

1989

## Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (1979-1992): News Article 10

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**Focus: Arts & Entertainment**



Photographer Aaron Siskind next to an exhibition of his photographs at the offices of Peat Marwick Main in Providence. photo by Ron Mann

# Corps. create a relationship between businesses and arts

By Ann Dunnington

The Providence accounting firm of Peat Marwick Main has unveiled a corporate first in Rhode Island: an art collection consisting entirely of work by Rhode Island artists. Its halls display an impressive array of such artists as photographer Aaron Siskind, glass sculptor Howard Ben Tre, illustrator David Macaulay, New Yorker magazine cover artist Gretchen Dow Simpson and native painter Maxwell Mays.

"We view the collection as representing a partnership between the state's business and cultural communities, something that is very important to the quality of life in our state," said managing partner Joseph M. Cianciolo.

Cianciolo hopes the collection will start a trend. "We have a rich art community, an incredible reservoir of talent in this state," he said. "Business leaders are getting the message that they don't have to go to New York to find good art. It's here."

Other corporations have also sought to include Rhode Island artists in their office collections. They include Old Stone Development Corp., Amica Insurance, Hinkley Allen Snyder & Connen, and Edwards & Angell. However, Peat Marwick's offices represent the first full-fledged immersion in Rhode Island artistry.

**Slow, steady progress**

Business interest in the arts has continued a slow, steady rise over the past few years. In 1984, the Department of Economic Development (DED) started a program to promote Rhode Island artists by exhibiting them on its own walls. The exhibition was curated by Fleet National Bank vice president Diana Johnson, who has also served as acting director of the RISD Museum and is currently chairwoman of the board of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts.

Twenty-two businesses signed up for the program. They chose works by lottery, which remained on loan for two years, bearing a label indicating the company's ownership.

"We began with well-known Rhode Island artists," Johnson said, "the rationale being that often those coming into DED were new or from out of state. It would be nice if they saw names they recognized and then realized these artists had chosen to live and work in Rhode Island."

Artists in the first exhibition included internationally known photographers Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind, glass sculptor Dale Chihuly, and artists David Macaulay and Chris Van Allsburg. The program soon had a waiting list. Department director Louis Fazzano said he hopes to put together another program this year.

**One means of support**

"It's a way to support and showcase Rhode Island artists," Johnson said. "We also hoped that if businesses participated, they would then get interested on their own. A lot of people talk about developing Rhode Island collections, but it doesn't always come to fruition. That's why the Peat Marwick collection is especially exciting."

Business interest in the Rhode Island arts

community has also been sparked by recent economic impact reports. According to James Hagan, president of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, the arts community in Rhode Island represents a \$125 million industry.

"We think, potentially at least, that the arts business in Rhode Island... is a segment of the business economy that can be grown and expanded. Not a lot of attention has been paid to it, and we'd like to see what we can do to help it grow," Hagan said.

Some of this growing interest can be traced back to the Governor's Conference on Business and the Arts, a program sparked by Gov. DiPrete's declaration of 1987 as the Year of the Arts.

**Art gets a boost**

The daylong program presented business assistance lectures for artists and introduced Rhode Island to Business Volunteers for the Arts, a national program established by the New York Arts and Business Council with local chapters in major US cities.

"The task force was created to stimulate a greater awareness in the business community of the various arts organizations," Hagan said, "and to see if there is anything business people can do from an economic development perspective to help artists."

Hagan said, "I was surprised by the numbers. We had about 40 to 50 people sign up for the arts task force from businesses across the state. That indicated to us that there must be genuine interest, so we explored it further."

That led to the creation of a local chapter of the Business Volunteers for the Arts. Its purpose, Hagan said, is to strengthen ties between businesses and the arts by lending business expertise to non-profit arts organizations and other small arts businesses.

**Volunteers statewide**

The arts task force is chaired by AT&T's public relations manager, Peter Cassels, whose goals include creating the country's first statewide chapter of Business Volunteers for the Arts. Currently, Cassels said, he is searching for a part-time manager and hopes to get the Rhode Island chapter established in the first half of 1989.

Stronger arts organizations will contribute to the cultural activity and quality of life that is a major draw for attracting professional talent to the area, Cassels said. "That's what executives look for when considering relocation. They like to have good strong cultural organizations. We have a very good quality of life in Rhode Island, and one of the reasons is the strong arts community—the internationally known Rhode Island School of Design and Museum, Tony Award-winning Trinity and a very good philharmonic."

Hagan concurs that one of the aims of the Arts Task Force and Business Volunteers will be to ensure the community at large and business community in particular maintains strong interest in the arts.

"From a selfish standpoint, the economic development perspective," Hagan said, "when trying to attract topflight executives to relocate to the state, the arts are a very strong factor." □

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