

Couple's Lifetime of Collecting to Benefit McLean Project for Arts

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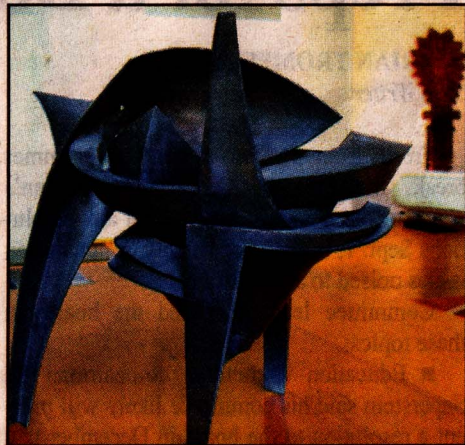
While working for New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller's gubernatorial and presidential campaigns in the 1960s, political consultant John Deardourff once asked Rockefeller about some polling data.

Rockefeller instead told Deardourff about artworks a gallery owner was encouraging him to buy. The experience prompted Deardourff to haunt art galleries in his limited spare time.

He and his wife, former Madeira School headmistress Elisabeth Griffith, amassed a sizable collection of paintings, sculptures and ceramic works before Deardourff's death in December 2004.

"The collection started very modestly, because our resources were limited," Griffith said. "His first gifts to me were a watercolor and a block print. Because he traveled so extensively, with campaigns or speaking [engagements] in every state except Alaska, and many countries, he visited galleries everywhere."

Griffith, who retired this summer after 22 years at Madeira, has donated 47 artworks to the McLean Project for the Arts (MPA), which soon will auction them off at a fund-raiser.



"Standing on Three," a bronze-and-copper maquette sculpture by Jon Havener, is among 47 artworks being auctioned off Sept. 12 as part of a McLean Project for the Arts fund-raiser.

The arts organization, which has three galleries in the McLean Community Center, will hold the auction at a private residence on Sunday, Sept. 12 from 4 to 6 p.m. The locale will be disclosed to people who R.S.V.P. for the event.

The works include three encaustic paintings by Rubin Rose, three ceramic works by Otto

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Heino and six clay sculptures by Jeff Shapiro.

Other sculptures offered for auction include a cast-glass work by Rick Beck, a bronze-and-copper maquette by Jon Havener and a pink-granite work by Jesus Moroles.

The auction also will serve up paintings by Shahla Arbabi, Willy Heeks and Leon Berkowitz.

"It's a good mix of paintings and ceramics," said MPA spokesman Dabney Cortina. "While there's not a theme, you can see why [Deardourff] and Betsy liked what they liked."

Those interested in buying the artworks also will have the opportunity to view and purchase them early at a "Sneak Peek" event on Friday, Sept. 10 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the same private home.

"If people see something they love and don't want to take the chance of getting into a bidding war with someone, they can buy it" at the Sneak Peek, Cortina said. "That price likely will be a bit higher than the starting bid at the auction."

The auction is the first such fund-raiser for the MPA, Cortina said. Proceeds will be placed in the organization's general fund, to support the wide range of MPA's offerings.

A tight housing situation contributed to the auction artworks' variety.

Deardourff began collecting ceramics and table sculptures after he and his family moved into Lucy Madeira's 1931 stone house on the school's campus in 1988, when Griffith became

headmistress. The family lived there for 16 years.

Deardourff retired from politics and was considering a career as a private art dealer when he was diagnosed with cancer in 2004.

Griffith's son and daughter are grown, so she decided in January this year to move from the family's five-bedroom home in McLean to a two-bedroom aerie in Bethesda, Md.

She kept part of the art collection and gave three artworks to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute in Utica, N.Y., and four to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, located in Washington, D.C.

"Many of the [collected] works are by women because John was a pro-[Equal Rights Amendment] feminist, and because women's work was underpriced, so we could afford them," Griffith said.

Griffith said she and her husband long supported McLean Project for the Arts, and added she was pleased the auction proceeds would help the organization hold more programs and showcase more exhibits.

Griffith declined to name favorite works in her collection, saying people's response to art is a deeply personal issue. It was hard to part with the family's old home and some of the artworks, each of which had its own story and memories, she said.

"We only bought what we loved, so I hope others will love it, too," Griffith said. "Art should be shared and seen and loved. John would be very pleased with this disposition, as are his children."

Reservations for the auction are required by Sept. 8; call Sandy Treanor at (703) 790-1953 or send an e-mail to info@mpaart.org.