

BOLD STROKES

AND BROAD BRUSHES

A HISTORY OF COOPERATIVE ARTS ORGANIZATIONS IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

by

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PREPARED FOR THE CALIFORNIA
PIONEERS OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY
1990 HISTORICAL ESSAY CONTEST

1990
THIRD PRIZE
\$125.00

PREFACE

Though known more for its prunes, blossoms and silicon chips, Santa Clara County has also been blessed with many creative artists, artisans, art lovers and art organizers throughout the Twentieth Century.

Our pioneer artists worked alone, at lonely easels, separated physically and artistically from their peers. But during the Depression years, new roots took hold: roots of cooperation and partnership, roots that would one day blossom into a panoply of the arts.

The organization of artists in Santa Clara County quickly moved beyond just visual art to encompass music, theater and dance. While the South Bay was once sneered at by the cultural mecca to its north, today we are witnessing a rebirth: a region that is coming into its own, spurred on by a strong backbone of artists and art lovers, working together in cooperation to define the soul of the emerging metropolis.

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The year was 1938. Howard Hughes had just set the round-the-world speed record. War clouds were stirring over Europe. Teflon was invented, as well as color TV and the Xerox. The first minimum wage was set. Benny Goodman and Count Basie gave the first jazz concert at Carnegie Hall, while Woodie Guthrie traveled the country with his music. "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves," the first full-length animated cartoon, was released by Walt Disney. Orson Welles caused a nationwide scare with his "War of the Worlds." Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" made its debut. And Thomas Hart Benton finished his painting, "Cradling Wheat."

In San Jose, prune and fruit orchards still stood in the "Valley of the Heart's Delight," enjoying its last few years of agricultural prosperity before World War II would turn it into an industrial center and attractive site for the subdivision of land.

In that year, Santa Clara County's oldest cooperative arts organization, the San Jose Art League, was formed. Thus began an intriguing tale of growth and networking which led to the creation of the many multifaceted cooperative arts organizations the County enjoys in the 1990s.

THE SAN JOSE ART LEAGUE

When this collection of artists and art lovers first met in 1938, they decided to form an organization "to add to the cultural development of the rapidly growing City of San Jose and its surrounding technological and agricultural area of the Santa Clara Valley by bringing an appreciation of the visual arts." The group then set about doing this by promoting exhibitions, lectures, social functions and other activities. Over half a century later, they're still at it.

The League began primarily as a collection of San Jose State College teachers and students, meeting in the years just before and after World War II. The group functioned without a home for its first 22 years. Its first facility was the 1887 Francis Bates home at 482 South Second Street, purchased in 1959. The stately Victorian had an upstairs apartment which was rented out for a few years and later became the home of "artists-in-residence," such as former director George Rivera and his wife, Donna.

Described by many as the "father of the Art League," art professor John De Vincenzi was involved in the League's affairs during its most active years, after 1950. Through those years, he served in numerous posts,

including president (1952-54, 61-62), chair of the Advisory Board, and chair of the Anniversary Committee. His wife, Lonnie De Vincenzi, is a League volunteer who holds the longevity record as president (1981-86).

Like many of the County's art pioneers, John De Vincenzi's work with one major arts group led him into ventures with other cooperative arts organizations. He served as one of the first members of the San Jose Fine Arts Commission, and on several committees dedicated to providing a civic gallery in San Jose. (A 50-year retrospective of his artwork was exhibited at the Triton Art Museum in 1990.)

If John De Vincenzi was the Art League's "father," its "grandfather" was Friedolin Kessler, who was a founding member. Still active in the 1990s as an artist/designer, Kessler's wooden mosaic, "Totem," was featured in the League's 50th anniversary exhibition in 1988.

Kessler was a leader of the original group in 1938. During the war years, the league went into "mothballs," but he helped bring it out afterwards with semi-annual exhibitions for local artists. He recalls exhibits by Clare Falkenstein, Rico Le Brun and cartoons of murals by Anton Refrigier as highlights of the post-war era.

Like De Vincenzi, Kessler's organizational efforts were directed towards other cooperative arts organizations in the early 60s, but he rejoined the League when the Advisory Board was set up in the early 80s. Asked if he ever felt that the group he helped organize would exist over 50 years, Kessler replied, "We hoped it would hang on, but this is much longer than we ever thought." He continued to persuade the community to give fair and

satisfactory recognition to the Art League and to be supportive of the League's efforts in adding to the cultural life of the community.

The basic direction of the Art League was established by George Rivera, director from 1982-1986. Rivera went on to become curator of the Triton Museum of Art. From 1986 until July 1988, the director was Helen MacKinlay, a friendly New Zealand native with an appealing accent and demeanor. MacKinlay tried to expand and augment Rivera's work, and add an international flavor.

Having also lived in Antwerp, MacKinlay brought a world view to the League, and was instrumental in setting up several international touring exhibitions to both Belgium and New Zealand. Her contacts in foreign embassies allowed Art League exhibitions to appear there. A travelling exhibition, "Print San Jose II," also appeared in Brussels and Lahore, Pakistan. MacKinlay's husband, Rod, served as president before they relocated to Singapore in 1988. Gene Van Natta, president in 1979-80, and owner of the former Pen and Brush Art Store, was elected to another term as President to replace him.

Lectures have always been an important part of the League's work. Many exhibiting artists have contributed their time and talents as speakers for the League, while their exhibits were hanging. Competitions are often held, including a regional three-dimensional art competition each year over two decades. Community outreach programs have included exhibitions such as "City Hall Salute," and art demonstrations in local convalescent hospitals.

Since its inception, the League has had a strong relationship with San

Jose State University. Master's candidates in art are required to show prior to graduation, and many choose the League's gallery as the best off-campus place to do so. Many San Jose State University art faculty members, including John De Vincenzi, department head Fred Spratt, and working artist and retired art professor Bob Freimark, have served on the League's Advisory Board. SJSU's class in "museumology" was set up by the League to be taught by a part-time teacher who could also serve as the League's director.

The League's annual fundraiser is the "Collector's Choice Art Auction". Contemporary artworks, donated by local artists, are first exhibited at the Gallery. The auctions were coordinated by League advisor/treasurer/director Dr. Delmer Kolb, who was also the first curator of the San Jose Museum of Art. Begun in 1952 to set up a building fund, the event was referred to as the "Grab Bag" until 1960. Most of the auctions were held in private homes and gardens until the 1980s, when larger restaurants, like the Market Street Bar and Grill, were used prior to the opening of the downtown gallery at 66 North Market Street. Another major fund raising sale is the "Best and the Worst Art Sale," a light-hearted tongue-in-cheek fundraiser in which artists (anonymously) donate "jewels and skeletons" from their own closets.

The League makes rentals and sales available to local collectors, corporations, business and patrons. In the 1970s, the rental and sales function of the League was located along the Paseo de San Antonio Parkway. Later, it was moved to 31 West San Fernando, in the "developing" area of San Jose. Problems continued, however, when use of the facility became too difficult with redevelopment and rent hikes. After the West San Fernando

site closed, the rental and sales outlet moved to the South Second Street site, known as "The Art Center."

That site has also had its drawbacks. Former director MacKinlay once said, "Victorian walls are beautiful, but they're not always straight!" The League shared its Victorian with a performance art group, Exo Productions, in exchange for performances at exhibitions. (A 1988 exhibit, "The Artist's Vision: A World Without War," concluded with an evening of poetry and performance art.)

Unsatisfied, Bob Freimark and John De Vincenzi walked the streets of San Jose looking for ideal facilities for a new gallery. They considered a proposal to build a new facility behind the Second Street building, but settled on the building at 66 North Market Street in San Jose. This building had been used by another coalition of arts groups known as Tapestry in Talent. It then became the new facility for the League gallery, offering expanded space of up to approximately 17,000 square feet. Portions of the building were sublet to practicing artists, who participate in the annual "Open Studios" programs throughout San Jose.

The move also gave the League an opportunity to play a vital part in the San Jose's downtown Renaissance of the late 1980s. The Gallery was established to offer artwork of all media by both established and emerging Santa Clara Valley artists.

The League's fiftieth anniversary was cultural highlight for San Jose. A reception at the San Jose Museum of Art featured an opportunity to view the anniversary exhibition of fifty artists who have been a part of the

League over the years, along with innovative entertainment, a special art exhibition preview, and Art League awards for the first half-century.

Also in 1988, a series of classes on hand-made books and alternative photo processes were taught in the League's newly renovated classroom space by printmaker Glen Rogers Perrotto. Rogers Perrotto, one of many talented young women who joined the League in the 1980s, served as interim director and exhibited monotypes by students from Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall. Anthony Torres, who was appointed director in September 1988, has forged new links with the Coalition for the Visual Arts and San Jose State's CADRE program (Computers in Art, Design, Research and Education).

SPRINGBOARD TO THE FINE ARTS COMMISSION

Over the years, the League developed strong relationships with the National Endowment for the Arts, the Music and Arts Foundation of Santa Clara Valley, the San Jose Fine Arts Commission, and the Arts Council of Santa Clara County. As a member of the original Music and Arts Foundation fund drive, the League's members actively participated in raising funds for a dozen mid-sized arts organizations in San Jose, and shared in the proceeds according to their efforts.

The springboard of energy and enthusiasm which activated the San Jose Art League quickly catapulted into other areas. League activist John De Vincenzi went on to become a powerful force in the creation of the San Jose Fine Arts Commission in the early 1970s. The Commission, under the

Convention and Cultural Facilities Department of the City of San Jose, was responsible for disbursing San Jose's arts budget allocations primarily to the major arts organizations. In the 1980s, this annual figure approached the one million dollar mark.

Another cornerstone of the County's arts network is poet/health crusader/arts administrator Consuelo Santos-Killins. Santos-Killins appeared on the local arts scene in 1973. She served four years (including the chairmanship) on the City's Fine Arts Commission, working with Fine Arts Director Bert Gerlitz and Department Head John Popovich. In 1981, she became the first Santa Clara County resident to be named to the California Arts Council. She served as the state council's chair from 1985-1987, the first woman and the first Hispanic ever to do so.

SAN JOSE'S ARTS RENAISSANCE

Another important grouping of literary, visual, culinary and performing artists in San Jose became known as Tapestry In Talent. Formed as part of the nation's 1976 Bicentennial celebration and the 1977 San Jose Bicentennial, "TNT" became an independent not-for-profit organization in 1978.

Under the direction of Alena Wilcoxson (originally with the City's "Happiness Task Force") TNT held a multicultural multi-arts Great American Arts Festival downtown every July 4th weekend.

Wilcoxson and San Jose Art League treasurer Dr. Delmer Kolb were also directors of a non-profit "Council of the Arts, Greater San Jose Area,"

founded in 1971 to publicize the events and performances of its 28 member organizations between Los Altos and Gilroy.

In 1985, the Great American Arts Festival event moved to the County Fair site for five years, during San Jose's major redevelopment. In 1990, however, the TNT event was moved back downtown on the first weekend in August, to kick off still another new entity, the San Jose New World Festival, in concert with the Festival's Urban Fair and Artsfest.

In the summer of 1989, following adoption of the "Arts 2020" plan, the City of San Jose instituted the new Office of Cultural Affairs under the City Manager's office. This office took over responsibility for the Fine Arts program, the Arts in Education program, and the Arts in Public Places program, among others. The latter offers a downtown public art walk brochure featuring twelve outdoor sculptures, including "Giselle ou le Wilis," for which sculptor Julia Lord used Mikhail Baryshnikov as a model.)

Dan McFadden took on responsibility for the Office of Cultural Affairs upon his promotion to Deputy City Manager in June 1988. Andrew Bales, Arts Planning and Development Director for the City of San Jose, was hired in August 1989. In January 1990, former California Confederation of the Arts President Yankee Johnson was hired to take over the Fine Arts function.

ARTS ROUNDTABLE

The San Jose Arts Roundtable was formed in the 1980s to serve the needs of "The Big Six" behemoth arts organizations in San Jose. They represent

the major forces of music, drama, musical theater, opera, art, and dance within Santa Clara County, and will continue as such in the 1990s.

These large performing arts organizations, which boast professional management and multimillion-dollar budgets, wanted to fight accusations that they were carnivores who gouge out the vast majority of arts funding and leave the dozens of smaller organizations to scavenge for scraps. By working together, they found they could create a positive aura of high-powered culture in Silicon Valley. The groups are:

The SAN JOSE CIVIC LIGHT OPERA was formed in 1934 (having used other names such as the San Jose Music Theatre Association). Originally an amateur theatrical group, the company now combines "name" stars, Equity actors and staff, and local talent to present four major musicals each season. With a phenomenal growth spurt during the 1980s, SJCLO boosted its subscribership to 30,000.

OPERA SAN JOSE, founded in 1980 by former Metropolitan Opera star mezzo-soprano Irene Dalis, achieved professional status in 1986. In presenting works of Verdi, Mozart, Strauss, Puccini, and an annual Christmas present--Gian Carlo Menotti's "Amahl and the Night Visitors," Miss Dalis, a San Jose native, prides herself on the company's practice of training young singers rather than importing established names from other areas.

SAN JOSE REPERTORY COMPANY, also born in 1980, became the fastest growing repertory of its kind in the nation, with a seasoned company performing new works before the ink on the scripts was dry. In 1985, the San Jose Redevelopment Agency awarded San Jose Rep a long-term, low-cost lease

of land adjacent to the City's spacious Center for the Performing Arts. Plans were prepared for two new performance areas, a 600-seat main center, and a 250-seat facility dedicated to premieres of new works. Financial realities, however, stalled those plans in favor of use of existing facilities. Founding producer James Reber moved on to direct the City's New World Festival, while renowned dramatist Timothy Near took over the reins at the Rep in 1987.

The SAN JOSE SYMPHONY, conducted by nationally-recognized maestro George Cleve, is the oldest in California. The Symphony once combined forces with San Jose Rep and Opera San Jose to produce the first major performance of Peter Shaffer's "Amadeus" with a full Mozart orchestral score. Maestro Cleve, whose contract will expire in the early 1990s, is also known as a cornerstone of the Midsummer Mozart Series.

The SAN JOSE CLEVELAND BALLET is a local troupe which began to establish a partnership with the Cleveland Ballet in the mid-1980s. It spends half of its season in each of the two cities, deriving half of its funds from each area. In the 1985, it sponsored a visit by Mikhail Baryshnikov and the American Ballet Theater, with underwriting and coordination provided by Pacific Bell and the Arts Council of Santa Clara County.

The SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART, in the historic 1892 Post Office building at 110 South Market in San Jose, is itself a historic landmark with six classic galleries. Its monthly exhibits emphasize American art, and one exhibit was limited to artists with studio space in San Jose or the South Bay Area. The Museum of Art survived some difficult years of management and directorial

problems. The long construction delays have caused their share of grief, as well. But the rebuilding is underway, and the institution will live on.

These performing groups choose from a variety of facilities, including the San Jose Center for the Performing Arts (designed by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation), San Jose's Civic Auditorium and Montgomery Theater, and other much smaller performing arts facilities. San Jose's maturing downtown will undoubtedly yield more performance spaces in the 1990s.

The decade of the 1990s promises two exciting new additions to the Arts Roundtable's membership and two additions to the downtown skyline: The Children's Discovery Museum and the San Jose Technology Center.

MUSIC AND ARTS FOUNDATION of SANTA CLARA VALLEY

Excitement and enthusiasm about local arts organizations spread throughout the County. Other cities formed arts commissions to coordinate activities, education and funding. In Palo Alto, for example, a community of under 60,000 now boasts a Division of Arts and Culture, under the direction of Leon Kaplan, with an annual budget of \$1.8 million. Its oldest group, the Palo Alto Players, dates back to 1931.

The first countywide fundraising coalition for the arts was the Music and Arts Foundation of Santa Clara Valley. It was founded in 1958 as a non-profit financing agency for the San Jose Concert Series. It gained momentum in 1967 as a "United Fund" mechanism for a consortium of five groups. The goal was to match the City of San Jose's contributions to the groups.

The Foundation's funding efforts got a big initial boost through the efforts of arts patron board members like San Jose Mercury-News publisher Joseph B. Ridder, Patrick H. Peabody of Peabody Mines, Louis Ratzesberger, Jr., and developer James R. Compton. Mrs. Thomas L. Mitchell and Danny Hill both served terms as president of the board of trustees. The board's first combined fund-raising effort netted \$18,000 for the Foundation, Symphony, Light Opera, Municipal Chorus and the now-defunct San Jose Theatre Guild.

The Music and Arts Foundation eventually became the fund raising arm for the midsized arts groups in the County. Besides the San Jose Art League, these have included City Lights Performance Group, Creativity Unlimited (arts for the handicapped), the Gilbert & Sullivan Society, New Dance Company San Jose, Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra, the Peninsula Symphony Association, the San Jose Children's Musical Theater, the San Jose Center for Poetry and Literature, the San Jose Symphonic Choir, the San Jose Taiko Group, the Santa Clara Chorale, the Valley Institute of Theatre Arts (VITA), the Western Ballet Theater Association, the West Valley Masterworks Chorale, and Young Audiences.

Under the leadership of board members such as Westinghouse executive Raymond Strong and banker C. Donald Allen, and guided by executive director Ervie Smith, the Foundation continued to make great strides in securing annual funding for these groups, reaching totals of over \$400,000 per year.

COMBINED ARTS AGENCIES

In the late 70s and early 80s, local control of funding for arts groups became a statewide trend, particularly in major metropolitan areas. But when the California Arts Council's State-Local Partnership Program was announced in 1980, there was no single existing agency in Santa Clara County to carry out the required planning and needs assessment tasks.

After some deliberation, the County Board of Supervisors designated the Music and Arts Foundation of Santa Clara County to supervise the planning process. In April of 1980, the Foundation established a 39-member ad hoc group, the Combined Arts Agencies, to research and coordinate information needed and to manage and administer the development of the Santa Clara County Master Plan for the Arts.

In July of 1980, the County Board of Supervisors designated the Music and Arts Foundation to be the contracting agency for the State-Local Partnership Program, with the understanding that a grant of \$12,000 from the State would be passed through to the Combined Arts Agencies to carry out the actual plan.

Robert Bailey, interim director of San Jose Civic Light Opera, was hired as a consultant to oversee the planning process and to compose a "preplan" consisting primarily of procedures and techniques for assessing the arts needs of the County and developing a County Arts Agency to adequately address these needs in terms of programs, services and funds. Most important was a proposal for a new non-profit corporation whose board of

directors would include representatives from business, government, education and the arts. The plan was completed and, after securing the necessary government approvals, was submitted to the State on in March 1981.

The plan qualified Santa Clara County to receive a grant of approximately \$14,000 in addition to another block planning grant of \$12,000 for fiscal 1982. Robert Bailey was again retained in October 1981 to expand and update the plan according to the new state guidelines which had now become Phase One of a three-year planning cycle. Christi Welter was hired as a full-time Cultural Coordinator to assist in completing Phase One by March 1982, and setting up a new agency which would work directly with the County Board of Supervisors. Working from the concepts outlined in the plan, a set of bylaws was drawn up for the new agency, the Cultural Council of Santa Clara County. Those bylaws were approved by the Board of Supervisors on February 23, 1982.

ARTS COUNCIL OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY

The new board retained Christi Welter to serve as interim director and complete the Master Plan for the Arts by 1984. For clarity, the Cultural Council changed its name to the Arts Council of Santa Clara County in 1984. Michal S. Bernstein became the first permanent executive director, and served in that capacity from 1983-85. Pacific Bell area Vice President Jack Black was instrumental as founding president.

A consortium of 250 smaller arts organizations throughout the County

organized themselves as an advisory capacity to the Council. This group, the Cultural Advisory Alliance, continued in various forms into the 90s. The Arts Council annually regranted \$40-\$70,000 to groups represented by the Advisory Alliance and to individual artists themselves.

Another adjunct organization was the Business Volunteers for the Arts, which encouraged local corporations to donate people power, as well as financial power, toward local arts organizations. The Director of the BVA program, Evelyn Crawford, also served as Arts Council director from 1985-88 after Bernstein's resignation. The San Francisco BVA program then lured her to its ranks three years later.

Patricia Holihan Steinhardt, a veteran of the California Confederation of the Arts staff, was hired in July 1988 as Arts Council Executive Director. Holihan Steinhardt quickly made great strides in recouping losses and reunifying the organization. Sunnyvale mayor Larry Stone, attorney Bob Chadwick and Santa Clara Land Title Company executive Carl Cookson all took terms as President of the Arts Council in the late 80s. Silicon Valley cornerstone Phillip Boyce of Pacific Valley Bank served as Chairman.

In 1986, the Arts Council of Santa Clara County began taking action to merge with the Music and Arts Foundation. A long transition was allowed for this merger, and by 1989, the merger was complete. With the resignation of Music and Arts director Ervie Smith, the executive staffing of both groups came under the same person, Trish Steinhardt, in July 1989.

This merger represented a new plateau for the arts in Santa Clara County: not only were arts groups cooperating, but the cooperative arts

organizations were merging together as well! Arts administrators were learning that by eliminating duplication of effort, more money and energy could be focused directly into the arts.

Management of the arts can be elusive. The future of the arts in Santa Clara County is bright, as are its new horizons as a cultural center. But that future was paved by a long history of trial and error among artists and their supporters, who tinkered with many different types of arts organizations, looking for just the right formula. Together, they worked hard to cooperate towards the goal of improving the quality of life in "the Valley of the Heart's Delight."

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