

MONEY FLIES AND HEADS ROLL: PROPOSITION 13 An Editor's View

As art heads dropped on the chopping block of Proposition 13 in California, the art market made headlines in all the papers of the world with the "sale of the century," millions being exchanged for masterpieces from the Von Hirsch collection. The \$34 million exchanged for the Robert von Hirsch collection broke many records at Sotheby Parke Bernet in London and made many museums and collectors poorer or richer, as one might want to interpret it.

Norton Simon bought a Giovanni di Paolo Madonna for \$923,500; a pair of multicolored enamels brought more than \$2 million apiece. German museums were fortunate to receive their art back into their arms for less than they had anticipated. In a consortium, major German art treasures such as works by Albrecht Durer, an enameled gilt-copper arm ornament, a Wolf Huber pastel portrait, an ivory plaque depicting David and Goliath were all returned to German museums with the help of a retired Frankfurt banker, state governments, and state-controlled museums. For under \$20 million, the West German government returned some major German art treasures to the homeland of the Nazi-era Jewish fugitive who purchased them.

As the headlines of the *New York Times* read that a record \$13.4 million had changed hands in one day for art treasures, the inner page (in fact, just on the other side of the same article) read that erosion is attacking the Acropolis and the removal of the Caryatids, and the closing off of the Acropolis to traffic both foot and mechanical were making tourists quite irritated. What would \$13.4 million do to headlines if that money went to preserve the Parthenon, or Venice, or the *Last Supper*, or a series of buildings, instead of the purchase of some works of art in London? Would there be anything to *show* for it? But instead, we have headlines for the concrete objects, the jewels of an age gone by. The material, rather than the gesture, the objects, rather than the ideals.

More erosion has set in in the state of California, when on the sixth of June the citizens of that fair state voted to cut their property taxes, and in so doing, also voted to cut through the warp and woof of the cultural fabric of their existence, for there will be less music, less art, less laughter in the playgrounds or in the public swimming pools, less services that we have all taken for granted. And this is only the beginning, since the surplus of California is going to bail out everyone for the most part in the fiscal year 1978-79, but just wait, wait when there is nothing to help us out—wait when there are not only short unemployment lines, but long ones, very long ones, when professions and families will be disrupted, when the fiber of our lives will be cut to shreds.

Just wait until you come to Los Angeles and go to the museum and find the gates locked—or find the admission fee so high that it is prohibitive to take the family to the museum. Or find that creative professionals have become caretakers, for there is no money to be creative. Wait until the private sector is called upon to help with all those millions that they will be saving from property taxes—wait

and see how long their help will last. Just imagine the halls of museums empty, the sound of music stilled in the concert halls, the recreational and park facilities not staffed with supervisory staff or maintenance crews! Last year we had a water shortage, a drought they called it, but this year we have a **cultural drought**. At least, Nature responded with 33 inches of water to quench that thirst and make California lush for longer than anyone had imagined a "green" California to remain. But who will quench the thirst of those who want more out of life than a paycheck and a roof over their heads? Who will give us back our art, our music, our libraries, our play areas?

As Charles White, veteran artist, said at a public meeting of artists in Los Angeles, the art community must find new solutions beyond the immediate present and have "more control of our own destinies." Amen!

PROFILE: soft arkiv

One of the great points of reference gleaned from the Toronto Conference on Sculpture was news of the establishment of **Soft Arkiv**, a federally (Canadian) chartered computer-aided information service conceived and run by artists that provides information to artists for their own use, and information about artists to critics, art administrators, and the general public.

Soft Arkiv attempts to bring an artist's viewpoint to the issues which are becoming central to our society—the symbiosis of man and technological change, and the growing dominance of electronically processed information as the primary medium of social, political and economic exchange.

In this way, Soft Arkiv is attempting

1) to create a computerized information service that is satisfying to use from a human perspective—that accommodates computers to human needs rather than imposing the inflexible requirements of machines on human beings;

2) to isolate social and cultural issues flowing from the extraordinary increase in information gathering and processing, and,

3) to create satisfying responses to such issues. For instance, to resolve the social utility of maintaining extensive information with the individual's drive to privacy and self-determination.

At present, Soft Arkiv is engaged in a project, funded by the Explorations Division of the Canada Council, to create a prototype data base (computer archive) of biographical and bibliographical information concerning living Canadian artists. The first portion of this data base, containing information on selected Canadian sculptors, has been demonstrated to the public at the 10th International Sculpture Conference in Toronto.

Some of the problems have arisen which are interesting: notably the lack of common standards and scarcity of communication among holders of public information, and complex questions of privacy and privilege.

In other words, **Soft Arkiv** is trying to develop a simple, inexpensive computer terminal and the software to go with it, which will make it economically feasible for artists, writers and institutions to access a sophisticated data base that will have local, regional, national and international applications. Within the scheme they are proposing that people who share this system as users will be responsible for much of the content of the data base.

The biographies and bibliographical information about sculptors involves questionnaires from artists and galleries. All the panelists at the Conference were in the data base, and the machine-readable registration data of all the delegates was also fed into the system. The data base of people is complemented by a purely narrative data base of general information: copyright, grants, slide collections, arts writers, a sample artist/gallery consignment contract, freedom of information, a bibliography of Canadian arts publications and of computers and the arts, and profiles of major public art galleries. Because of the computer's flexibility, the data will change as often as necessary to keep up to date.

In order to expand and broaden the existing base, **Soft Arkiv** would like you to request an artist/gallery information sheet with requests for new avenues of inquiry, whether it be the cataloging of exhibition catalogs and of slides, or a print-out to start before 1967, rather than using that date as the data base, who should pay for such service and who should not, who should have access to the system and should there be those who are not allowed to use it?

As Michael Hayden, one of the founders and a present Director of **Soft Arkiv**, has told *Umbrella*, the hardware is now being created for the software and an interface is to be made this fall. The potential for information about sculptors is just a prototype for a data base for video artists, art periodicals, etc. We see that the potential is boundless, and **Soft Arkiv** is definitely a candidate for international cooperation and sharing of art information on a larger scale than ever before.

Hayden is a sculptor in light and environment, while Robert Arn, the Director, is an artist, scientist, teacher, writer, designer, critic and filmmaker. Stan Bevington, founder of Coach House Press, is the other Director.

For more information in this exciting venture, write to **Soft Arkiv, P.O. Box 597, Station P, Toronto, M5S 2T1, Canada.**

GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

AMERICA AS ART. This Smithsonian Institution publication complements a 1976 exhibition of the same name at the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C. Most of the works illustrated in this book were part of the show, which demonstrated how American artists changed their styles to reflect the continually changing social and cultural mores of the country. 320p., illus. S/N 047-003-00039-3 \$9.60

AMERICAN ART IN THE MAKING; Preparatory Studies for Masterpieces of American Painting, 1800-1900. Presents in a richly illustrated volume a general overview of 19th century art from the Smithsonian Institution's Travelling Exhibition Service. The book delves deeply into the creative process through these sketches, and with the text, provides great insight on the growth of American painting during this critical century. 1976. 95p., illus. S/N 047-003-00037-7 \$3.20

ART OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST: FROM THE 1930s to the Present. This is a study of artists working in the Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington areas since the 1930's. Fine illustrations along with short biographies and a very interesting text make this an important Smithsonian publication. 1974. 139p., illus. S/N 047-003-00022-9 \$4.10

CHAIM GROSS: SCULPTURE AND DRAWINGS. A Collection of drawings and sculptures in wood and bronze by this important American sculptor. More than 20 of the artist's major works are included. 1974. 47p., illus. S/N 047-003-00026-1 \$2.75

H. LYMAN SAYEN. The catalog of an exhibition held at the NCFCA in 1970. An active member of the American artists' colony abroad in the early years of the 20th century, he helped bridge the gap between the new painting in Paris and the course of painting at home. 1970. 83p., illus. S/N 047-003-00008-3 \$2.65

THE PAINTINGS OF CHARLES BIRD KING (1785-1862). As close to being the resident painter of 18th century Washington, D.C. as anyone, C.B. King turned his hand to what was needed as the occasion arose, whether it meant painting the likenesses of visiting Indians or the members of the Adams family. 1977. 214p., illus. S/N 047-003-00053-9 \$8.00

AMERICAN PRINTS FROM WOOD. A pictorial catalog of a traveling exhibition of woodcuts and engravings in American art. 1975. 64p., illus. S/N 047-003-00035-1 \$3.10

JOSEPH SAXTON AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MEDAL RULING AND PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS. The story of one of the most important figures in the development of medal ruling and photographic processes during the early 19th century. The early photography here is daguerreotype. 1975. 17p., illus. S/N 047-001-00123-1 \$.85

COLOR AND THE GRAPHIC ARTS. A reprint from the *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, offering a brief history of the development of color in the graphic arts, including books, magazines, newspapers, prints, and maps. 1975. 19p., illus. S/N 030-000-00075-7 \$.75

THE ANIMAL IN ART: SELECTIONS FROM THE HIRSH-HORN MUSEUM COLLECTION. Catalog of an exhibition during the winter of 1977-78. 1977. 14p., illus. S/N 047-003-00055-5 \$1.50