A Report on The Art Center for Southwestern LA or The USL Art Museum or The UL Art Museum at Lafayette

By Frances Lové, former director of the Art Center and officer of the USL Foundation, 1965-1983.

This report is dedicated to people who are interested in knowing about the early history, leadership, and the building, as well as one of the finest art collections in this state. The building itself was once the pride of all of South Louisiana, and we are in hopes that it will once again be in that category. National and International visitors who came here were impressed too. A curator from the British Museum in London told me that he had not expected to see the high quality of (cypress) paneling in the library of the building. We hope to see it returned to its original beauty and order with ALL of the permanent collection in place. Also, after the building is refurbished, we believe that the time is right to build the second building for a gallery as originally planned by A. Hays Town.

WHAT: An art center owned by the USL Foundation. The name was chosen by the members, because they could not agree on naming the building for one person. (They did not name this building a museum, because they wanted to indicate that it would have a wider use as a place for lectures and seminars, teaching people of all ages, small scale performing arts, and social gatherings related to the arts. The small library was to be maintained for the use of the public and the community. A second building was planned to be used for more gallery space. Pages 3, 4, 6-8, 14-23, 51-52.

WHERE: On property donated by Maurice Heymann at the corner of St. Mary Blvd. and Girard Park Drive, adjacent to USL. Pages: 6-13.

WHEN: Fund raising began seriously in 1965 and the initial building was completed in March 1968. The building was paid for in 1972.

WHY: An important art collection of 10 paintings was donated by W.E. Groves Orleans, and other valuable donations followed, including A. Hays Town of Baton Rouge, Mr. and Mrs. James Parkerson, Mrs. Jewell Parkerson Roy Lowe and J. Arthur Roy, Mrs. Jacqueline Heymann Cohn, Dr. Wm. E. McCray, Rob and Beth Rickey, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Boudousquie (of New Orleans, Lafayette, and Sun City, AZ, the Whitney Museum of American Art of New York,
Gilbert Laloux (Namur, Belgium), Mr. and Mrs. William Mason, Mr. and Mrs. Ben Toledano (New Orleans), Mr. and Mrs. M. E. Girard, Dr. and Mrs. Wm. E. Hayden, Miss Agnes Edwards, Mr. and Mrs. Russell Caffery, Dr. and Mrs. John Straub, Horace B. Rickey, Jr., Alvin Sharp, John and Frances Love, Kenneth Reasoner (Le Milleur), and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Shelton, Mr. and Mrs. Henry B. Abrahams of New York City, Miss Harriet Joor, Ninette Feraud of Namur, Belgium, Judge John Shaw of Opelousas, and several anonymous donations. The above donors not listed by city, state, or nation were residents of Lafayette at the time the gift(s) were donated.

Groves Collection, Pages 24–36; Parkerson and First National Bank, 37-39; Caffery, 40; 41-43 other major gifts; Jacqueline Heymann Cohn Collection, 42-48; others, 49, 51-52.

WHO: The USL Administration, including Dr. Joel L. Fletcher, Dr. Clyde Rougeou, and Dr. Ray Authement, all succeeding presidents of the University and Dr. Herbert A. Hamilton, Dean of the College of Commerce. Fred Bates, Winston Fontenot, D. S. “Shine” Young, Joseph Onebane, Herbert Heymann, J. Rayburn Bertrand, and Billy Bolton, were presidents of the USL Foundation board of directors, 1955-1983, during the formative years.

Among the men and women who have served as members of the Foundation board of directors are the following: Henry W. Busch, Wesley H. Clanton of Eunice, LA. Murphy J. Foster if Franklin, LA, Barton W. Freeland, Sr. of Crowley, William P. Fuller of Oakdale, Jacob S. Landry of New Iberia, H. J. Lutcher Stark of Orange, TX, Walter S. McIlhenny of Avery Island, Frank A. Godchaux III and Mrs. Margaret Steen of Abbeville, and Morgan W. Walker of Alexandria. Lafayette members have included the following: Fred W. Bates, J. Winston Fontenot, Herbert Heyman, Dr. Fred W. Zur Burg, Henry W. Busch, M. Eloi Girard, Mrs. C. Thad Montgomery, Walter W. Schroeder.


AREA BUSINESS AND SOCIAL LEADERSHIP: The City of Lafayette’s Mayors Office, the Chamber of Commerce, the Service League (now Junior League), Lafayette’s Federated Clubs, the Lafayette Art Association, En Avant, Chez Amies, Idonian, The Woman’s Club, Aletheian, L’Heure d’Amitié, Toujour Fidele, Lions. Beta Sigma Phi, Jaycees, Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, etc. and most other Lafayette and area organizations. The Art Center was a favorite community project with wide area
participation from the University, the public and private schools, the convention and tourism promoters, etc.

A docent organization provided volunteer assistance with the programming of the Art Center. They included the following: Mally Phillips, Mrs. Bronc Foreman, Mrs. Keith Lindley, Mrs. Flo Rickey, Mrs. E. Lee Mills, Mrs. W. W. Coulter, Mrs. Alan Shaw, Barbara Pointer Stephens, Loraine Crain, Billie Hebert, Mrs. H. H. Gates, Mrs. Rick Rountree, Mrs. George Champagne, Mrs. Gladys Carter, Mrs. Hazel Francisco, Mrs. Douglas Lynn, Lorilee DeHart, Mrs. Kaliste Saloom, Jr., Mrs. Bella Chappuis Abrams, Carolyn Heymann, Flo Jones, Virginia Yongue, Mrs. Paul Hilliard, Jan Rippy, Jewell Lowe, Jan Heymann, Annette Myers and Ann LeJeune.

Professional artists who taught at the Art Center included Julie Christensen, Kathleen Crain, Randy Simon, Claudia Trivethick, Ben Earl Looney, Larry Russell, Kirby Rogere, Tina Cook, Fred Daspit, and others, as well as professional photographers.

**HOW? It was a community project with wide area participation.**

1. **Eight publications sold related to exhibits and seminars:** Louisiana French Furnishings: 1700-1830, Oriental Rugs, Victorian Decorative Arts, Haitian Art, Louisiana Artists Working in New Orleans, 1895-1910, European Graphic Art, The Groves Collection, Umlauf Sculpture, etc.
   - How? By selling institutional-type advertising to banks, dept., stores, etc.

2. **Annual month-long Art for Youth Exhibit for bus tours from all Lafayette parish schools:** Sponsored by and executed through the Lafayette Service League.

3. **Annual juried art shows and competition** for high school students with prizes from the Lafayette Art Association and partial scholarships. Judges chosen from University of Houston and other art faculties.

4. About every other year we sponsored seminars with nationally known authorities in their field, such as from other campuses, museums, etc. One year we had the Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum director, a curator from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and author/faculty person from Tulane University. Another year we brought a curator from the Chicago Art Institution, and for the Oriental rug seminar we used a curator from the Smithsonian in D. C.

   In 1983 we took 23 artists to Washington D. C. where Senator Russell Long sponsored them in an exhibit in the rotunda of the Russell Office Bldg. for senators during the weekend of the Louisiana Congressional sponsorship of the Mardi Gras there.

   One spring we sponsored a six weeks series of films, the **MUSEUM WITHOUT WALLS** series from the National Endowment of Art. Ticket sales paid for the project. **HOW ELSE?** By sponsorship from local and area people.
5. DESIGNFAIR, an annual weeklong fine art, fashion, music and drama event at the Hilton with booths, speakers, productions, fashion shows. This event was well attended for 21 years by area people interested in the visual and performing arts. Booths were sold to area businesses, and runway fashions were sold to fashion leaders and department stores. Advertising was sold to businesses into our publications, as you will see in this report.

This money was handled through the Foundation for Art Center expenses for the building, as well as to pay for needed occasional parttime help and, to sponsor special exhibits. One year we purchased 18th and 19th century ivory miniatures for the collection.

The Museum was open to the public without charge.

AMBASSADOR JEFFERSON CAFFERY COLLECTION OF EGYPTIAN ART—Although this collection belongs to the University, it was displayed in the Art Center on a permanent basis at the request of the Foundation, the Caffery family, and UL faculty. In the summer of 1976 (at my expense) I spent time with Egyptian curators at the Louvre in Paris and the British Museum in London identifying the pieces that had been given here. There are several very rare items included. AMAN RA, “king of the gods” is probably the rarest of all, appears on page 39. It was given to the Ambassador by Jamal Abdal Nasser in Cairo, 1955. There are only two in the Louvre collection and three at the British Museum.

THE IBIS, Sacred Bird to Thoth, is on page 36. All three items are bronze.

Mr. and Mrs. RUSSELL CAFFERY, heirs of Ambassador Caffery, donated an important collection of late eighteenth century Portuguese silver holloware to the Art Center for Southwestern Louisiana that includes four candelabra, three plateaux, three urns, and several classic figures. These pieces were often used for special events. Russell Caffery and Associates was the civil engineering company who executed the plat showing the Art Center property. See page 4. He was the nephew of the Ambassador.