Center might still outnumber, and outshout, the audience down the street at Trinity's Lederer Theatre, but these impressive figures meant that those playgoers—and everyone else who supported the arts as audience or participant—had a newly demonstrable strength. Quiet and incremental success had led to this milestone in the integration of the arts into "mainstream" society.

The council took two other initiatives during that Year of the Arts. A program called Art in the Workplace brought the work of artists into the previously barren corridors and lunchrooms of factories and businesses. At the Monet



jewelry company, for example, a bleak wall was transformed by an artist into a mural wittily celebrating in monochromatic blackboard and chalk the work of (who else?) the painter Monet. The council also began publishing *Arts and Cultural Times*, a friendly newspaper compendium of events and features and announcements. The funkily unsyntactical title of the new periodical proclaimed its broad appeal.



By now Rhode Island artists were loosely organized enough to begin making demands on "their" Arts Council. One result was the establishment of grants to artists for specific projects, a program that allowed the council to respond more flexibly to the realities of what went on in the studio and the workshop.

In general, these years saw the beginning of a major reshaping of the Arts Council's approach to its mission, an establishment of new directions that have continued to this day. Partnerships, leverage, access to community—these became not just important abstractions but structural approaches. As the tide of funding crested and then began to ebb, these approaches would allow the council to make its money go further. The idea was to use grants as encouragement and reward for projects that involved partnerships between agencies or community arts groups, thus doubling or trebling the impact of any particular grant, or that targeted specific audiences which were not being adequately served. In this way Arts Council money might leverage additional community support and involvement. The council made consultants available to help project directors develop ways to share resources and to coordinate their events calendars.

To the eternal question of big grants versus small, the council has had to steer a middle ground, maintaining level funding for large institutions while trying to make more money available to smaller and medium-sized applicants. Large institutions still have to show substantial community support, of course, and new applicants usually have to show proof of innovation—in audience or location or program content—in order to be competitive.

Since its beginning in 1982, the Folk Arts Program has continued to foster ethnic diversity within the agency programs and to serve as a bridge from the established arts communities to cultural worlds that might otherwise remain as unknown as the dark side of the moon. The program has a dual focus: to introduce Rhode Island audiences to the diversity of ethnic traditions in music and art and to make sure that within those communities the singer and the painter, the maker and the dreamer, are recognized and given support for their art. For example, the apprenticeship program, begun in 1986 as one of the first in the country, pays for traditional-instrument makers and master musicians in Hmong, Cambodian, Afro-American, Portuguese, Irish, and Cape Verdean communities to pass on their art to the next generation. As Folk Arts Program director Lambrecht points out, "This might happen normally, of course, but the connection with the Arts Council validates it and gives it a stamp of approval within the community."

As an adjunct to the Arts in Education programs, the Folk Arts Program has cultivated a natural audience in the state's vocational schools, an audience of students who might not otherwise be exposed to resident artists. Where programs already existed in woodworking and metalworking, teachers were delighted to allow ethnic artists to demonstrate that people in the Rhode Island community could actually make a living using traditional skills. In standard and vocational settings, the Arts Council pioneered in the use of educational kits to help teachers prepare their classes for a visit from a folk artist. Underneath their cardboard covers these boxes are little treasure chests of photographs, fact



Figure 17.  
The Arts Council has worked behind the scenes for twenty-five years to support Trinity Repertory Company, the state's premier theater group. Courtesy of the Trinity Repertory Company.



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## GOVERNOR'S ART AWARDS

From its founding, the Arts Council understood that an important part of its mission in making the arts more visible in Rhode Island was to honor those individuals and institutions that had made major contributions to the artistic life of the state. The list of Governor's Art Award recipients is impressive in its eclecticism: writers and artists are by far the largest group, but an actor, an architect, a preservation society, a brace of patrons, a museum, a repertory theater company, and a stonecarving shop are included also. It is a Rhode Island honor roll whose influence resonates nationally, a group portrait of the remarkable diversity of a state's artistic community.

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sheets, and artifacts—small squares of woven reeds, for example, when students are to see a demonstration of Native American basket making.

The state's fastest-growing minorities, the Southeast Asian communities, have been increasingly represented in Arts Council programs. The Hmong, for instance, have historically been forced to adapt to new environments, and their traditional openness has made them one of the most receptive of immigrant groups. Ironically, in RISCA-funded programs in Hmong communities in Providence, two very different United States government initiatives from the 1960s—the Vietnam War and the National Arts Endowment—have come full circle and meet each other, twenty-five years later and half a world apart.

As it has been from the beginning, the council's Arts in Education program is a cornerstone of agency activity. According to one of its first directors, Richard Latham (now of the Rhode Island Department of Education), in its early years the Arts in Education program was essentially a talent agency, matching schools with artists. Both he and Jane Mahoney, his successor, tried to make sure that the artists were not compromised by participating in the program, and that they were not exploited by their host schools. They were to be there as a resource, and not to replace the art teachers already on staff.

After Gary Hogan, the program's next director, became the first assistant director of the Arts Council, Sherilyn Brown took over the Arts in Education program. With a background in theater, dance, and education, and as a member of a touring band of actors playing Rhode Island historical figures in the schools under a Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities grant ("At five in the morning the phone would ring and someone would say, 'Wanna play Anne Hutchinson at 8:30 this morning in West Warwick?'" ), Brown knew firsthand what an art program could be like in area schools. Like every artist who ever participated in the program, she knew the thinking in schools, where the arts were often seen as a chance for the teacher to take a break or, only slightly better, as an instrument of positive or negative incentive ("First you did the *real* work, then you could work in the arts," as Brown puts it). In some cases the ease with which a visiting artist—a creative hired gun—could awaken a class's real enthusiasm might undercut a permanent teacher's message that the arts were work, work, work. Composer Arthur Custer, for example, the program's first director in the 1960s and a resident artist in 1975, might show up at a high school's auto repair shop and within a single class period have the students "composing" with sounds wrung from pipes and tools and sheet metal. The message was that the arts were indeed work, but as a young student in a RISCA workshop explained, "they're fun work."

In 1989 the nationwide guidelines for the program were redefined, and the focus shifted from the artists to the arts. In a way the program has come full circle, back to its original emphasis on education. Nowadays the Arts in Education program is likely to see itself less as a talent agency than as a catalyst and a broker bringing people together. Today's initiatives are more directly associated with the Rhode Island Department of Education, but now, significantly, they are part of that department's literacy program. This is a crucial shift in emphasis: if the arts can be understood as a language, as a way of communicating essential meaning—especially for those who may be less adept at traditional languages—then they will be more firmly tied to the basic concerns of education and not considered simply as decorative frills. This rethinking of the enabling power of the arts is not only good pedagogy; it may make the arts less vulnerable to the



1967	Eileen Farrell Bates Lowry The Providence Preservation Society The Trinity Square Theatre
1968	Lee Bontecou John Hawkes The John Stevens Shop Louis Krasner Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design
1969	Anne Kinsolving Brown Harry Callahan Arlan Coolidge Malcolm Grear C. Alexander Peloquin Florence Simister William Warner
1970	Mrs. Murray S. Danforth Antoinette Downing Edwin Honig Jean Madeira
1971	Joseph Goto Richard Kneeland
1972	Francis Madeira Hugh Townley
1973	Barnet Fain Eugene Lee
1974	James Schevill
1977	Senator Claiborne Pell
1980	Walter Feldman
1981	Fritz Eichenberg
1983	Aaron Siskind
1986	Dale Chihuly Richard Fleischner
1987	Richard Benson Michael Harper David Macaulay David McKenna Chris Van Allsburg
1988	Robert Coover George Kent Rosmarie Waldrop
1990	Richard Cumming Galway Kinnell John Prip C. D. Wright
1992	Tage Frid Cora Lee Gibbs Paula Vogel Geoffrey Wolff

knife-edged budget winds that have come whistling down the corridors of public education. If the arts can be seen as tools, and not just surface enrichment, then perhaps they have a better chance to survive and flourish in the schools. Today the Partnership for Literacy in the Arts promotes this new formulation with the resources of the Arts Council, the Department of Education, and the Rhode Island Alliance for Art Education.

Another important innovation in the Arts Council's goals is an emphasis on long-range planning. Grants to individual artists, specific projects, and large and small institutions still take up the bulk of the agency's budget, and they will continue to do so; but the council has turned its attention in other directions as well. One significant council initiative, for example, is in funding and overseeing an ambitious planning program within the school districts. The Rhode Island Comprehensive Arts Planning Program (RICAPP) looks cumbersome at first; it includes a battery of workshops, seminars, and training sessions designed to help two school districts each year to integrate the arts into a coherent program, one involving the development of a new curriculum in every school year from kindergarten to senior high. In fact, the complex layering of services reflects the Arts Council's crucial understanding that change takes time, and that the planning of an effective arts program demands the full involvement of school and community. Ultimately the program will stand or fall on its ability to teach people how to do such planning themselves.

The initial results have been impressive. Having taken almost two years to look at its own needs, the Pawtucket school district, the recipient of one of the first model grants awarded in 1990 (the other went to Cranston), has come up with a planning document that reflects an astonishing degree of sophistication and economic savvy. It is no utopian outline, and the contributions to it of the school district, the individual schools, parents, and teachers are clear and convincing. As stipulated by RICAPP, the Arts Council is automatically committed to funding the first year of implementation; after that the district itself must find the money to carry on, but by that time, the council hopes, the Pawtucket arts community will have learned how to color in the outlines of its impressive plan.

For the council itself, the idea of long-range planning has taken on a slightly darker hue than it might have had in the years of expanding budgets. The council now sees planning as a map for the future, a map that can be changed, certainly, but one that gives direction and a sense of where possible future financial cuts can be absorbed with least impact.

The Arts Council continues to publish a periodical directory of performing artists who can be engaged for programs throughout the state, but it includes under the same cover an even more distinguished list: a register of those artists who are available for Rhode Island educational programs and residencies. One reflection of the council's new realism is the selectivity of this list; eight years ago it included 250 artists, but through a tough process of peer screening and interviews, that number has been cut to 75, with only 10 or 12 new artists added each year. Combined with a continuing series of workshops for teachers applying for residency grants, the blue-ribbon quality of the artists themselves has helped maintain the Arts in Education program as one of the standards by which the Arts Council can be measured—as it has been since the first pilot grant was awarded in 1970.

In 1982 the Arts Council received a grant from the National Committee, Arts for the Handicapped, to establish a program that would introduce disabled people to a broad spectrum of arts experiences. In 1983 Barbara Conley joined



the staff to oversee this initiative. Nationally the funding parent has metamorphosed into Very Special Arts, and individual states have established their own complementary independent nonprofit agencies. Today the council supports Very Special Arts Rhode Island, and in conjunction with that agency it coordinates the arts components of a wide variety of performances, festivals, and workshops designed not only to bring the arts to children and adults with special needs but to enable these individuals to express their own artistic talents. The annual statewide Very Special Arts Festival is perhaps the most spectacular expression of the council's determination to make the arts accessible to everyone. First held at Colt State Park in 1985, this festival is a two-day extravaganza of arts and crafts, theater, and song designed especially for its very special audience. An array of other access initiatives for involving handicapped citizens in cultural experiences is also supported by RISCA funds.

Although the Arts Council's program of direct grants to artists is only a small part of its overall budget, it is one of its most visible manifestations. Since beginning to award direct grants in 1973 and then expanding the program to include specific projects in the 1980s, the council has supported hundreds of artists in every field. Although it is certainly not true, as some wags have remarked, that in a state as small as Rhode Island nearly everyone who can pick up a paintbrush has received a grant by now, it is true that the council has leaned over backwards to make the grants process as equitable as it can, including, as a supplement to the statewide peer-review panels, the use of out-of-state judges to evaluate artists in every category.

Many individual artists seem always to have enjoyed a love-hate relationship with the Arts Council, if not biting the hand that feeds them, at least eyeing it hungrily. In response to comments that individual artists' grants—whose dollar amounts have held amazingly steady over the past twenty-five years—have had their real values so eaten away by inflation and the rising costs of materials that they are no longer large enough to make a difference, the council will begin next year to double the amount of the award for individual fellowships in each discipline, but it will offer each grant only in alternate years. The council hopes thus to increase the leverage of its money. Additionally, this change will help to make the individual grants (and the runner-up awards) more competitive, prestigious, and useful to the recipients in carving out time and buying materials. In a state in which artists tend to know one another, seeing someone else's name on a grants list one year may lead to a spasm of professional jealousy, of course, but it is also likely—since the competition is in plain view down the hall, or across the campus, or in the studio next door—to lead to redoubled efforts to win a place on the list next year.

Proof of the efficacy of the council's selection process appears in the impressive number of grantees who have solidified statewide reputations or gone on to forge national ones over the years. Dozens of artists have won competitions and premiums, or performed significant new compositions, with work they have done under Arts Council sponsorship; and dozens of others have felt their work validated, and their spirits lifted, by the recognition that a grant carries with it. By those measures, in every field from photography to jewelry design to painting, the program has been a success.

With its Rhode Island Arts Fund grants, the Rhode Island Foundation has continued its fruitful cooperation with RISCA. In its operating support grants to smaller and medium-sized institutions and its discovery and support of expansion arts



activities, the foundation has happily piggybacked on the Arts Council's peer-review process, having been impressed over the years with its integrity. But the foundation has continued to invest its own resources as well in the expensive and time-consuming process of finding worthy grant recipients around the state. Guided by an advisory board, it has prospected in community centers and church basements for some of its grantees—groups or individuals who have wonderful skills but who might not have qualified for money under the Arts Council's stricter requirements. In 1992 the Arts Council received a supplemental grant from the National Endowment to support this exemplary program. The new money is going for technical assistance to small arts groups and struggling artists to help them hone their skills in raising money, in reaching audiences, in applying for other grants, and in keeping their books, skills that can help them function more effectively in carrying on their work.

Almost every field of the arts in Rhode Island has seen a steady and remarkable growth over the last twenty-five years. The major cultural institutions have become more welcoming and more responsive to the public; for example, the RISD museum, under the ebullient direction of Franklin Robinson, has never been more open to the community than it is now, and Trinity Repertory Company's Project Discovery continues to expose thousands of children to the best in drama. Across Rhode Island, simple markers like attendance figures and economic impact studies tell one part of the story, but perhaps the most important gains have been made in availability and access. In theater and dance, for instance, a flowering of small, innovative companies has changed a landscape that comprised only a small handful of such organizations twenty-five years ago. Now theater groups like the Perishable Theater, All Children's Theater, and Alias Stage and dance troupes like the Dance Alliance and Island Moving Company have brought drama and dance geographically closer to great numbers of Rhode Islanders and have also made the experience affordable. The Cumberland Company has pioneered in bringing its own kind of physical, active theater to wide audiences, and it has made itself a cultural power in the Blackstone Valley. As part of the growth of dance, the Arts Council has not only supported traditional dance forms but has also underwritten programs that attempt to introduce dance into the schools, often in unexpected ways, as in the Everett Dance Company's recent synergistic collaboration with the physics program of Middletown High School.

In the literary arts, the flourishing of small presses like Copper Beech Press, Burning Deck Press, and Ampersand—all supported by Arts Council project grants—has given wing to poetry and prose, and tongues to thoughts, that might otherwise have remained undiscovered and unsung.

There is no proof, of course, that the mere existence of RISCA has conjured any of these groups into being, but the council has tried over the past twenty-five years to put its resources into the incubation of new programs and new ideas, and into the cultivation of small, specialized audiences as well as large ones. The Expansion Arts program, for example, is charged with tapping the cultural richness and diversity of Rhode Island's many ethnic communities and supporting their expression. Ever more consciously the council has tried to function both as a nurturing medium for already successful ideas and as a catalyst in the formation of new combinations of resources and new forms of expression. Its real success in these twenty-five years should be represented not in the bare peaks and valleys of a funding graph but rather in the softer forms of the foliation of tree and branch, as a gradual spreading of energy into a broad network of the arts.



A brilliant burst of fireworks over the State House on First Night is another image that shows how far the council has come since the quieter days of the downtown Providence Arts Festival over twenty-five years ago. This New Year's Eve celebration concentrates in one night the talent of hundreds of performing artists in dozens of venues. The idea for First Night originated elsewhere, but Iona Dobbins brought it home to Rhode Island and promoted it for years with local and state leaders. Finally, with the arts community solidly behind it, the Arts Council unveiled First Night on the Rhode Island stage for the first time on the eve of the state's commemoration of its 350th anniversary.

In 1987 the Arts Council began to cooperate with the Providence Foundation in a three-year study of the potential revitalization of the urban center of Providence. A feasibility study of the role that the arts might play in this renaissance—a study to which RISCA committed \$35,000—led to the call for a downtown cultural district. In proposing a healthy new mix of resident students and artists and senior citizens as the basis for downtown renewal, recent public “charettes” have built on the findings of that study. Many artists have agreed that there is a lack of performance and exhibit space in Providence, a shortcoming that AS220, the downtown avant-garde arts center, has worked hard to remedy in the last few years by providing space and support for new art forms. For the future the Arts Council is looking forward to the planned restoration of the old Shepard's department store as a state cultural center. Here the council hopes not only to locate its offices but also to carve out new gallery and performance space at the heart of a renewed downtown.



For better or worse, the Arts Council's twenty-fifth anniversary coincides with a national election year, and this makes any attempt to see what lies ahead a troubling process. The high stakes and stormy drama of politics in the 1990s seem to have energized zealots whose capacity for self-righteousness is surpassed

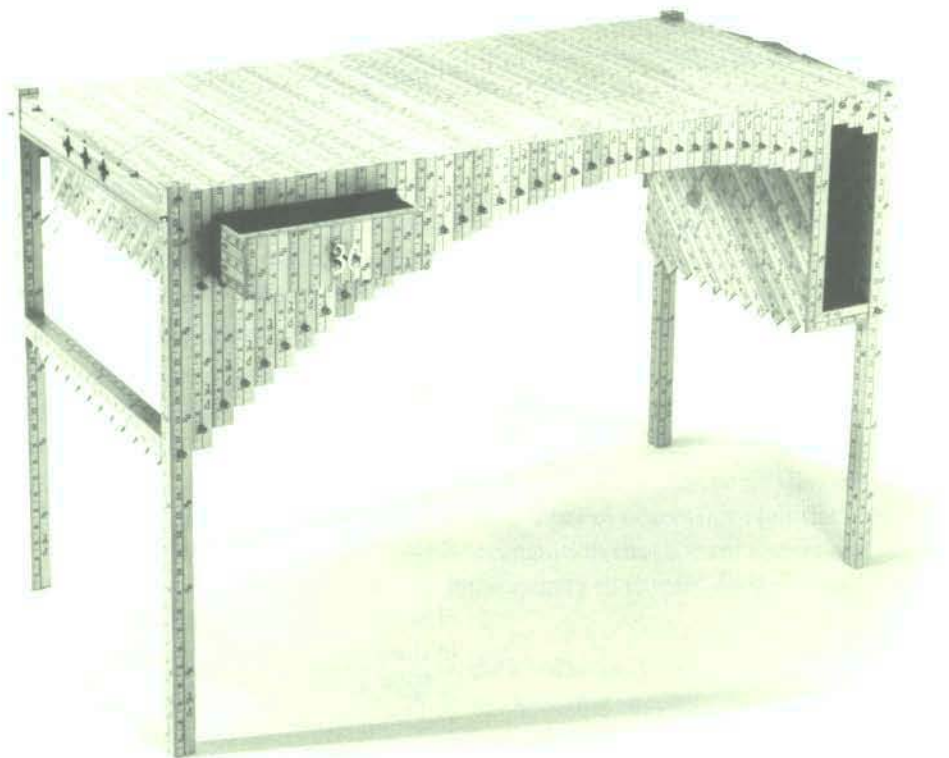


Figure 18.  
*Tetrium Table*, by John Marcoux. Winners of RISCA individual fellowships in the crafts and applied arts contribute to Rhode Island's national reputation for providing the rule by which good design—both traditional and wittily avant garde—may be measured. Collection of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design; Daphne Farago Purchase Fund. Photo by Michael Jorge.



only by their ignorance of what the arts really are. According to many commentators, it was the presidential nominating process that precipitated the departure of John Frohnmayer as head of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1992. Many see Frohnmayer as a victim of political bullying from the radical right, and of a corresponding lack of support from the center.

In this volatile and unpredictable context, arts councils around the country are finding questions asked about the most basic principles of public arts funding, questions that were thoroughly debated twenty-five years ago at their founding. In an election year so unpredictable that grist for the headlines can be found in the subject matter of a single photograph in a small show at a provincial museum, arts advocates might well have regretted that these issues should be raised; but, in fact, questions and reservations and misunderstandings about the government's role in the arts have simmered along beneath the surface for years, at both state and national levels. Twenty-five years of experience have shown arts councils the wisdom of meeting the challenges head on, in open debate.



Figure 19.  
Ella Thomas Sekatau, a Narragansett elder, is a bearer and preserver of her traditional culture. She has presented her knowledge and crafts in numerous residencies under Arts Council sponsorship. Photo by Winifred Lambrecht.

Figure 20.  
One of three major art institutions in Rhode Island, the Rhode Island School of Design's Museum of Art receives support from the legislature for its strong educational programs, as well as general operating support from the Arts Council. Courtesy of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.





There are, of course, arguments for and against government support of the arts; indeed, arts organizations often attend and sometimes sponsor symposia in which philosophers and political scientists and economists are asked to consider the whole question of public funding. In 1984, for example, one widely publicized blue-ribbon panel, cosponsored by the Metropolitan Museum of Art (itself no stranger to governmental largesse), brought together literally hundreds of interested parties from both the giving and receiving ends of the arts-funding pipeline. William Baumol, a professor of economics at Princeton and New York University, posed one of the central questions to the distinguished audience: "Just why do you and I, when we visit a museum or attend a performance of modern dance, deserve to have our enjoyment subsidized?"

Participants in the two days of discussion that followed rejected as philosophically peripheral the politically salable notions that the arts attract tourists or generate jobs, but they also agreed that the free market alone cannot be expected to support anything but an arbitrary, and momentarily popular, slice of the great arc of culture and art that is every generation's legacy. Panelists argued that the arts have an intrinsic value that makes them precious, whether or not many of the people who are called upon to support them understand what that value is; that public subsidies can be justified in the same way that support for schools is justified, by the argument that they produce better citizens; and that the arts should not have to justify themselves for public support when other subsidized activities are not required to make similar elaborate arguments. Finally, however, it was the artists who had the last word. The composer Milton Babbitt, in making a plea for more money for American contemporary music, eschewed philosophical niceties: "Public funds, private funds," he exhorted, "steal it, send it!" And Philip Johnson, the grand old man of American architecture, declared that he and other artists could make better use of the millions of dollars that the Pentagon was squandering: "Give us the money," he argued, "and we can make your offices warm and happy, and your houses gardens of delight."

Unfortunately, the objections to public funding that are being raised in sound bites and misleading film clips along the 1992 campaign trail have none of the insight or humor often generated by real discussions of the value of the arts in society. Instead, some critics of government funding of the arts have found easy targets in a small handful of grants—easy targets, that is, to those people who think that the arts should be inoffensive rather than challenging, that they should offer reassurance rather than expressions of what individual artists most deeply feel.

Senator Claiborne Pell, as much as anyone, has been on the firing line of this issue for years, forced to defend the endowment he founded, his child now grown into beleaguered adulthood. He is blunt. "On the national level we've made over eighty thousand grants. Eighty thousand. If there are a few lemons in there, even by anybody's standards those numbers are still pretty darn good." It might also be claimed (though it is a harder argument to make, given the political realities of 1992) that those who are attacking the arts have never really been exposed to them, or, if they have, they have come away from the encounter unchanged.

In part, what the attacks on the national arts endowment show is how much of a job remains to be done in arts education. Although there have been a few embarrassing episodes in which the police have taken it upon themselves to act as censors, Rhode Island has been relatively free of attempts by church or state to censor the arts. One would like to think that this has been a legacy of the state's singular tradition of religious and intellectual freedom, that Rhode



Islanders have been in a better position than most to appreciate the unequivocal call of the Arts Council's enabling legislation twenty-five years ago: "to promote and protect the freedom of artistic expression."

But what is not attacked may also not be passionately defended. Hard economic times have had their impact on the arts budget in Rhode Island: in 1990 the state allocation dropped by almost \$400,000. If this has occasioned what the Arts Council might euphemistically call belt tightening, next door its sister agency, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, has been put on a crash diet, with the Massachusetts legislature cutting its appropriation for the arts and humanities from \$27 million to \$3.6 million. Against this somber backdrop Iona Dobbins has worked diligently and successfully for almost nine years as executive director (a record in what has traditionally been a volatile position) to speak to the needs of the council's varied constituencies and to keep the arts in the hearts of the people and the minds of the legislators. She is an optimist and prefers to see the glass as half full. Others may talk about "downsizing"; Dobbins talks about "rightsizing" the Arts Council for its next decade.

To find the right mix of projects and people, the right balance of innovation and conservation that will carry it through the shoals visible ahead, the council elected Karen Mensel as its chair in 1991 and then reelected her for a second term in 1992. A scholar with a Ph.D. in art history, Mensel has already proven herself adept within the daunting arcana of federal grant requirements and programs. As money becomes more scarce, her background should serve the council well: the times will demand a scholar's attention to detail and a historian's imaginative grasp of the possibilities inherent in circumstances, however straitened.

The Arts Council is currently looking at innovative funding structures that have worked elsewhere—a state endowment, for example, or a trust fund financed by earmarking for the arts a small portion of an existing tax. A great deal will depend upon the council's ability to make the voters aware of the difference that the arts make in their lives: not only in the hard dollars of economic growth and

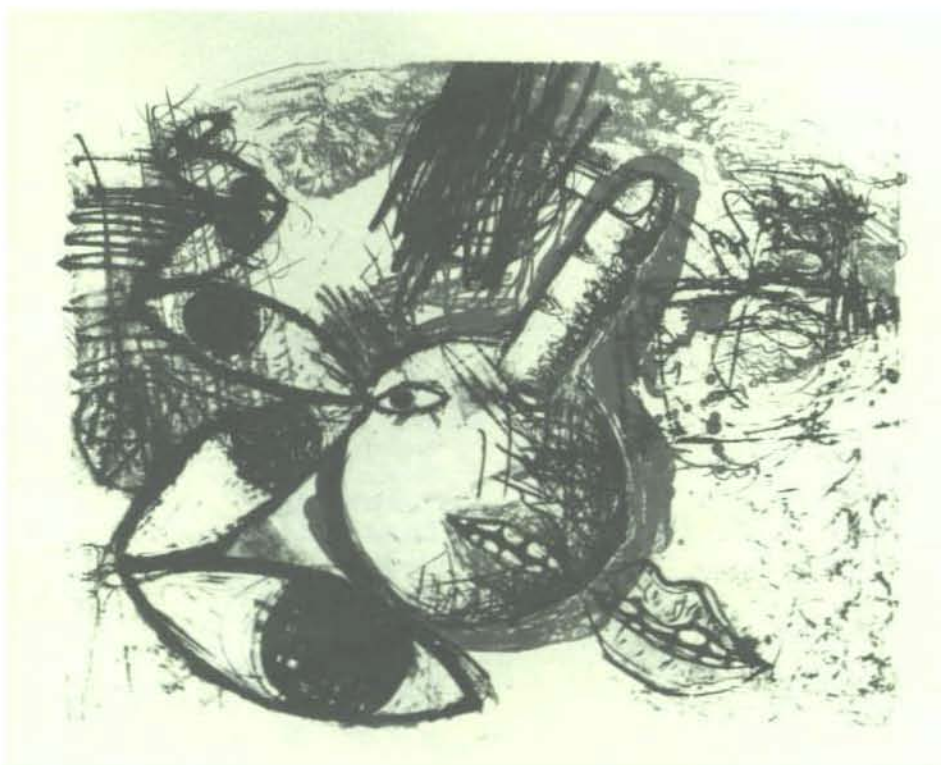


Figure 21.  
*"One Glorious Moment,"* by Leslie Bostrom, 1992. This is one of the images in a portfolio assembled to raise funds for AS220, an alternative multifunction facility in downtown Providence providing gallery and studio space for individual artists. Photo by Denny Moers.



arts-related jobs but also in the arts' quiet, long-range role in building basic community ties and strengthening crucial social services.

If the first twenty-five years of its history tell an observer anything, it is that the Arts Council is resilient. "May you never live in interesting times," an adage warns; but though the past decades have indeed been interesting times for the council, it has not only survived but flourished. Perhaps that is not surprising, since RISCA's basic resource, the creativity of the state's artists, is as powerful and irrepressible as a child's first drawing and as durable as a remembered chord. The council now steps into its next quarter century, celebrating the capacity of art to be both subversive and conservative—its capacity to uncover the liberating force of an individual's vision while at the same time drawing around us a reassuringly human, communal circle of word and song, movement and color.



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