A SURVEY AND ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP AND APPROACH
OF TEXAS MUSEUMS TO CONTEMPORARY ART

THESIS

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By

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The problem of this survey is to ascertain the relationship between nine Texas art museums and contemporary art, defined for this study as art of the 1970s. The role of the museum and its involvement with contemporary art are also perceived in respect to the general public.

The purpose of this study was (1) to visit nine Texas art museums and interview the director or curator of contemporary art, using a standardized questionnaire, and (2) to present and analyze the responses to the questionnaire.

The eight questions comprising the survey were formulated to include both practical and philosophical related concerns. Therefore, the survey responses and final conclusions reflect a variety of issues ranging from the physical accommodation of diverse contemporary works to the more fundamental philosophical issue concerned with contemporary art's presence in the museum and the institution's function.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The substantial growth and development of art museums in Texas, notably in the late sixties and early seventies, has, for the most part, revealed a parallel growth of interest in the contemporary area. The increased involvement of museums with contemporary art and their presentation of that art to the general public has produced a variety of often conflicting views. To what extent the museum should and can accommodate contemporary works and public interest in the museum has become an important issue.

Historically, contemporary art of any period has found its way into the museum following an aging process. Like a literary classic, it is confronted by the test of time. Realistically, museums are collectors and preservers of art. Some specific means are necessary in order to select important works on their own merits as well as their relevant placement within the museum's collection.

Whether exhibiting or collecting contemporary art in the museum, numerous questions are raised concerning the ability to judge the quality and historical significance of the work, as it is not yet removed in time. Other difficulties arise in determining an effective
interpretation of conceptual works and communicating such theories to a random audience. Aside from the philosophical concerns, there are also practical considerations. Problems dealing with space and technical facilities must be considered because of the changing physical aspect of recent works such as installation pieces, video works, acoustical systems, and viewer participation projects. In light of the previous considerations, can art museums accommodate such diverse and often elusive contemporary works of art? At one extreme, one might ask, does a survey of contemporary art belong in the museum?

The very nature of contemporary art is one of change and rebellion. Currently working artists are not only exploring both old and new issues and processes in art, but more importantly, they are questioning, challenging, and defying traditionally accepted concepts and practices. Not only does one face the challenge of effectively interpreting a work in light of the artist and his times, but one is often subjected to a reassessment of the very essentials of critical analysis. For example, elements such as quality, beauty, and formalism are not always relevant in the analysis and interpretation of contemporary works. Many artists continue to deny the significance of the art and question the very existence of this phenomenon, art. On the other hand, artists continue to produce art works, or more aptly, visualizations of their creative
ideas, which are then presented to the public for exhibition. The critic's role may be seen as increasingly challenging due to the broad scope of contemporary aesthetics. Furthermore, given the presence of numerous extra-art influences affecting the arts, the museum's role has also become a more complex one.

Although some museums or institutes have devoted themselves solely to the exhibition of recent art, for the most part, contemporary works of art have been misfits. How can they be incorporated into the mainstream of art history? If we assume that a museum is a collector as well as an educator of art history, then the exhibition of recent works would logically have a beneficial effect on the quality of the museum's presentation, both aesthetically and intellectually. And, if many issues in art are indeed relevant to current social issues, then the public could ideally benefit from exposure to them.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is to ascertain the relationship between nine Texas art museums and contemporary art, defined for this study as art of the 1970s. In view of this relationship, the role of the museum and its involvement with contemporary art are also examined in respect to the general public.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was (1) to visit nine Texas art museums and interview the directors or curators of contemporary art using a standardized questionnaire, and (2) to present and analyze the responses to the questionnaire. It was hoped that they would provide insight into the relationship between museums and contemporary art, and the effects of that relationship on the museum, contemporary art, and the public. An exploration into the philosophical and practical aspects of the contemporary art and museum relationship should provide useful information beneficial to working artists, art historians, educators, museum staffs, critics, and concerned individuals of the general public.

Method of Procedure

A series of questions was formulated and verified by two art professionals, Curator Tom Hinson of the Cleveland Museum of Art and Director Henry Hopkins of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Nine Texas art museums were visited in which staff members were personally interviewed using the standard questionnaire.

A short summary of the following chapters follows. Chapter II contains a discussion of the two major aspects of this study, contemporary art and the museum. Chapter III contains a discussion of the method of approach and
includes a list of the proposed questions and a brief description of each museum. Chapter IV consists of three of the eight questions and responses which essentially deal with the philosophical issues and considerations associated with contemporary art and its presence in the museum. Chapter V consists of an additional four questions and responses which initially reflect more of the practical concerns accompanying contemporary art's presence in the museum. Chapter VI consists of the final question which represents the fundamental issue reflected throughout the survey. The given question and responses deal with the role of the art museum and its relationship with the general public. Chapter VII contains a summary of the study and related conclusions.
CHAPTER II

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Discussions on the nature of contemporary art--its concepts and boundaries--are prone to debate. Furthermore, attitudes towards the museum and its relationship with contemporary art are even more prone to disagreement. Therefore, a brief description of each--contemporary art and the museum--has been included. Contemporary art is viewed in relation to the museum and the general audience.

Contemporary Art

To both historians and artists, contemporary art of the 1970s represents some immediate and unresolved issues. Interestingly, the seventies also exist as a medium in which contemporary art can be viewed in a comprehensive yet flexible framework. For example, scholars may view a decade as adequate time in which to begin evaluating art works in respect to their historical position. Very often, historians and critics will follow artistic developments in terms of decades. On the other hand, artists may acknowledge the continuing developments and personal relevancy that ten years hold in respect to their work.

The development of art in this decade retains innumerable influences from the past. These influences have been
further developed, combined, emulated, negated, and disinherited. Most importantly, they have been questioned and analyzed. The limitless boundaries and unquestionable variety of contemporary art attest to its evolution towards new tentative definitions of art with a shaky perimeter. Critic-historian Lawrence Alloway captured the spirit of the times in characterizing twentieth-century art in terms of its fundamental diversity, an occurrence which he feels is epitomized in the seventies (1). This diversity is evident in the lack of dominant movements and the subtle blending of older movements with new ideas.

An ambiguity exists as to where art begins and ends. Is it concerned with idealistic, humanistic goals in the enhancement of life as art historian Bernhard Berenson believes? Does it exist by itself as art for art’s sake? Or at the other extreme in its progressed permeation of other areas of society, does it become indistinguishable? However one perceives the situation, the breadth of art certainly reflects the diverse attitudes and works of this decade. Contemporary art, in this case the 1970s, challenges the sensibilities of its audience, an audience which includes artists, critics, scholars, and the general public. It also has complicated aesthetic, social, and psychological considerations used in the process of evaluation.
Nonetheless, that is the present situation which is no less emphatically stated in the very titles of recent critical writings, such as Harold Rosenberg's *Art on the Edge*, Edgar Wind's *Art and Anarchy*, and Nicolas Calas' *Art in an Age of Risk*. This crisis in art, which one reads so much about, has frequently been explained as a continuation of very similar changes that occurred in art history, crises that were just as critical and baffling. Bertram Jessup, professor of philosophy and critic, briefly compares the contemporary arts situation with that of the dilemma facing the artists who followed the sixteenth-century Mannerists. Following such titans as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Titian, it seemed "that nothing remained to be done because everything that art could possibly do had been achieved" (7, p. 4). Jessup claims that Mannerism was a "professional or technical crisis," while our own is a "total cultural crisis" (7, p. 5). Although social, political, and religious factors were certainly influential, Jessup believes that this ultimate dilemma was not a question about art itself or what art "could or should be" (7, p. 5). The art of the seventies does appear to have reached a complex level where the overall function of art has become a key issue.

Total cultural crisis is a discouraging and somewhat exaggerated description. It becomes apparent that culturally we have undergone some pertinent changes which have
had a great impact on the arts, affecting the perception and understanding of it. Arnold Berleant is also a professor of philosophy who, like Jessup, has been involved in the study of aesthetics. In an articulate and well-substantiated essay, he discusses the historical and cultural evolution of aesthetics, an occurrence which very well may be at the core of this so-called crisis. Although Berleant's discussion refers to initial influences and changes in the nineteenth century affecting traditional aesthetics, his discussion is still relevant. One can still recognize in the average museum-goer the prevalence of a pre-industrial aesthetic consciousness. Berleant describes this evolution of aesthetics and the need to reassess them in respect to industrialization, technology, and social changes (3, p. 159).

Berleant notes, for example, that "the use of new materials, objects, and techniques" followed industrialization, which initially "transformed the characteristic features that objects possess" (3, p. 159). Therefore, artists' vocabulary, attitudes, and works have progressively broadened in scope. Second, a social and aesthetic democratization has paralleled the "emergence of population masses and a corresponding mass culture" (3, p. 159). Both would logically suggest inherently different aesthetic concepts, formulated from a different reference point than that of the pre-industrial period.
In similar respect, Bertram Jessup states, "The artist today poses a new and stern realism, a realism in depth," which necessitates a shift from "visionary cultural ideality to cultural actuality" (7, p. 7). Hence, a different sense of perception and the increased social function of art are recognized. Berleant continues to draw comparisons between the pre-industrial handmade unique object and post-industrial products in which mass production and expendability are taken for granted. Consistent with this democratization is the progression of art as independent of religious, political, and aristocratic demands. Simply, it has moved more and more into the course of everyday life, often literally using typical objects and cultural debris to express itself.

Changes in concepts and materials are mutually dependent on each other. A simple increase in number of both has led to more variety, in content and form, thereby complicating and challenging the viewer's perception of contemporary art. Interestingly, the democratization of the art object has often alienated the viewer from the work, leaving him uncomfortable and suspicious of it. It is well known that the public still prefers "social realism in the arts," such as "representationalism in painting and sculpture" (10, p. 36). Yet those actively involved in the arts--artists, dealers, critics, and museum curators--have become more permissive and receptive towards
vanguard works. Naturally, many contemporary artists continue to work in more traditional veins, the initial purpose and final state of the work relatively unchanged from a traditional standpoint. Traditional concepts and processes in art are not questioned; rather, they are recognized as coexisting with new developments.

To clarify what is being considered under the term "contemporary art," a condensed overview of artistic concepts that may be found in this decade is included. The most traditional to the most vanguard works may be found within it. The outline also seems to reflect the cumulative development of the arts as is known today. Specifically, the outline shows the very clear evolution of emphasis on the art object to emphasis on concept.

The Object: Perceptual Art
1. Traditionalism:
   The continuance of traditional media in the visual arts: painting, drawing, printmaking, and sculpture.
   a. Manipulation of pictorial and sculptural elements such as line, space, and composition towards representational, figurative, didactic, and narrative imagery.
   b. Recognized importance of the finished art object.
   c. The enduring concern for interpretations of realism in the visual arts.

2. Formalism:
The prime concern for the innate qualities of form. Form becomes content.
   a. Qualities such as color, surface, shape, and line become sole expressive entities in themselves.
   b. Experimentation and growing interest in materials. The physical aspects of the art object are explored and recognized for their individual characteristics and aesthetic value.
c. Continuation of art for art's sake.
e. The increasing freedom of the artist from technical and conceptual limitations of his field.

3. Anti-Formalist:
Continued skepticism and analysis of logic and order. The popular recognition of chance, disorder, and chaos as realities; their use and influence in the creative process.
a. The sacredness and function of the art object are continually reassessed.
b. New emphasis on process over product.
c. Increasingly diverse, personal interpretations of nature and reality.
d. "It's art because I say so."
e. The continued breakdown of barriers separating media.

Post Object: Conceptual Art

4. Continued disillusionment with the limitations of traditional art concepts, processes, aesthetic disciplines, and the art object.
a. The search for new media, forms, spaces, and concepts such as installations, earthworks, and body works.
b. The pursuit of non-art and perishable forms.
c. The growing ambiguity between art and life.
d. The increasingly active voice and role of the artist as commentator on his work or as his own "package."
   1. The artist as performer.
   2. The artist as commentator on social, political, and other contemporary issues and concepts.
   3. The anonymity or insignificance of the artist as "artist."

5. Disillusionment with art processes and objects and emphasis on "idea works"--conceptual art, communicated with less or no reliance on visual imagery. Language, information, suggestion, documentation transmit ideas and images.

As witnessed in the above outline, the museum has increasingly been faced with the dilemma of accommodating and presenting conceptual works. The sixties revealed artists seeking alternative exhibition spaces and art
forms in an attempt to liberate art from the museum. Unfortunately, in liberating art from the museum many works became inaccessible or isolated from the audience. Consequently, since the sixties, many artists have returned to the museum. However, through the need for some form of documentation or tangible object to effectively represent the art work, many conceptual or post-object works are, in a sense, eliminated in the museum. On the other hand, many works are now specifically created for particular museum spaces, thereby giving new dimension to the museum as an exhibition space. In effect, contemporary art proposes numerous challenges and changes for the museum which often contrast or conflict with the institution's traditional image.

Museums and Contemporary Art

The collecting and exhibiting of contemporary art by museums continues in many ways to be controversial. On one hand, the relationship between contemporary art and the museum is an incompatible one; the two concepts are diametrically opposed to each other. On the other hand, contemporary art assumes a natural and valid role in clarifying the historical evolution of art. Therefore, it merits an active position in museum collections and exhibitions.
Such debates seem to originate from conflicting ideas concerning the function and role of a museum, particularly the ability of its personnel to evaluate art works. The conflict is present even in Webster's definition of museum as "an institution devoted to the procurement, care, and display of objects of lasting interest or value" (16). The museum's involvement in predetermining or establishing the future value of art works conceived at the present time is a very controversial issue. Furthermore, the structure and character of much contemporary art are opposed to longevity and preconceived standards of value. Therefore, the nature of many contemporary works conflicts with the museum's traditional standards and function. Generally, however, museums are presumed synonymous with the past. They collect, preserve, and exhibit art works which have been effectively interpreted and evaluated within a context of other works. Only after a substantial period of time can adequate evaluations and value judgments of works be assessed in terms of quality. Sherman E. Lee, Director of the Cleveland Art Museum, upholds that contemporary art, in its unresolved state, belongs in society. The museum, equated with the past, meets "different but essential needs" (6, p. 9). He supports Etienne Gilson's perspective of the museum. "Museums provide homes for aged masterpieces" (5, p. 229).
Advocates of contemporary art's presence in the museum can raise issue with these judgments. By placing preconceived tastes and value judgments in the selection of works and perpetuating the safe art and relics of the past, the museum assumes the role of an elitist. Subsequently, it projects a narrow fixed standard of quality and neglects conflicting, yet valid and relevant, contemporary issues and works. Furthermore, the "ideological etiquette" that has been traditionally associated with the museum has not agreed with "artistic currents or ideas of today or yesterday which in fact try to destabilize values, standards of taste, preconceived ideas of art and so on" (15, p. 37). A second definition of the museum is offered, "a permanent, non-profit institution, essentially educational or aesthetic in purpose, with a professional staff which acquires objects, cares for them, interprets them, and exhibits them to the public on some regular basis" (2).

Evaluating Contemporary Art

Since the number of proposed variables in contemporary art has increased, the understanding and evaluation of those works have become more complex. These evaluations must be made as the works are being created and are not yet stabilized by the test of time. Artists, critics, and historians continue to debate the values and aesthetics
which should be used in evaluating contemporary works. This merits attention, since art museums exhibiting contemporary art have been subjected to these debates.

Ultimately, the evaluation of a work of art is a subjective process of determining what is significant. The standard of significance allows for an encompassing, unbiased, yet valid, process of evaluating contemporary art. Since the term "significant" may be interpreted by some as a vague or poor substitute for quality, a brief explanation is offered in light of aesthetics. Aesthetics is defined as the "philosophy of the beautiful" (4, p. 854). This implies the importance of one universal theory and indirectly sets specific standards for achieving an ideal. Such ideals are quite often irrelevant to contemporary works. The pleasing images associated with beauty make it inadequate when considering the aesthetic experience. Certainly, not all art is beautiful or pleasing, visually or cerebrally. "Significant" seems to be more appropriate and more encompassing than the term "quality." In the former case, beauty could define that significance.

Michael Kirby suggests "everything that is implicitly or explicitly proposed as significant by an artist must be considered as art, whether or not we ourselves evaluate it as significant" (8, p. 40). That it must be considered as art is certainly questionable; that it should be suggests an open yet discriminating eye. Thereby significance
is less apt to be assumed; rather, it is more carefully
determined. The first step in a long process of evaluat-
ing, criticizing, and finally exhibiting a work is the
consideration of that work. In the case of the museum,
it becomes crucial in selecting the most comprehensive
and effective consensus of recent art.

The problem of evaluation is magnified amidst debates
over the validity of traditional aesthetic standards when
applied to more vanguard works. It is proposed here that
contemporary art is the sum of its past with new additions,
a concept which necessitates an active understanding of
past works and ideas as they relate to present ones and
vice versa. Any argument over the total inadequacy of one
for the other leads to a shallow understanding of contem-
porary art and art, for that matter. In not rejecting
past values and attitudes or contemporary ones, one may
assess the situation of the arts up to this point and allow
for greater understanding of contemporary works.

In the museum, evaluations of contemporary art rest
on highly diverse considerations, originating from the
nature of the work. The methods of historians and critics
are often juxtaposed in a manner suggesting they are op-
opnents. Yet in the evaluation of contemporary art, the
critic-historian seems to represent the ideal marriage.
In studying the work first on its own terms, one "unrolls
the creation of the picture as an intellectual drama, while
keeping his eye on it as a visual object" (13, p. 146). Then moving back through history, the critic-historian sees it through the entire evolution of art. The combination of studying the work as an individual creative element, with a keen sense of history in mind, is a method that includes consideration of innumerable factors in ultimately evaluating and selecting a work. Harold Rosenberg states,

All categories of experience, past and present, from fetishism to laboratory discipline, are potentially relevant in making critical evaluations. The critic's primary act of judgment consists of choosing the modes of insight--aesthetic, psychological, social, metaphysical--which he regards as significant in the particular instance (13, p. 141).

If change is one of the major constants of contemporary art on which a museum can depend, then its situation is already a difficult one, since a large portion of its job rests on discrimination. Aside from the art object itself, other influences and pressures have increasingly challenged the museum structure. In the past two decades more museums have opened as contemporary museums or have actively begun showing contemporary art. In América, this is a recent occurrence. Joshua Taylor notes that "active collecting of American works began in earnest in the late fifties" (14, p. 59). "The acclaim of post-war American painting and eventually sculpture" prompted numerous museums to begin collecting contemporary art (14, p. 60). Max Kozloff gives two reasons for the continual enthusiasm for contemporary art. First, the
accessibility of older masterpieces and works has tightened up and museums have turned to recent works which are ever available. Second, limited museum funds often cannot meet the high prices of older established works; contemporary works are less expensive (9, p. 162). Not mentioned by Kozloff, one wonders if there is a heightened interest, awareness, receptiveness, or acceptance of contemporary issues and works?

The Museum and Its Public

The ongoing controversies and diverse attitudes in art have placed the museum, by nature of its official status, into the role of arbitrator among artists, critics, scholars, and the general public. Social, economic, and political influences and pressures have further complicated the museum's function and role.

Social influences and pressures have affected the museum in a number of ways. The democratic spirit which pervades our society has been intensely felt through an increasing rise of controversial, moralistic, philosophical, and ethnic issues voiced through the public. Many have been directed towards the art museum. For example, in New York City in 1969, the Museum of Modern Art was labeled as representing a capitalist society and reproached by the Art Worker's Coalition for its elitist attitudes towards artistic, social, and political issues
Several demands were made. The coalition insisted that the museum close down for the duration of the Vietnam war. The museum was pressured to open small galleries in the ghettos for the culturally deprived. Although an extreme case, this example clarifies the museum's recent reassessment of its responsibility and susceptibility to artistic, public, and social issues as well. At one point, the museum has re-evaluated its position between the elitist and populist poles. While recognizing and even encouraging public interest, participation, and feedback, the museum personnel must carefully weigh such influences and potential pressures so as not to jeopardize its initial concern--art. And, when social and political issues form the subject and content of art works, additional controversies, contingent on the museum's aesthetic standards and method of discrimination, are apt to appear.

Economic influences and pressures are intertwined with political and social ones. The former have their share of effects on museums. The costs of maintaining art museums have continued to climb. Growing public interest also raises financial problems. For many larger museums, operational expenses have risen above the institution's rate of income. Many museums receive much of their financial support from individuals and foundations.
which fluctuate with the times. Due to the recent troubled economy, more museums have had to turn to state and federal sources for support--such as national endowments. Needless to say, the less self-sufficient a museum is, the more it is susceptible to outside pressures and influences on its policies, exhibitions, and programs.

Museum attendance is up in this country (10, p. 12). Consequently, a social dilemma of a different order has received renewed interest, contemporary art vs. the public. Simply put, contemporary art often leaves its public confused. A large number of bodies coming through the door may not reflect the public's increased awareness, nor understanding of contemporary art. In a series of studies conducted on today's audience and their perception of art, the following was discovered: "As far as art is concerned, the long observed peculiarity that there exists a generally stable gap of two generations or a minimum of half a century between important creative innovation and its general acceptance by the ordinary public remains true" (11, p. 140).

Since the Salon des Refusés, in which the Impressionists confronted the official French Salon and chose an alternative space to show their innovative work, one can chronologically recognize the increasing experimental approaches in art. As traditional concepts and artistic
approaches—realistic, didactic, and narrative—led to more "non-figurative and antidactic" ones, the viewer was left with less obvious visual and conceptual elements with which to identify and on which to depend for adequate interpretation (10, p. 43). Furthermore, he was asked to freely and independently interpret and participate with the work, relying on his own knowledge and experience. Vanguard, once applied to a small group within a given period, has now emerged as a widespread concept, thereby contradicting its original use. Today, continual change makes it difficult for the viewer to even discern what is vanguard. Undoubtedly, the situation can be an uncomfortable shift for the viewer in light of traditional art works.

The dissolution of barriers and restrictions in form is matched by a broad spectrum of content. Artists offer the public reflections and statements of controversial issues, morally, ethically, and politically related, to name a few. The democratization of the art object has been seen by some as a bridge between the artist and the public. Paradoxically, it has often alienated the two more than ever. The viewer is left uncomfortable, suspicious, or simply uninterested. Considering the philosophical challenges that accompany contemporary art and the related professional problems of the museum, the recent development and growth of museums handling
contemporary art in Texas raise a number of interesting and critical questions. Essentially, these questions deal with the relationship between museums and contemporary art as well as their combined effect on the audience.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER III

METHOD OF APPROACH

Eight questions were created for the survey. They were asked during the interviews held at each of the nine museums selected.

Formulating the Questions

A series of questions was carefully organized in order to include the most significant issues involving contemporary art in the museum. They were formulated so as to maintain a standard procedure during the interviews. The questions range from the practical accommodation of diverse contemporary works to the more fundamental philosophical issues related to contemporary art's presence in the museum and the latter's ultimate function. Finally, the museum's role, responsibility, and activities in the contemporary area are examined in relation to its public. Although the thrust of each of the eight issues is found in the initial question, each one is supplemented with additional material in order to encourage responses. The questions are as follows:

1. The Juxtaposition of Past and Present Art in the Museum

Are past and present art compatible when displayed together in the art museum? Often the transition from representational to abstract to conceptual
art is a difficult one for a random audience to understand as they walk through a museum. Consider the juxtaposition of the academic tradition with the vanguard of contemporary art. What means, if any, are used to clarify artistic developments in style and concept? How are the works grouped? Is the task more or less complex when only contemporary works are exhibited?

2. Museum Programs
What museum programs, if any, are employed to draw upon current interests of the public? Special programs within the museum? Does the museum offer audience participation shows, lectures, education programs for different age groups? Programs which go out to the community, e.g., exhibitions in schools, civic centers, businesses, street shows, happenings? Do the programs relate to the particular interests of that social group? Please give examples. Programs which parallel contemporary interests of the general public, e.g., the recent activities of the women's movement as reflected in recent major exhibitions.

3. Accommodating Contemporary Works and the Artist in the Museum
Do many contemporary works demand unusual revisions of exhibition space? How efficient is the lighting system, acoustical system, overall facilities? What is the nature of the relationship between the museum and the artist, particularly concerning the installation of his work? Often, contemporary works are "perishable"; what guidelines are set in purchasing and/or exhibiting such works? Are national or traveling exhibitions arranged to also include related statements by local or regional artists?

4. The Viewer and Contemporary Art
Consider the alienation of the viewer from many contemporary art works or in the absence of the art object altogether; how are new "ideas" presented effectively to the audience? What are some of the ways to "educate" the viewer about new theories in contemporary art, e.g., the criticism and evaluation of such works? What are the problems involved? What bulletins, catalogues, and other literature are published by the museum to acquaint the public with contemporary art? How valuable or effective are they?
Ultimately, how does the museum respond to the cliché, "Is this art?"

5. The Selection of Contemporary Works
What are the set guidelines in determining the purchase of contemporary works? Their inclusion in exhibitions? Consider economic, political, philosophical, and moral influences. For example, what influence do trustees, supporters, the board of directors, public response, aesthetic and stylistic trends have? Does the museum receive coverage and feedback from newspapers, periodicals, radio, television? What effects have such coverage had on museum activities and policies concerning contemporary exhibitions? The purchase or display of a particular work(s) of art?

6. On Contemporary Exhibitions
In the past five years, what major contemporary exhibitions has the museum organized: national shows, regional, state, traveling shows, one-man shows? Overall, is there a means of determining public response to the museum's presentation of contemporary works? Consider attendance. Are there specific means through which the public can communicate their criticisms?

7. Contemporary Art and the Art Historical Mainstream
Is contemporary art (the seventies) a significant aspect of art history; where does it fit into the mainstream? As it is not removed in time, is it difficult to determine the validity and significance of many art works? How important is such a consideration to the museum? To what extent are contemporary concepts offered to the public? Are they being introduced to applicable contemporary art theories concerning both the criticism and evaluation of recent art? Please explain.

8. The Role of the Art Museum and Its Public
Ultimately, what is the major role of the art museum? What relationship should it have with the public or community? Consider the development of the museum, its future role.

Prior to the personal interviews, a description of the survey and the proposed questions were sent for constructive criticism and validation to two professional sources.
outside Texas. Henry Hopkins, Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Tom Hinson, Curator of Modern Art at the Cleveland Museum of Art, reviewed the proposed survey. Their validation of the study and critical observations provided additional objective credibility to the survey and its purpose.

The Nine Texas Art Museums

Nine museums were chosen for the survey with several reasons in mind: 1. Each museum was known to be involved with contemporary art. 2. Geographically, a wide selection of museums was chosen to adequately represent the state. 3. A balance of small, medium sized, and large museums was included. In the course of the survey, each selected museum was visited. Personal interviews were held with the directors or curators. Conversations were recorded on tape for later reference. Staffs were also asked to provide as much printed material as possible concerning the museums' policies, programs, and exhibitions. The amount of printed material varied immensely. Many of the museums are very limited in their publications.

The selection of nine Texas art museums included in this study is as follows: the Amarillo Art Center, the Laguna Gloria Art Museum in Austin, the Museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts,
the Fort Worth Art Museum, the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, the McNay Art Institute in San Antonio, and the Tyler Museum of Art. A description of the study and a copy of the standard questionnaire were submitted to each person interviewed. A brief summary of each museum is presented below.

Amarillo

The relative youth yet recognized growth of the Amarillo Art Center is reflected in its ample structure, designed by Edward Durrel Stone and built in 1972. Although the museum is located on the campus of the Amarillo College, it is predominantly self-sustaining and independent of the school. The college does contribute some financial support towards such needs as maintaining the museum.

Although essentially an institution of twentieth-century American art, the staff has continued to exhibit works within a wide spectrum of periods and cultures. An acquisition policy has been formed with a small collection underway. However, the museum's major emphasis is on temporary shows. Amarillo's programs and exhibitions have provided a major source of artistic activity in the largely rural area of the Panhandle. In effect, education has become an important aspect of this museum.
The staff has continued to stimulate communication and feedback among neighboring states. One example is the biennial Amarillo Competition, a juried exhibition of artists from Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico. In the past few years, the museum has increasingly represented the contemporary area. Of particular interest are the staff's enthusiasm and support for regional artists as revealed in numerous exhibitions.

Interviews were held at the Amarillo Art Center on October 26, 1979, with the director, Tom Livesay; the curator of art, Jerry Daviee; and the curator of education, David Turner.

Austin

The Laguna Gloria Art Museum has operated since the forties, although it assumed independence and growing credibility when it separated from its parent, the Texas Fine Arts Association, in the sixties. As in many other regional museums, the staff has directed the limited resources into providing quality exhibitions as opposed to focusing on building a collection.

Although the museum is one of twentieth-century American art, the staff has recognized the availability of quality contemporary works in Austin and central Texas. Exhibitions in that area are juxtaposed with similar emphasis on contemporary national mainstream issues and works with additional historical shows.
Recognizing its commitment, as a regional museum, to its immediate community, the museum has also developed reputation on a wider scale through its well-received endeavors in the contemporary area.

Education remains a strong commitment in regard to the museum's continued effectiveness and active role in the community. This is reflected in the presence of a satellite, or additional exhibition space, run by the museum and located in downtown Austin at First Federal Savings.

Interviews were held at the Laguna Gloria on February 1, 1980, with the director, Laurence Miller, and the curator, Annette Carlozzi.

**Corpus Christi**

The Museum of South Texas moved to its present building, designed by Philip Johnson, in 1972. Located on the shoreline of the bay, the building, with its striking white exterior and fine contemporary lines, has been a source of admiration in itself. Since its 1972 opening, initiated by an exhibition of three prominent mainstream artists and accompanied by numerous figures in the arts, the museum has generally continued to support more established artists in their contemporary exhibitions.

The museum continues to rely on a very broad exhibition program, with shows, for the most part, drawn from
other institutions. The staff maintains a small collection which contains works primarily from the sixties and seventies. The director expressed the possibility of expanding the collection to a broader range which might include works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Recognizing the museum's youthful presence in a community newly acquainted with the arts, the staff has stressed education in attracting and developing community interest, understanding, and support. Like the other exhibiting museums, classes, films, and lectures represent efforts in that direction. Yet, given the present lack of support coming from the community sector, programs have recently been restrained in need of additional financial backing and support.

An interview was held in the Museum of South Texas on April 14, 1980, with the director, Cathleen Gallander.

**Dallas**

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, presently housed in Fair Park, will open in a much-needed larger facility in the early eighties. With a growing collection ranging from the antique to the contemporary, its temporary exhibitions are equally diverse. As the only major museum in the city, its programs reveal the staff's interest in accommodating the metroplex's condensed and diverse general audience. For example, the museum has attempted
to incorporate more contemporary interests since the closing of the city's contemporary arts museum in the sixties.

In contrast to the elitist, self-sustaining collecting museums, the Dallas museum has continually maintained an active education department. Furthermore, its outreach program has gained momentum as the staff has continued to penetrate the community. The kinds of exhibitions and programs inside the museum are often designed with audience participation in mind. For example, informal gallery lectures, cultural and craft festivals, and demonstrations are a few programs which reflect the variety of potential interests available.

In the contemporary area, the collection contains more established mainstream artists and trends. Yet, one can lately find more works coming from a variety of locations and sources in the seventies. In particular, a recent interest and investment in regional artists may be seen in exhibitions and the collection.

Interviews were held at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts on November 13, 1979, with the director, Harry Parker, and on November 15, 1979, with the acting curator of contemporary art, Sue Graze.

Fort Worth

The Fort Worth Art Museum, originally built in 1954, has doubled its exhibition space since its renovation in
1974. A museum of twentieth-century art, it houses a small permanent collection. Nonetheless, it continues to emphasize its exhibition schedule which has contributed greatly in the contemporary area. In effect, it has become one of the most active and favorably received museums representing contemporary works in this state.

Like many contemporary museums, the types of works and interests available in the museum range within a broader scope than the traditional one associated with the museum and the visual arts. For example, the museum's involvement with contemporary architecture, photography, performing arts, and film has enhanced an awareness of the inherent relationship of one to the other. Furthermore, aside from the specialized audience to be found in such a museum, programs have been designed to appeal to a variety of people through scholarly lectures to the more informal gallery gatherings. Children's workshops have been similarly organized to include a broad selection of stimulating experiences and learning processes enhanced by a variety of media and working concepts.

An interview was held at the Fort Worth Art Museum on April 24, 1980, with the curator, Marge Goldwater.

Houston Contemporary Arts Museum

The Contemporary Arts Museum, operating since the 1940s in various buildings, opened in 1972 in a new building
across the street from the Fine Arts Museum. The museum has no collection. It operates solely on contemporary exhibitions, generally understood to be works by living artists. As an institute devoted to the most recent or vanguard works, it is the only one of its kind in this state. The museum naturally appeals first to a specialized audience. But in contrast to the limited public support apparently felt in the earlier part of the seventies, the museum appears to be experiencing more widespread support.

Like many of the other museums and centers in this study, the staff has consciously projected a more objective and comprehensive view of the national scene by including lesser established and regional works in the same context of more established and mainstream works. As the exhibitions are the true focus of the museum, educational concerns are largely fulfilled there. As often as possible, the staff attempts to bring artists and the audience together in the gallery for an exchange of questions and ideas.

In the past few years, the museum has included numerous programs involved with dance, poetry, and film which represent a progressive view of the arts. The museum also supports an Art After School Program located throughout the community.

An interview was held at the Contemporary Arts Museum on April 11, 1980, with the curator, Marti Mayo.
Houston Museum of Fine Arts

The Houston Museum of Fine Arts has operated since 1900 in its present building, which includes the more recent addition of a new wing designed by Mies van der Rohe. As a general museum, this institution maintains a permanent art historical collection complemented and supplemented by temporary exhibitions. The contemporary area of the collection is largely represented through clearly established figures and trends. Interestingly, a substantial portion of the contemporary focus is to be found in the museum's collection and exhibitions of photographs, which are one of the museum's strongest interest points. Photography is a relatively new addition to museums.

The collection, exhibitions, and programs within the main building should be seen in relation to the museum art school housed nearby. The school operates on a regular schedule and offers numerous classes. Its staff includes a director and faculty of working artists who, on occasion, exhibit in the museum. Various exhibitions, workshops, an outreach program, and other educational programs are coordinated through the school in addition to the daily classes.

An interview was held at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts on April 11, 1980, with the curator of contemporary art, Judith Rooney.
San Antonio

The McNay Art Institute, founded in 1954, is a museum of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art. It is located in the lovely refurbished home of the late beneficiary, Mrs. McNay. She formed the guidelines for the museum, which are still used.

This museum contains an international collection, with art that well represents the European modern era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Selections often represent less documented works of well-known artists, which is a welcome surprise to the viewer. Contemporary works are to be found in the collection and exhibitions. Usually, they are representative of well-established artists and schools. However, the staff has also supported select works of lesser established and regional artists in its exhibitions.

The museum does not contain an education department as the staff prefers to focus all its attention on maintaining its collection and organizing exhibitions. Docent tours, lectures, and gallery talks do, however, parallel the subjects and interests found in the collection and exhibitions.

An interview was held at the McNay Art Institute on November 23, 1979, with the director, John Leeper.
Tyler

The Tyler Art Museum opened in 1971 and represents one of the more established regional museums which grew up in Texas during that period. It is located on the campus of the Tyler Junior College. Like Amarillo, the college does contribute to the museum's upkeep, but for the most part, it too follows an autonomous course.

The museum is one of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, with no collection. The staff has initiated a strong contemporary direction amidst its historical exhibitions. Continuing a policy of showing contemporary artists from the region and neighboring states, Tyler has developed a sizable audience outside of the community.

Education programs, headed by a curator, are active in the museum. Yet, they are carefully aligned with the exhibitions in order not to deviate from the art object. In addition to the lectures, seminars, workshops, and films, Tyler offers a museum course coordinated with the University of Texas at Tyler whereby students may experience the museum firsthand.

Like so many of the so-called smaller museums, Tyler has emerged as a reputable institution receiving favorable and supportive critical responses from throughout the state.

An interview was held at the Tyler Art Museum on January 25, 1980, with the director, Ron Gleason.
CHAPTER IV

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES PERTAINING TO THE
PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY
ART'S PRESENCE IN THE MUSEUM

The following three questions and responses reflect philosophical concerns and issues accompanying contemporary art's presence in the museum. First, contemporary art's presence is perceived through its juxtaposition with older works of art. Second, the museum's presentation of contemporary art and the ability to communicate contemporary art's varied qualities are discussed in relation to the general audience. Finally, contemporary art's role and significance in respect to the art historical mainstream are viewed in relation to the museum's perspective.

Question One

The Juxtaposition of Past and Present Art in the Museum

Are past and present art compatible when displayed together in the art museum? Often the transition from representational to abstract to conceptual art is a difficult one for a random audience to understand as they walk through a museum. Consider the juxtaposition of the academic tradition with the vanguard of contemporary art. What means, if any, are used to clarify artistic developments in style and concept? How are the works grouped? Is the task more or less complex when only contemporary works are exhibited?
Generalization

The conception that has often been associated with the traditional museum, as a silent, aloof keeper of the past, has been affected by the combination of growing public participation and integration of contemporary issues and works into its framework. Controversy has accompanied the degree and effectiveness that museums can and should accommodate the past with the present.

Many of the visual and conceptual transitions, contrasts, and conflicts to be found in the juxtaposition of older works with contemporary ones are certainly challenging and often confusing to the general audience. The arrangement and presentation of such works in the museum has remained an important concern in effectively exhibiting and clarifying particular works, ideas, and developments in the arts. In respect to the above considerations, this question revolves around the various concepts and processes behind the integration of past and present art in the museum context.

Amarillo

Tom Livesay, Director of the Amarillo Art Center, characterized the focus there as predominantly twentieth-century American art. Within that realm, Jerry Daviee, the curator, explained that programs and exhibitions lean towards the contemporary, since it is logical "to deal
with resources close to us." Equally important, the staff recognizes the great accessibility of good contemporary art in the region. Daviee estimated that, although one-half to three-fourths of the exhibitions are twentieth-century American, the remaining ones consist of a broad variety of art historical and cultural non-American shows. They are included to simultaneously introduce, to a relatively new art audience, more familiar concepts and processes in the arts with less familiar ones, both of which "they don't ordinarily have access to."

In a sense, since the museum does not have a collection, Daviee stated, "We don't run into the problem of juxtaposing contemporary art with older art" in the traditional "history of art tour" of larger collecting museums. Two or three temporary exhibitions are simultaneously organized and designed for particular spaces or galleries.

Director Livesay felt that "art historical ties" are often confusing for some audiences. He described the benefits of physically separating past and present art in an effort to help an audience in Amarillo who, for the most part, do not view works in "an art historical context." Relying on temporary exhibitions, the museum can continually provide the fundamental qualities pertaining to individual movements, techniques, and styles throughout history. These exhibitions are supplemented by the
educational programs in an attempt to enhance for the audience an understanding of the aesthetic and historical progression of art.

**Austin**

Director Laurence Miller stated, "By policy we are a museum of twentieth-century American art . . . by economic reality, we show art that is post-World War II." He mentioned that only 15 to 25 per cent of the exhibitions are prior to that date during a yearly exhibition schedule. In light of the strong contemporary direction, Miller felt that with limited resources, "the only route for us to take is to focus our attentions in a very specific direction and to take risks. Since, for us, the very nature of contemporary art is risk-taking, it's a logical marriage." In an initial critical role, Miller saw the potential feasibility that "our choices of contemporary art which we show will at some juncture be significant art historically."

Concerning some of the more difficult transitions within the twentieth century leading up through contemporary works, Miller believed the staff purposely and effectively facilitated them for the audience through their educational programs. On a more immediate level, he felt that how the museum represented art works somewhat characterized the audience response. For example, although
recognizing the need for more space, Miller cited one advantage of the limited area. It resolved, for the viewer, any "overload of imagery" often found in large collecting museums. He continued to explain that "Since works of art, by their very nature, are not sequential but are spatial, the idea of exhibiting them in a sequential manner, as encyclopedic museums do, is opposed to the very nature of the work, and, specifically, opposed to contemporary art. Contemporary art cannot be read sequentially... One of the jobs of a contemporary art museum is to break that sequential way of reading that people bring into the museum."

Concerning the expediency with which contemporary art often moves into the museum context, Miller stated, "Museums that show contemporary art are part of the aging process." That process is now more expedient, or "starts sooner in contemporary society." Therefore, in the arts, the "weeding out process" also begins earlier. Whereas that process "used to exist outside of the structure of the museum," to a greater extent it now "takes place inside the structure of the museum." Hence, the fast pace at which society moves has led to one, according to Miller, that is more "cognizant" of change and more "readily accepting" of changes in the arts.
Although the museum's small collection presently focuses on works from the sixties and seventies, the staff relies on temporary exhibitions which reveal one of the most consistently broad historical variety of works for the audience. Exhibitions there have ranged from a loan exhibition of Greek sculptures to Larry Bell's Iceberg. Director Cathleen Gallander discussed the reasons for the varied exhibition schedule. "It's important here, particularly because Corpus does not have a long tradition in the visual arts." Furthermore, due to limited resources, and therefore the absence of an encyclopedic accumulation of works, she felt that the museum would never "be a history of art museum." In contrast, Gallander noted, "Our focus is more of an aesthetic sense."

Concerning the difficulty of understanding recent developments in art in comparison to earlier ones, she felt that they were not necessarily more difficult, but they came more quickly, in profusion. That has presented complications for the museum, particularly in terms of effectively evaluating and selecting significant works. And, in respect to the diverse and often complex intrinsic qualities of contemporary works, she stated, "It takes more interpretation and requires more interpretive programs on the part of the museum."
Dallas

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts and the Houston Museum of Fine Arts reveal the broadest context of historical works—in the collections. These museums provide a cumulative cross-section of art history in which works are arranged with a loose chronology in mind.

Sue Graze, Acting Curator of Contemporary Art at the Dallas Museum, noted that the ultimate effectiveness of juxtaposing past and present art in the museum rested initially on two qualifications, the given space and the collection. Ideally, she felt that rooms organized by schools and movements, and in some cases artists, would be most beneficial for the viewer. In reference to that she added, "Our collection is not as broad." Therefore, the rooms are hung, not so much chronologically, but within general areas such as pre-modern European twentieth century.

Concerning the juxtaposition of past and present art, Director Harry Parker said, "Much of seventies work does not cause any serious gap in contact with the visitor." Furthermore, he felt that it has often been "relatively easy" to integrate the contemporary with the traditional. For example, he noted the relative ease of moving from the gallery of the thirties paintings to more contemporary paintings by artists such as James Rosenquist.
Yet, reaffirming the variety of "manifestations" that contemporary art provides, he stressed the importance of addressing the specific concerns of each work. He noted that some works have "forced us to change some traditional concepts of showing art." He cited the practical and aesthetic concerns that were juggled in an effort to safely, yet effectively, exhibit an outdoor sculpture piece, on which the artist encouraged public interaction. Considering the nature of many older objects, a proposed shift from interaction to restraint can demand sudden and sometimes difficult changes in one's aesthetic sensibility. In that sense, the juxtaposition of past and present art can be a difficult one to adapt to. In another instance--an exhibition of Carl Andre's work--an entire environment was created by the artist. Parker felt that such a work was "more difficult for the public to adjust to" given the many facets and subtleties of the work. In conclusion, he stated, "Some of the work of the seventies fits intelligibly and easily into the museum context and some of it presents some real problems."

Fort Worth

The Fort Worth Art Museum is one of twentieth-century art, specifically, post-Armory Show works with an emphasis on contemporary ones. In respect to that, Curator Marge
Goldwater said, "It's easier to focus on such a small period of time. We're very fortunate to have a situation where there are three museums to divide up the territory." In effect, she stated, "It's very nice to not have to be all things to all people," a dilemma to which general museums are often subjected.

Concerning the juxtaposition of past and present art, she felt there were not "inherent problems." More importantly, she believed "interesting juxtapositions" can be made, often revealing a number of natural affinities, such as the recent revival and emphasis of "patterning" in contemporary works.

In discussing the potentially conservative effects that collecting can have on the contemporary area in a museum, Goldwater believed that a large permanent collection could be "an inhibiting factor in dealing with more contemporary manifestations." In respect to the Fort Worth Art Museum, she said, "We don't face that problem now because our collection is very small."

On the questionable compatibility of past and present art, the curator Marti Mayo replied, "Sure they are." She discussed her continuing perspective through a similar standpoint in her past working experience with the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. The Corcoran was "devoted to
American art at a time when American art was not the fashion." Maintaining a national collection which "leads straight into the art of the seventies," the staff recognized one important purpose. That purpose was the exhibition of vanguard works, viewed "as an extension of the permanent collection." In effect, she believed transitions were not necessarily "more difficult but they're just faster . . . including the kinds of things that happen within art that are revolutionary, they come faster."

Since the Contemporary Arts Museum is devoted to the exhibition of works by living artists, Mayo recognized the "specialized audience" to whom they appealed. "Logistically, it's probably easier as far as the audience problem," since the museum benefits from "an audience that returns often." Furthermore, the museum receives many visitors coming from the Fine Arts Museum next door. In effect, that arrangement seems to be a compatible one.

Houston Museum of Fine Arts

Characterizing the objectivity sought by museums of this kind, Judith Rooney, curator of the contemporary area, believed that the chronological arrangement of art works was a sensible one, "since that's how it happened." She stressed that such an approach avoided removing any emphasis from the works and simplified relationships for the viewer.
In respect to the audience, she felt that the availability of a permanent historical comprehensive body of quality works largely fulfilled the staff's commitment to clarifying transitions in art. Essentially, the collection provides a firm basis for comparison. Concerning the audience's difficulty in understanding and following transitions leading up through contemporary works, she felt that the increasingly thought-provoking qualities of some conceptual works proposed new challenges for the viewer. However, she recognized similar occurrences throughout history, such as religious icons. Most important, she felt that there was a growing awareness of contemporary art. For example, through repeated exposure, certainly enhanced by its infiltration into other popular communicative means--mass production, television, and other media--it slowly becomes part of one's consciousness.

San Antonio

The McNay Art Institute's focus is on nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and American works. The philosophies of Director John Leeper concerning the mutual accommodation of past and present art are closely related to the general museums. With the focus on the collection, Leeper described a museum's educational responsibility in terms of "dealing with classic examples of whatever period you're working in." Therefore, the contemporary area is
largely represented through adequately established works. However, within the collection, one can expect to find strong lesser-known examples of established artists alongside more familiar ones. It is an occurrence which minimizes an encyclopedic feeling in the collection and reflects the personal approach to collecting which was begun by Mrs. McNay and is continued today.

Concerning the compatibility of past and present works, Leeper emphasized the common denominator of quality, noting that with a consistent sense of quality, works will "hang together" in any circumstance. In the McNay, he explained that the works were hung from a "pedagogical standpoint" in which they were "relevant in their sequence or provocative in juxtaposition."

One interesting asset of the overall arrangement, pointed out by Leeper, is the humanistic quality of the space. And, indeed, the groupings have a looser structural appearance as various intimate rooms, halls, and open galleries break up the monotony of a strict progressional checklist of works. The comfortable yet undistracting environment allows one in parts to easily relate to individual works as they might in their own environment, or as the works may have originally been intended to be seen.
Tyler

The Tyler Museum of Art is, by policy, a museum of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, although, within that framework, the director, Ron Gleason, specified, "We are always hunting for exhibitions that are about the avant-garde of that time. We necessarily turn our back on a popular audience in order to make those decisions."

Reflecting the desire to develop community interest, Gleason noted, however, that Tyler is not the "prime audience." A larger audience exists outside the community—coming largely from Dallas and Houston. That response can be related to their strong contemporary direction. In respect to that, Gleason noted, "The largest part of what we exhibit is contemporary art from Texas and the contiguous states."

Concerning the juxtaposition of past and present art, Gleason said, "I don't know whether they're compatible or whether they're supposed to be. I think sometimes they're not supposed to be because that's how you begin to make judgments." He believed it is not so important how the two are exhibited, but "how you talk about them." For example, an exhibition of nineteenth-century non-figurative Navajo weavings was discussed "in terms of Minimalist painting" because, in Gleason's words, "There's a real parallel between the two." In effect, he suggested that by drawing correlations or applying contemporary criticism
to an older art form, the staff could extend a deeper understanding of the visual and conceptual qualities of the works in light of very similar approaches in the contemporary area. When considering a lay audience, without an academic background in the arts, the juxtaposition can be a very effective one, from both sides of the historical chronology.

**Question Four**

**The Viewer and Contemporary Art**

Consider the alienation of the viewer from many contemporary art works or in the absence of the art object altogether; how are new "ideas" presented effectively to the audience? What are some of the ways to "educate" the viewer about new theories in contemporary art, e.g., the criticism and evaluation of such works? What are the problems involved? What bulletins, catalogues, and other literature are published by the museum to acquaint the public with contemporary art? How valuable or effective are they? Ultimately, how does the museum respond to the cliché, "Is this art?"

**Generalization**

The alienation existing between contemporary works of art and the general public has always been an issue, to some extent, throughout art history. In the 1970s, this problem of alienation received renewed interest due to the very nature of contemporary art. The innate diversity of seventies art seems to represent the entire century in concentrated form. In addition, schools and "isms" have largely been replaced with increasingly personally
oriented works. Furthermore, the evolution of art has continued to reveal a great emphasis on concepts and processes in contrast to a more traditional emphasis on forms and objects. In effect, the intellectual and aesthetic accessibility of such works to a general public is certainly one concern of museum professionals.

During the interviews, qualifying the term "alienation," or lack of understanding, in respect to earlier periods of art and speculating to what extent it occurs presently, led to conclusions which may characterize the mood of contemporary art. Although the staffs' perspective of and approach to developing audience understanding of contemporary art do vary, it is noted that the museums surveyed are not publication oriented.

Amarillo

One view holds that contemporary works demand more of the audience. At one extreme, it might be said that the audience must educate itself in a changing vocabulary to keep up with the progression of art. For example, Curator Daviee specified a number of traditional standards of appreciation in the visual arts which, for the most part, prevail among the general public:

1. The economic value of the work.
2. The visible convincing use of skill.
3. The overt narrative quality of the work.
4. The decorative and/or pleasing nature of the work.
These standards suggest, in part, a timeless classical approach to the arts which has repeatedly existed throughout art history. Not denying the validity or quality of many works conceived in this perspective, it is crucial to recognize their coexistence with new issues raised in the processes and concepts of other works. In some cases, these works openly question, challenge, or defy traditional standards of appreciation.

Accordingly, Director Tom Livesay felt that the audience feels "uncomfortable" in their "unfamiliarity." Characterizing art of the entire century as anything but "serene," he believed contemporary art requires more "thought and mental action" than art from other periods. Hence, he emphasized the museum's educational responsibility and its potential to provide visual and conceptual insight into the often obscure and personal interpretations of contemporary art.

Reiterating that unfamiliarity, Jerry Daviee suggested that perhaps artists have even placed themselves in a position of "antagonism" with the general public as they have often "attacked middle-class tastes and middle-class values." At one point, in pushing to be ahead of their audience, these artists may have created an audience of themselves. They continually look to the public for acceptance of their works. Recognizing the delicate relationship between artists and the general public, Daviee
discussed the importance and advantage of bringing artists together with the general public and "letting them talk to each other."

In Amarillo, publications are limited. The staff has created a number of "Looking at Art" brochures which provide a concise fundamental basis for viewing art and were particularly designed for the layman. These publications have been favorably received. Daviee noted the effectiveness of keeping "critical jargon" on a "local level." Not intending to project a condescending manner, the staff has made a specific effort to "teach them [the audience] that vocabulary." Most important, the staff appears to concentrate its efforts on the most immediate level, through verbalization. Livesay stated, "People relate to people. Hopefully they can relate to objects that people produce. Sometimes they do; sometimes they don't."

**Austin**

Director Laurence Miller agreed that contemporary art contributed to the "plight of the public." He sees it more as an effect of a greater cause. The director discussed an essential lack of "reinforced visual sensitivity in society." He stated, "A lot of the response made to contemporary art is not a response to the art at all, but a response to the individual's inability to deal with the language." Therefore, many of the negative
reactions are based on one's "inability to deal with the work." Television was cited as one example which has substituted the incentive to rely on one's own visual sensibility. Contemporary art, by nature of its individual concepts and images, emphasizes that illiteracy. In essence, Miller felt that while the gap is not necessarily larger, it is indeed more complex now.

Emphasizing the presence of a common visual vocabulary, Miller sees the museum's potential to introduce the individual to enough different kinds of works through an active and broad exhibition program. In that sense, the museum provides the "groundwork" for further investigations. He described the somewhat "schizophrenic situation" in which museums find themselves. At one point, "mass marketing" is used to get the people in, but "once in the door, they are left alone to make their own decisions." With that in mind, he said, "We're looking for a response. The worst possible reaction is no reaction. We value, to a certain extent, a negative reaction. If we accept as an institution that it's normal that there will be a negative response to contemporary art, then we don't have a dilemma."

Publications have been limited, due to financial resources. Yet, the staff has addressed the core of the alienation problem by providing educational material for children on a sophisticated level. Museum-produced works
include Carl Andre: Sculpture Experiences for Children and Line and Shape, one in a series designed around the elements of art.

Corpus Christi

Reflecting on the process of effectively relating contemporary art to the audience, Director Cathleen Gallander stated, "There is no simple solution. It's a matter of persistence . . . one by one you get people to understand it." In respect to the museum's potential influence and role in that process, she related one series of studies, which she did not identify. Conclusions revealed that "museum-goers and supporters" were those "who have had a positive art experience in their childhood." Hence, she recognized the importance of museum programs geared to develop an interest and understanding of the arts at a young age. Referring to the present situation in Corpus Christi, she said, "The visual arts still are not part of their deep tradition. Where we are right now is audience development." At present, publications are few and have suffered due to insufficient funds.

In general, the director felt, "More people are involved with contemporary art and understand it, particularly in more urban areas." Although Corpus supports a few collectors in the contemporary area, additional stimulating sources are minimal, which surely lessens the
museum's efforts. Essentially, it is Corpus's "geographic position" that makes it unique, according to Gallander. "You don't get that cross-fertilization you get in other towns with mainstream traffic." Even in comparison with Amarillo, Corpus does seem to be located off the beaten path.

Dallas

Director Harry Parker stated, "The confrontation of the art work and the viewer should be so powerful that the secondary devices that are used are only supportive. You cannot educate someone to have an experience which isn't there to begin with." However, he did feel that a variety of aids, ranging from video and slide shows to interviews and access to the artist within the context of his work strengthened the experience. The museum now offers a handbook, A Guide to the Collections. Created and organized through the education department, the handbook attempts to impart a fuller aesthetic understanding of works in the collection beyond a merely descriptive account of them.

Director Parker believed that the "art experience is accessible to anyone." A lack of art education does "not rule out an effective experience." In fact, they are often the better ones. "The art experience equals a fundamental easy experience that doesn't absolutely require
education . . . but it happens more often and more easily with some kind of preparation."

Ultimately, he believed that the museum had "to be on guard to having a poor effect" on the viewer's response to art works, since its influence could be both powerful and damaging. He felt caution should be used so as not to "lead the audience away from the art object instead of to it." Expressing the positive asset of the museum as neutral territory, he saw it as the "setting for confrontation." And "to take a role in the success of that confrontation or experience" requires an "approach with a lot of trepidation, because you are intruding on the experience."

**Fort Worth**

Curator Marge Goldwater felt that the museum's educational role in the contemporary arts was a "very important commitment." Although recognizing the presence of a "larger audience for avant-garde art in larger cities," she saw the process of developing an audience for contemporary art as a "slow process" in any situation. More important, she believed in the museum's potential ability to develop the audience's interests. "Cities are capable of making exceptions out of themselves." In those cases, she continued to say, "Those audiences weren't born; they
were developed. We face that challenge now, here in Fort Worth."

She cited the assets of using both formal and informal means in effectively relating to a diverse audience. In addition, she said, "You start early in the game--you deal with children. You provide them with some exposure to art-making, to different kinds of art, and to the notion that art need not be just something that fits in a two-by-three format that hangs on the wall." With the staff's emphasis on exhibitions, publications revolve around that area. In addition to catalogues, complimentary handouts are now available. Aside from the descriptive and biographical information on the artist, they include a brief yet helpful interpretive criticism of the works for the viewer.

Goldwater noted the initial luxury of "specialized" museums in that they draw and retain the interests of a particular subset of the general public. And yet in terms of the general public and the museum's narrower context of the twentieth century, the staff can still strike a balance between the historical and the contemporary. In that respect, she felt that contemporary art was even more accessible to the public, "since showing early modern helps you understand most contemporary manifestations."
Houston Contemporary Arts Museum

Curator Marti Mayo reaffirmed the lack of "isms" and the rise of individual directions in contemporary art. She felt that seventies art may be more accessible and demand less of the audience, in terms of educating themselves. For instance, in comparing the sixties and seventies, she noted that seventies art is not accompanied by the greater body of critical theory as in the former decade. "Since the art is more personal and less formally oriented, it's probably more accessible to more people who have not done a great deal of critical reading."

Functioning totally on exhibitions of the most recent developments in contemporary art, the Contemporary Arts Museum has consciously recognized an important obligation unique to contemporary works and these kinds of museums. In a statement drawn from a 1978 brochure--CAM: The First Thirty Years--which provides a retrospective view of the museum, Harold Rosenberg was quoted as saying, "I should like to point out that in dealing with new things there is a question that precedes that of good or bad--I refer to the question 'What is it?'--the question of identity."

In agreement, the staff has been involved in this procedure of definition and description. Because this process has been assumed by museum staffs, the identification, interpretation, selection, and evaluation of new works of art may be witnessed firsthand by the audience in the museum.
In effect, exhibitions and education are now subtly integrated.

Aside from the exhibition catalogues, the museum's publications have largely been created for public relations purposes. As in the other museums, the staff emphasizes the value of verbalization. For example, whenever possible, visiting artists are asked to give gallery tours of their work.

Houston Museum of Fine Arts

Curator Judith Rooney believed that the gap of understanding associated with contemporary art was not a particularly unique issue, since it was a traditional occurrence and a relatively consistent one in history. She did believe, however, that the conceptual and minimal works proposed more difficulty in interpretation for the viewer. The recent hiring of an education curator, in addition to the educational programs largely assumed by the museum school, was seen as one means of providing a more interpretive and informative basis for viewing the collection. For example, Rooney discussed using more "didactic labels" alongside works. At present, museum publications predominantly consist of catalogues accompanying exhibitions organized by the museum.

As to how far the museum's responsibility extended in educating the audience about contemporary works and
issues, Rooney was cautious. Her views on this issue are derived from a conservative standpoint. She noted, "Many museums feel very equivocal about education." She characterized education as the "stepchild" of the museum. Rather than "proselytizing" works of art, she said, "We try to make decisions about quality. We can't be so presumptuous" in approaching the audience. Hence, emphasis was on making works of art "more accessible" to the general public. A large part of that process was viewed as contingent on the staff's fulfillment of its curatorial responsibilities.

San Antonio

Concerning the alienation of the viewer from contemporary art, Director John Leeper proposed, "The first step is to show them [the works]. That's a big enough challenge. If you show what you think is the best of this kind of material, over and over again, people do come and look at it... Exposure is enough." With emphasis in that direction, he felt, "Implicitly the museum does an education job." Museum publications are directed toward exhibitions and, particularly, the collection. During the interview at the McNay, the staff was preparing a new catalogue of the permanent collection.

By and large, Leeper said, "All art is enjoyed by only a few people. You develop a small group of people who
understand it." In light of contemporary art, he expressed, "I don't think there is a negative attitude."

Considering that "the audience that is significant is a very small number of people," Leeper felt that of that subset, the audience is very "cosmopolitan."

In respect to the museum's audience and the general Texas public, Leeper thought, on one hand, that "The climate is good" for contemporary art. On the other hand, he noted that there are only a few substantial collectors in the area. "As is true in most parts of Texas, emphasis in collecting is on furniture, silver, and china. There are not many really good contemporary collections. You can name them on one hand."

Tyler

Reflecting a similar view to that held by other museum directors, Ron Gleason suggested that it is not necessary or even desirable for everyone to be interested in or to participate in the contemporary arts, or in any of the arts for that matter. In effectively reaching the present or potentially interested audience, Gleason saw the museum's capacity to reach them on a variety of levels. One important approach adopted by the museum on several occasions has been to "impose art in a very personal way, in their offices." Many of Tyler's programs are involved with the public. Specifically, they are
oriented to meet and develop particular individual and group interests as opposed to providing mass appeal. On such a level, Gleason believed "A little understanding goes a long way."

Speaking of the general public and its response to contemporary art, Gleason described the results of a study—which he did not identify—completed in the late sixties and seventies in the northeastern portion of the United States. With the premise that there has always been a "fifty-year lag between art and the general public's understanding," researchers thought that perhaps with the development of television, communication, and education, the present gap could conceivably be less dramatic. Yet following a two-year test, the results showed no changes at all. Consequently, the director noted that the enormous amount of contemporary art in Texas museums was not a reflection of the audience's interest and understanding in the area, but rather a reflection of its availability and demand through economic reality.

He did note one interesting factor which has surfaced during the museum's involvement with contemporary regional works. The director stated, "What interests me about the contemporary art in Texas is that there seems to be a handle on the best works for everybody to get hold of." That very quality is further enhanced and recognizable in one particular museum policy. The staff has continued
to exhibit a large number of Texas artists—in Gleason's words—"shows for artists who have not had a one-man show with a catalogue." Catalogues are usually created in cooperation with the visiting artist. In design and concept, the catalogues are not only informative and descriptive, but they visually and conceptually characterize the artist's work to a point where they often suggest small works in themselves. These publications take on an educational significance in a subtle yet effective accessible format.

Question Seven

Contemporary Art and the Art Historical Mainstream

Is contemporary art (the seventies) a significant aspect of art history? Where does it fit into the mainstream? As it is not removed in time, is it difficult to determine the validity and significance of many art works? How important is such a consideration to the museum? To what extent are contemporary concepts offered to the public? Are they being introduced to applicable contemporary theories concerning both the criticism and evaluation of recent art? Please explain.

Generalization

The large number of Texas museums substantially involved with contemporary art suggests a broader perspective of the art historical mainstream than traditionally recognized. However, the rise of contemporary works in the museum is partially the result of economics. Due to the competitive, high-priced art market, many museums have
turned to more accessible and generally less expensive contemporary works. On a practical level, contemporary art is a significant aspect of the museum.

On the philosophical level, the museum's perspective of art history and contemporary art's place in it remains an interesting issue. Some scholars and critics have proposed that in its unresolved state, contemporary art is part of the social order. As a neutral entity with objective standards, the museum only receives works after a timely and natural process of criticism, evaluation, and judgment in the traditional art historical manner. However, in some museums, contemporary art may be presented by the staff in the critical sense rather than validated in the art historical one. Since contemporary art has not yet settled into the historical format, it must first be perceived through its own intrinsic qualities. Subsequently, contemporary art may openly challenge, and thereby strengthen, the viewer's sense of understanding and appreciation of both older and recent works.

Amarillo

Director Tom Livesay noted that it is "tough to see things from an historical perspective that were only done yesterday." Furthermore, he felt that museums are in a somewhat tight situation in that they may generate, through their selections, influential "critical reaction" which may
affect the path of art history. At one extreme, contemporary selections are often interpreted as a statement or validation of the historical progression of art before the fact.

During the interview, it was proposed that, in its profusion and immediacy, contemporary art may induce a confusion of values whereby the museum is left to decide the questionable significance of proposed works. For example, Livesay discussed the recent use and potential value of video in the arts. He noted that as of yet it has produced little success. Concerning its validity, he expressed caution in that "It's an art form because this man is an artist and he's using it? I doubt it." With similar concern, Education Curator David Turner discussed the loose structure of performance works and the necessity of carefully determining the level of refinement.

Understanding the initial importance of discretion, the staff generally assumed a contemporary viewpoint of art history. However, Curator Jerry Daviee acknowledged that contemporary art is often neglected as a valid participant in art history. "Having gone through that art history training," he believed that "many universities and art history departments don't believe that it is."

As a young institution without a collection, and therefore without the burden of a reputation, Daviee felt that his museum had more freedom in exhibiting a variety of
contemporary works. Furthermore, staff members were not necessarily validating the historical significance of these works of art, but rather proposing their aesthetic significance as works of art.

David Turner stated, "It's too early to put it [contemporary art] into the art history category . . . things have to sift." He felt that the audience should be exposed to new attitudes and works, "not because they may be a footnote in an art history book someplace, but because there's something good about them." He saw the curator as a critic who evaluates the quality of innovative works whether they contribute as a "building block" or the "peak" of a trend or movement.

Austin

Curator Annette Carlozzi felt that art history initially viewed from the present was more effective than the reverse. She stated, "It's more interesting to figure out what's a product of your time." Ultimately, she believed a "balance of the two is important," that being a consensus of the past perceived in light of the contemporary situation. She continued, "I view 1979 as important to the concept of twentieth-century art as 1913 . . . It's one continuum." Specifically, twentieth-century art raises issues extremely pertinent to now. "There are connections to be drawn. . . . To me that's probably the
only validation I need of contemporary work is that the concerns from which it springs come from the concerns that were developed in the beginning of this century."

Those thoughts are reflected in the curator's exhibition plans. Plans in the future are to develop more historical theme shows that are consciously designed to interrelate the two.

Most important, Carlozzi believed that there is a lot to be learned from the unresolved state of contemporary art and judgments of quality: "It's the context that you find something in that you learn from; it's not necessarily the exquisiteness of it." Concerning the museum's controversial role in validating contemporary works in the art historical sense or in projecting the "next trends," she observed a change since the sixties, "when museums were still validating works as they were coming right out of the studios. I don't think that's as much as the focus now."

Rather, she recognized the present situation "where things can no longer be classified as they were before." Consequently, that has "led everybody to re-evaluate what, in fact, we're trying to do in museums. We're not trying to classify. It has much more to do with looking at art works and artists as individual entities." In effect, museums do not have "so much of a sense of historical responsibility as they used to."
Corpus Christi

Director Cathleen Gallander reiterated an earlier comment affirming contemporary art's validity in the historical framework of the museum, due to the original relevant impact that it can only have on the audience of its time. Yet, within the relatively short period of the seventies, she believed it is difficult to assess what will survive in terms of quality works.

She did point out that this decade has revealed a unique development in the arts, distinguishing it from other periods. In retrospect, she described American art's coming of age in the fifties, upon which it continued to "evolve in groups." In contrast, the seventies have seen artists with "enough self-confidence to go on and branch out on their own." The occurrence has contributed to greater challenges in effectively assessing the variety of works. Amidst the pluralism and expediency of works coming into the museum and the paralleling quickened pace of time and communication, Gallander said, "We need to slow down and look more in depth. Some artists who are just taking older aesthetics and trying to expand them are overlooked. I think that's a danger of this fast pace."

Dallas

Director Harry Parker felt it was difficult to designate and teach "what is the art of the seventies . . . It
may turn out that in twenty years the person—who in hindsight is thought to have been the most exciting person—we may not even know the name." Recognizing the innate value that contemporary works can carry in illuminating the interrelated context of works, Parker cited the importance of the curator's critical role. Although the process of selection is invariable a gamble, he added, one hopes to seek the "best partial picture." Of course, the "perimeter" can also be narrowed "through looking, reading, and knowledge."

As to the museum's occasional appraisal as a taste setter in its authoritarian selections of quality and foresight of trends, Parker believed that museums were only one element of an influencing force including critics, dealers, and collectors. Interestingly, he believed "the opinions of artists themselves are probably the most influential." Appreciating the unique vantage point of artists, Parker described a policy of asking artists "what they think is missing, especially in the very contemporary collection" and "who we have not represented in the collection that they think is important." That process runs contrary to a popular conception of the museum's tunnel vision in selecting works, with only self-interests in mind. Hence, the museum's influence on the validation of contemporary works cannot easily be separated from other critical contributions.
With a substantial interest in contemporary art and a recognizable commitment to the art historical developments of the twentieth century, the Fort Worth Art Museum is a resounding affirmation of contemporary art's valid inclusion and active role in providing the most comprehensive up-to-date view of the given context. Unequivocally, Curator Marge Goldwater felt that judgments of quality are not necessarily dependent on the aftermath of fluctuating waves of time and criticism, but can be made in the "midst" of the period of creation. Recognizing the professional and personal challenges that contemporary art unfolds in its unresolved state, she noted the interest and potential historical value of speculation that accompanies the curatorial process.

During the interviews, the curator noted that the present availability of contemporary art in museums, suggesting its significance in the art historical sense, is somewhat misleading. In actuality, it often may be less the result of a philosophical aspect of the issue and more the result of a practical assessment. Simply, she related that often the inclusion of contemporary works in the museum, or an institution devoted to that area, may be the outgrowth of a personal interest or smaller groups responsible for the museum's foundation and continued development.
In effect, a museum's position on this question may be of little consequence, if it arrives after the fact.

**Houston Contemporary Arts Museum**

Like Fort Worth, the Contemporary Arts Museum represents a positive assessment of contemporary art as a significant and valid aspect of the historical progression of the arts. On one hand, it is a continuation of that spectrum. On the other, in its specialization and separation from the general museum, it is a point of departure.

Concerning contemporary art's relation to the historical mainstream, Curator Marti Mayo stated, "It's difficult to evaluate the art of your own time. You can analyze it, you can try to classify it, you can show it, you can write about it, but none of us will know what the art of the seventies was about until the art of the eighties has come and gone." Nonetheless, she believed that the museum's role had to supersede one of merely reporting contemporary art. Moreover, she felt that quality can be discerned, and, as a source of expertise, it is the museum's responsibility to do so. Mayo stated, "There has to be some kind of quality judgment, otherwise you're not serving your public and you're not serving the artist."

Since the Contemporary Arts Museum only exhibits contemporary works, Mayo remarked that the issue was "obviously" not a "terribly important" consideration of the
staff. Furthermore, since the institution is devoted to the contemporary area, it cannot be equated with the traditional historical museum. In fact, Mayo believed this issue to be more appropriate for larger museums with substantial diverse collections. She recognized the dilemma of collecting museums which are concerned with the validity or relative art historical value of their investments. In such cases, staffs must cautiously distinguish between the very different concerns of quality and fashion in their acquisitions and deaccessions. For example, she cited the case of Vermeer, who was "not fashionable until recently." She continued, "Let us hope that some less-than-cautious director didn't deaccession his Vermeers before they came into fashion." In conclusion, she remarked that it was difficult to know what in one hundred years will have been re-evaluated. Judgments on the significance of a work can only be relative assessments representing one point in time.

Houston Museum of Fine Arts

Curator Judith Rooney felt that the seventies were indeed a significant aspect of art history. However, determining the validity and the particular significance of its varied components, in light of the museum's historical context, was a different matter. She said, "It's very difficult to have any perspective about it."
Nonetheless, she believed that "it's better to make mistakes" on the side of receptiveness than "closing your mind in the beginning."

In collecting institutions such as this one, contemporary art, as both an economical and art historical investment, is a gamble. Rooney described the questionable benefits of buying a less expensive contemporary work ten years prior to its validation by critics and the art market. The results could range anywhere from advantageous to disastrous. Most important, she noted that premature judgments, found to be inadequate, can have derogatory effects on the museum's credibility. As the curator explained, "The public trusts us to make decisions about quality." Hence, the museum's context of contemporary art must exceed that of merely "reporting what's going on." She discussed the misconception with which museums are often associated, the image of an art gallery. As a collector, the museum represents a more controlled environment. In contrast, temporary exhibition spaces, galleries, and alternative spaces can better accommodate the most recent, experimental, or vanguard works. Expressing that there was an unfortunate lack of alternative spaces, Rooney was concerned that museums may be sought out to relieve this problem.
San Antonio

John Leeper characterized contemporary art as "another brick in the wall." Yet, interestingly, he felt it was "curiously in a rather quiescent period . . . The seventies seem awfully tame to me. . . . You can't assign reasons to it." However, he suggested that the "lack of a dominant image in the world of art" had contributed to that. Furthermore, he noted the revived interest in American painting and realistic painting. In effect, he suggested that a recent conservatism in the visual arts, as compared to the sixties, may propose fewer difficulties towards integrating it into the historical mainstream.

The director noted that the major criterion for a work's validation, be it this decade or another, rests on the element of quality. He stated, "If it's well done, it's valid." However, "another discriminating eye in another decade" may have a change of mind. Although Leeper recognized the validity of contemporary art in the museum, he expressed that it should be the result of a controlled, cautiously discriminatory process. That has presented somewhat of a dilemma for the museum, since it may be expected to arbitrarily accommodate more contemporary works. Leeper stated, "A museum is not the end-all for an artist. We are not dealers . . . There is no thrust whatsoever in that direction. And there are other alternatives that artists ought to explore."
While discussing the hesitancy of some art historians and scholars to integrate or include contemporary art within the context of art history, Director Ron Gleason first stated, "I'm not an art historian." In one sense, his observations and approach to works of art seemed to be more sympathetic with those of a critic, and, to some extent, with those of the artist. For example, the museum's contemporary works are not presented or illuminated so much as a documented extension of art history. Rather, the focus is on an aesthetic and intellectual assessment of its particular parts, often in relation to previous works. Contemporary art's inherent significance is arrived at through individual evaluations.

Reflecting on the seventies in general, Gleason felt that this period is both the "end and the beginning." He noted, in a personal observation, that the strong minimalist tendency found throughout the seventies seemed to represent a highly established and "geared academic form." He added that it obviously was not altogether representative of the period, but it was probably the most recognized facet of the seventies. The director then pointed out that historical observations and evaluations are taken from a "slice of art history that makes the most sense--that we think is important." Invariably, the mainstream of art history often leaves out the "points" removed from its
linear progression. Very likely, museums which are very involved with contemporary art can offer a look at both, as equally important, not yet summarized or systematized in their sequential significance.
CHAPTER V

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES PERTAINING TO THE
PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY
ART AND MUSEUM RELATIONSHIP

The following four questions and responses revolve around the practical concerns and policies involved with contemporary art's presence in the museum. The four major topics of discussion are (a) museum programs, (b) accommodating contemporary art works and artists in the museum, (c) the process of selecting works for the museum, and (d) the number and kinds of contemporary exhibitions organized by the museum.

Question Two

Museum Programs

What museum programs, if any, are employed to draw upon current interests of the public? Special programs within the museum? Does the museum offer audience participation shows, lectures, education programs for different age groups? Programs which go out to the community, e.g., exhibitions in schools, civic centers, businesses, street shows, happenings? Do the programs relate to the particular interests of that social group? Please give examples. Programs which parallel contemporary interests of the general public, e.g., the recent activities of the women's movement as reflected in recent major exhibitions.
Generalization

By nature, museums are educational, if not specifically, then surely in effect. However, the museum as educator is a relatively new concept. Although in each interview education was stressed, it was always with the understanding that the exhibition or collection of art works was of prime importance. Museum programs were seen as a catalyst towards understanding art works and encouraging audience participation. The museum was most often seen as a provider--rather than an educator--of the essential components for an educational experience in the arts. Often, knowing about art begins to substitute for looking at art. Hence, the staffs stressed the intrinsic value that only the works can provide.

Nonetheless, as museums have moved away from the image of elitists, they have made attempts to encourage involvement and an understanding of the arts, and, in this case, contemporary art. Of course, that is as much the result of necessity as it is willingness. Public relations and administration have become more important as museums have looked to the public for moral and financial support.

On one hand, the social image of Texas museums is an inviting and relaxed one. On the other hand, an artistic elitism characterizes the attitudes behind the selection and organization of appropriate exhibitions and programs. Texas museums have been cautious in their approach to
accommodating public interest and social issues inside the museum. All the staffs expressed concern over the negative sensational image to which museums are vulnerable in attempts to attract mass audiences.

Amarillo

The Amarillo Art Center is located in the Panhandle region of Texas. Within that expansive area, it is the primary source of artistic activity. In similar respect, it is isolated from the internal feedback of Texas. Yet, not only have its programs been designed to develop the immediate audience, but the staff have also extended their interests throughout Texas. They also have induced a growing relationship with the neighboring states. As the museum serves a large rural area surrounding Amarillo, Curator Jerry Daviee noted that one-third of the museum's audience are out-of-towners.

Director Tom Livesay emphasized the importance of a strong internal program, so as not to weaken the museum's effectiveness by overextending itself. Therefore, an active series of programs within the museum is the main focus. They are coupled with an outreach program which has permeated many of the less populated and rural areas of the Panhandle.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of the museum's programs is the interest in juxtaposing the humanities,
history, and the arts in meaningful relationship. Livesay explained that it was important to show that art does not exist in a vacuum, and "we're not just slapping works of art on the wall." He emphasized that not all art is of the "art for art's sake" school. He felt that if the audience could relate to relevant social and historical influences on the creative process, then one could more easily relate to the individual works. For example, Education Curator David Turner briefly described the educational touring program provided for the public schools' eleventh-grade history classes. The project was timed with an exhibition of the Michener Collection of twentieth-century American paintings, in an effort to relate art and the events from which it emerged.

In light of more current events, Jerry Daviee felt it was "difficult to stay topical," because most exhibitions are planned far in advance. The museum has dealt substantially with Texas artists. Daviee noted that their inclusion has received a good response from the general audience, since they do feel a "kind of kinship" with more regional artists.

In conclusion, Livesay described the staff's attempts to "present things from a more humanitarian view, and certainly from an educational standpoint." In terms of a lay audience, it may be one of the most integral factors in effectuating an understanding of the creative process.
The Laguna Gloria Art Museum has established a strong direction in contemporary art. It has also shown a progressive attitude towards its exhibitions and programs. Director Laurence Miller sees a "common vocabulary" within all the arts, and particularly in contemporary art where barriers are often broken down among traditionally separated media. The staff has frequently been involved with film, dance, music, and theater in addition to the regular exhibition schedule. According to Miller, concerts, lectures, and performances have been organized within the gallery as well as outside in the community. Interestingly, a number of dance groups have been commissioned to "create specific pieces for specific exhibitions." The museum has been involved with mural projects and dance projects outside the museum and has co-ventured exhibitions with the local artists' cooperative gallery.

The Austin community contains within it a rather large audience either associated with or at least affected by the youthful university atmosphere. The community also supports a substantial number of working artists. Both are somewhat reflected in the strong contemporary direction of the museum. However, in terms of current issues and public interest, Miller described the importance of upholding the staff's critical sense of quality. He then said, "Our notion of what they like is used as a counter
balance." Within the context of twentieth-century art as "an intellectual framework," the staff predominantly focuses its exhibitions and programs on contemporary mainstream artists as well as Austin and central Texas artists. Those exhibitions are contrasted with other historical exhibitions of this century.

The museum has assumed an active role in the community. For example, the museum has an additional exhibition space or satellite in the downtown area, called the Laguna Gloria at First Federal. Continuing exhibitions and lectures are varied with thoughtful considerations given to civic-related issues as well. In one instance, the Louis I. Kahn Exhibition and lecture series sponsored by the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects was held there. The museum also sponsors an Art After School program in which both artists and art educators work with children in eighteen schools within the community. Miller also described the wide-reaching effects of the community art school which is "one of three ongoing museum schools in the state." The other two are the Houston Museum of Fine Arts School and the San Antonio Art Institute, loosely connected with the McNay Art Institute.

Corpus Christi

Located in the deep south of Texas, the Museum of South Texas serves as large a region as Amarillo does.
Within the historical context of the exhibitions, the contemporary area is predominantly devoted to national mainstream works. In a sense justifying that direction in terms of the public's interest, Director Cathleen Gallander noted the limited space and stressed the need to expose the area audience to "things they haven't seen."

In respect to the audience, the museum's purpose, and its programs, she explained that the museum's standards and credibility were still being established within the community which largely "has not developed a sense of what is museum quality." Furthermore, she continued, "There's been a great misunderstanding in what kinds of things, even in terms of more traditional things, are appropriate to exhibit."

Recognizing the large Mexican-American community, which comprises over 50 per cent of the audience, Gallander described the strong commitment to that area. In a diplomatic, professional, and aesthetic sense that focus has been on providing an aesthetic-cultural insight into their heritage through educational historical surveys. Controversial ethnic, political, and social issues are consciously avoided.

Although the museum and local college engage in a good mutual support system, the museum focuses its programs internally. It is there that films, lectures, and docents accompany exhibitions in an effort to build a foundation of
interest and understanding within the community. In addition to the audience dilemma, financial problems have been another restraint in taking programs outside the museum.

**Dallas**

The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts assumes many responsibilities in terms of its public, since it is the only museum in the city. As a general museum, it accommodates the interests of a number of different audience groups, comprising the overall public. In effect, it has had to represent more things to more people.

The staff has simultaneously coordinated lectures, tours, classes, and gallery demonstrations with their exhibitions. Encouraging interaction, they have also sponsored a number of audience participatory affairs. For example, in one exhibition, *Modern Art: A Guide to Looking*, questionnaires were included for the audience to fill out. Festivals have also been included with the general audience in mind. These entertaining affairs have offered a combination of the visual arts, performing arts, and demonstrations for the public.

The museum has assumed greater responsibility in representing the contemporary area since the closing of the Contemporary Arts Museum in the sixties. In its present diversity, the museum reflects a strong educational commitment to its public. Harry Parker stated,
"I think we've tried most every variety and variation." Programs have ranged from loan exhibitions for the city hall and public library to an active outreach program organized through the education department. The outreach program is colorfully characterized through the recent addition of the extension bus, "Go Van Gogh."

In terms of public interests, Parker felt that the museum was very aware of the "potential interest of any exhibition we bring in." For instance, he cited the public enthusiasm that accompanied photography and architecture shows. Both areas seem to find their mark with Texas audiences. These two areas have received substantial attention in numerous museums in this survey.

In many cases, potentially controversial current issues may be presented in a more objective manner through thematic or historical reviews. Parker recalled the 1977 exhibition Two Centuries of Black American Art which in essence was a "conservative historical chronological survey." Concerning more vanguard and specifically "political exhibitions," Parker stated, "You have to think a little harder because in developing one constituency you may irritate another." He felt, for example, that an "outright feminist" show would "probably" be a mistake, whereas an exhibition such as Women in Art reflected a more objective "historical perspective." The director agreed that the retrospective or historical survey, reflecting current
public interests, offered museums of this kind a safer approach to potentially controversial issues.

In conclusion he described the museum in Dallas, "We are not a contemporary institute. Our whole approach to contemporary art runs somewhat conservative in that it makes contemporary art one element of the total spectrum."

**Fort Worth**

Considering the small staff and the museum's effectiveness, Curator Marge Goldwater believed that of the museum's programs, "the primary focus has to be here." Within that realm, she expressed trying a variety of "avenues" and programs to reach the audience. For example, she discussed the merits of a "traditionally oriented lecture series," such as the three-part series of lectures given by critics and historians in January of this year. The program was designed to facilitate a broader understanding of some of the major issues and developments of twentieth-century art. The last lecture was devoted to a retrospective view of the seventies. In effect, the series provided "a context for the audience of contemporary art" in a format with which they had an affinity.

In addition to the exhibitions, outreach programs, lectures, and tours, children's workshops now include explorations in video and other non-traditional media. The museum has also maintained an interest in contemporary
architecture, the performing arts, and film. Open screenings are provided by the museum for younger or unestablished filmmakers. Contemporary museums of this kind have witnessed and accommodated the merging of different art forms and media. In fact, they now respond to a variety of interests of the general public.

Concerning the effectiveness and quality of programs and exhibitions picking up on popular contemporary interests, Goldwater expressed caution. For example, in discussing Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* she stated, "I don't think a lot of people went in to see that work, not because of the women's issue but because it was a lot of hype." And although she did not see the exhibition, she surmised from available material covering the show that "it was a somewhat interesting historical document which is very marginally related to art."

**Houston Contemporary Arts Museum**

It should be noted that, on one level, the Contemporary Arts Museum is representative of current public interests, since it is devoted to the most recent issues of art. Within that context, Curator Marti Mayo discussed several means through which the museum has communicated that purpose and penetrated the public. For example, she described the benefits of the museum's Art After School Program which reaches students in the public school system
who can afford the tuition while NEA supports students who cannot. Hence, it is extended to a "whole level of lower-income, more culturally deprived, kind of student than normally would have access to this kind of program."

On a different level, Mayo explained that an outreach program has been organized "through the press" and through the museum's own organized public relations. She expressed the importance of the latter in making the community aware of the museum's presence and function, particularly in dissolving the misconceptions that "we're so very specialized and forbidding."

Mayo pointed out that any museum-supported projects or works outside the museum would be contingent on the quality of the work and available financial resources. Internally, the active exhibition schedule is of prime importance. The staff has continued a policy of inviting and encouraging visiting artists to talk to the audience "in a general very informal gallery tour which is free and open to the public." In respect to public interest, Mayo stated, "The response has been phenomenal."

Mayo felt strongly that, assuming the first criterion of showing works was fulfilled, a variety of works and issues became the second criterion. In that way, she noted, it is not "so necessary to approach what you exhibit from the point of view of who's going to see it, who's going to like it, or what kind of audience it will
draw. If it's good, it will draw an audience." Furthermore, she felt that the museum was less vulnerable to pressures of appealing to the public through popular "blockbuster" exhibitions. In terms of economics, space, and staff, "We don't have the capability to house those kinds of exhibitions. They have their place, but not in this kind of institution."

Houston Museum of Fine Arts

Reflecting on the museum's potential to select exhibitions reflecting popular interests in order to draw a crowd, Curator Judith Rooney echoed similar feelings throughout the survey. "I don't see art as propaganda at all. . . . The only single criterion, I think, that is relevant for a work of art is quality." Hence, in reaching a larger audience, while provoking and maintaining an awareness of that initial commitment, museums have offered more internal programs under the direct auspice of the staffs.

In the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, a variety of programs is available within the museum. Lectures, films, and musical events are continually sponsored by the museum. Emphasis there is given to highlighting areas within the collection. Outreach programs have largely been organized through the museum school. A number of programs have been sponsored within the city to reach special groups
such as an Older Adult Fine Arts Program and a Deaf Children's Program. Due to the cooperative measures assumed by a number of different sources, the museum has been able to focus its attentions on the collection. The very presence of the school and the Contemporary Arts Museum next door offers a condensed distribution of contemporary interests for the general public. Furthermore, the favorable impact of numerous artistic forces operating within Houston is one advantage of larger cities.

San Antonio

Of the museums in this survey, the McNay Art Institute is one of the most independent. The provision of a private income, and the continued connoisseur approach to the collection, reflect the museum's removal from outside pressures. In light of that, Director John Leeper affirmed the absence of external programs. The museum has no educational department per se. Leeper firmly believes that the collection offers the most effective educational possibilities. Referring to "educationalist," he stated, "The whole notion of museum education is erroneous. I don't think you're ever going to have a general great following."

Leeper discouraged involvement in overt socio-political contemporary works related to recent controversial issues. He recognized the availability of more scholarly exhibitions
of historical surveys of cultural, social, and ethnic developments in the arts. He too was very opposed to the sensationalist attitude from which many shows have arisen. Yet concerning the potential validity of a controversial work, he pointed out, "It's not a matter of philosophy; it's a matter of taste." Hence, he saw the importance of addressing the specific concerns of individual works or projects. He was agreeable to backing artist projects in the community, if they were "valid" in the quality sense.

The museum's isolated situation certainly does not reflect the response or influence it has had on the public. The museum continues to draw a substantial audience within and outside the community. That is the result of a fine collection which continues to grow. The staff has integrated contemporary issues and works with discretion. The final effect is a balance of sensitivity to contemporary works with a strong historical sense of aesthetic significance in mind. The former is also evident in the close association existing between the McNay and the San Antonio Art Institute which has contributed substantially to the community's involvement in the arts. Furthermore, the Whitte Museum provides an additional source of reference for the public.
Several of the museums located outside of larger metropolitan areas have not only been active in cultivating audiences in their immediate area but have also received substantial recognition from afar. The Tyler Museum of Art is one example. While discussing museum programs, Director Ron Gleason stressed the importance of an internal focus on quality exhibitions. The museum has strongly supported the contemporary area and, in particular, the works of regional artists. In light of that, it has attracted a substantial audience outside of Tyler. Nonetheless, the museum has often taken on numerous interesting responsibilities in an attempt to further develop an awareness and understanding of the arts in the community. Gleason said, "I like to think of the museum as an animator." With all the "components" there, the museum ignites and stimulates them.

He described several examples. Four to five years ago, no art curriculum existed in the Tyler elementary schools, with only a minimal one in the middle and high schools. The museum raised twelve thousand dollars through local and state sources for the school system. It also supplied a list of artists from which one was selected and hired to organize an art curriculum that year. The following year the school system was asked to raise half of the funds. They declined. However, in the absence of
the original program, they felt a loss and proceeded to develop a curriculum on their own.

In another instance, the museum assisted a bank in putting an art collection together. Consistent with the standards and area of focus within the museum, the staff provided a selection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century works. The bank then had the option of selecting or rejecting from among those works. The museum has also acted as an arbitrator between a collector and an artist, in which the museum commissioned a group of works from the artist. In similar manner, Gleason described a project in which the museum was going to participate in the early plans for a public sculpture. In this case, the museum would "intervene between a donor and the city."

Question Three

Accommodating Contemporary Works and the Artist in the Museum

Do many contemporary works demand unusual revisions of exhibition space? How efficient is the lighting system, acoustical system, overall facilities? What is the nature of the relationship between the museum and the artist, particularly concerning the installation of his work? Often, contemporary works are perishable; what guidelines are set in purchasing and/or exhibiting such works?

Generalization

In the museums surveyed, the kinds of available spaces vary, although the contemporary preference for open, versatile areas characterizes most of the interiors. It
is a quality which reflects the youthfulness of many of the buildings. Although the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts is presently very limited in space and facilities, its staff anticipates few such problems in the new complex now underway. The Laguna Gloria and McNay continue to function out of older and colorful refurbished residences which characterize earlier architectural tastes of this century. The more contemporary buildings of the remaining museums were designed with an open air feeling in order to achieve maximum functional use of the given space.

The varying forms of contemporary art demand new considerations by the museum, both physically and conceptually. Often, works are less easily adapted to the traditional format of exhibiting *objets d'art* such as painting and sculpture. Collages, assemblages, projects, processes, performances, installations, and perishable works are a few forms representing the integration, innovation, and overlapping of media and concepts which are ultimately best described as mixed media. Furthermore, the artist often assumes a greater role in the final context of the work and/or its organization inside the museum. Consequently, such developments have raised new concerns for staffs in facilitating the art work and the artist in the museum.
Amarillo

In the Amarillo Art Center, the open arrangement of a deep center hallway with smaller adjoining galleries on each level provides an easy transition from one space to another. The staff felt that the ample space effectively served a variety of purposes, freeing them from temporary revisions and adjustments of the interior. Curator Jerry Daviee mentioned the limited video equipment and related facilities, although he added that the museum has access to the campus theater next door where performance and video pieces have occurred.

The director and both curators believed that backing artists in any number of varying ventures was feasible, with initial attention given to the economic and practical limitations of the museum. At one point, Director Livesay noted, "We're looking for installation pieces." With considerable enthusiasm in the contemporary area, the staff has continued to establish cooperative relations with working artists, particularly less established regional ones. Livesay described the positive flexible working relationship experienced during the Young Texas Artists Series, which included a selection of fifteen artists. It began in 1976 and ended in 1978. Essentially, artists selected were given spaces to fill with a body of work of their choice. The museum worked with them closely, providing as much assistance to "get their ideas across."
In effect, Livesay saw the museum as a mediator in initiating the most immediate "communication between the artist and the public."

In similar respect, the staff has been receptive to and supportive of artist projects, notably temporary works. In light of the museum's interests, such projects are preferably documented in some manner. As Education Curator David Turner said, "The whole piece becomes more viable when documentation is part of the whole concept of the idea, not the afterthought of it." Such is the case of the State Plain Project, a "highly perishable commodity," according to Livesay. Working with an artist, patron, and several other supportive sources, the staff is participating in an extensive wheat-growing project, twelve miles long and six hundred feet wide, in an expansive and barren area of the Panhandle. Essentially an earth work or "drawing," Livesay briefly described it this way: "If you grow wheat . . . under ultraviolet and infrared photography, it would make a very clear line of distinction between that and the arid landscape." Documentation of this extensive project from beginning to end will occur through the artist's drawings, photography, and video. That material will become part of the museum's collection.
Austin

Since its original opening as a museum in 1943, the Laguna Gloria has outgrown its immediate facilities. In addition to the sister facility downtown, the staff is utilizing the beautiful grounds around the museum. The area is being developed as a site for contemporary sculptures. In light of the limited interior space, Director Miller felt that the given "constraint" allowed the museum to organize "high-quality exhibitions at a reasonable expense." The feeling was shared by many of the similar museums. An exhibition of fewer select works was seen as equally beneficial, if not advantageous, over an encyclopedic accumulation of many works. Miller stated, "Since you're not dealing with sequential visual information, there isn't any need to have [for example] 150 works by Clifford Styl. The human mind can't deal with it."

Miller and Curator Annette Carlozzi share a mutual interest in maintaining a consistent working relationship with artists. Yet the director noted that the increasing presence and involvement of artists in the context of their art do contribute to a more complex process of effectively selecting and evaluating the works. He pointed out that there are instances where the artist plays an "integral role in the work." However, he stressed the importance of separating "between the art where the artist is an essential part of it, and where the artist is simply trying
to impose his own vanity." At one point, he remarked, "A lot of shows on the road right now, and we've certainly been guilty of this too, are the equivalent of vanity books . . . they're vanity exhibitions." In effect, he felt that museums run the risk of being "vehicles for artists." In that sense, museums handling contemporary art are more susceptible to a conflict of interests when dealing with artists.

Corpus Christi

The Museum of South Texas is one of the most impressive museums recently built in Texas. Constructed in 1972, the structure has ample space—30,000 square feet—which can accommodate a variety of works. The museum continues to rely heavily on incoming exhibitions. Director Cathleen Gallander expressed no plans for organizing an exhibition through the museum this year. Although she suggested the possibility of showing "more Texas artists," the staff appears to have less interaction with working artists than most of the other staffs. Again, this museum largely handles traveling exhibitions coming from the national mainstream.

Although the facilities are more than adequate, with the surrounding Gulf areas also conducive to a variety of explorations, the staff has also been less involved with temporary works or projects. Several installation pieces
have occurred within the galleries, but limited resources and restrained audience support have certainly been inhibiting factors in these areas.

**Dallas**

Considering the changing tendencies in contemporary art, Director Harry Parker stated, "Increasingly the artist expects to have a real hand in the installation of his work. . . . Some of the very old formats like the competitive juried show are proving harder and harder to do. It used to be when you did a print show you knew nothing was going to be bigger than three by two." In effect, he felt that the diversity of works often realized in their dramatic varying sizes and concepts had to be individually evaluated and selected in close respect to the given space and other proposed related works surrounding them. He described one of the museum's responsibilities: to "watch an artist and see the way the work is developing." For example, in consideration of the overall context or statement emerging from a group exhibition and the capacity to effectively communicate it, the process of selection has to "be a collaborative effort." He continued, "Some pieces just have to receive a different kind of treatment."

Curator Sue Graze echoed similar concerns. "Sometimes our needs are not their needs." She explained that the "process of negotiation" becomes important on an
individual basis in terms of meeting the artist's needs and maintaining the museum's direction, standards, and policies. Graze described the museum's support for "ephemeral" projects, yet she reiterated the museum's original commitment to the collection and its preservation.

Inasmuch as contemporary art has emphasized process and concepts, these kinds of museums continue to carry out the other responsibility of preserving art historical objects while stimulating an understanding of the intangible experience. It can be a difficult dual role. Harry Parker related one interesting facet of the issue. "Experience has validity for its own sake." Essentially, he believed that the "memory of a strong experience" carried more personal impact than any memento of its occurrence.

Fort Worth

Curator Marge Goldwater expressed satisfaction with the given space in the museum. Although there are no movable walls, the large open areas have been reorganized on occasions with the construction of smaller walls within. Goldwater mentioned one desire for a theater accessible on a regular basis. Concerning video, she stated, "I'm not aware of any museum yet that has solved the video problem satisfactorily." She did feel some museums in other parts of the country had made some progressions in that area.
As the museum subsists largely on contemporary exhibitions, Goldwater was very interested in the well-being of the artist and museum relationship. "Artists are the bread and butter of any museum and without them we're out of business. We have tremendous interest in their welfare and in providing good working situations for them."

Concerning perishable and temporary works, she remarked, "It's an interesting issue and we tend to deal with it on an ad hoc basis." Often if a work is "not salable after an exhibition," the museum will "pay for a temporary work since at the end of that period, the artist has nothing he can take with him and he's given us a chunk of his time." As in many other museums, the staff commissions or purchases a temporary work for an exhibition.

Houston Contemporary Arts Museum

Recognizing the versatility of the museum's space, Curator Marti Mayo said, "The space was designed to work for contemporary things in a way that larger, older physical facilities were not." Yet she added, "If money is not an object, any place can be adapted for anything." She used as an example the Corcoran which was built in 1903. There, she explained, the kinds of activities have ranged from having "airplanes crash to video."

Concerning the relationship between the museum and artists, she stated, "Whether you're curating or creating,
it's just a different part of the same community. . . . An atmosphere of cooperation should be present just by the nature of what you're trying to do." Therefore, she also felt that it is "very difficult to make any kind of evaluation of the work without having discussed with the artist where it is coming from and where it's going." In terms of potential complications, she thought that the relationship was probably more difficult for the artist, since the purpose of going to the studios is not to give a show, but to acquaint oneself with the work.

Although the museum does not collect, Mayo believed that the perishable nature of many materials and works was less of a threat to museum investments in that area, since contemporary conservation is keeping pace with artists' new materials.

Houston Museum of Fine Arts

Curator Judith Rooney foresaw few problems with the present space. Movable partitions are used to provide the necessary varying formats for individual works and exhibitions. Short of "impinging" on the preservation and security of the collection, she felt that the museum could effectively deal with any temporary "inconveniences" accompanying art works or artists' requests.

Although she recognized the curatorial responsibility and interest in working with artists and following their
development at close hand, she felt that it was a "tough situation" as to how involved the museum should become with artists. She recognized the potential interference it could have on the evaluation and selection of works to be exhibited. She explained she would first want "to decide on having a show for an artist" before any "personal involvement with the artist." Then the mutual working relationship would gain momentum and importance in the process of putting a strong exhibition together.

On the topic of perishable works as a commodity, she said, "We [the curatorial staff] don't really make the decisions." The acquisitions committee, a subset of the board of trustees, "has the final word." In the realistic sense, she described the committee as representing a collector's eye and business orientation. Ultimately, she explained, they are more prone to ask, "Is it a good investment?"

San Antonio

The McNay Art Institute is a spacious museum where contrasts between the older galleries and more recent expansive areas have carefully been combined in keeping with the character of the refurbished home. Director Leeper felt that the given space was adequate. In light of the "intimate museum," he stated, "We don't change gallery spaces." Works are exhibited "as simply as possible" to avoid "an interior decorator's attitude."
Characterizing a conservative policy in maintaining a controlled environment for the collection and exhibition, Leeper stated, "When we select an artist for an exhibition, his responsibility has ceased. We don't want an artist around when we hang it." He explained that exceptions are made when additional insight or information such as a chronology was needed. For the most part, the "artist's taste is confined to the work."

With continual emphasis on the art object and the collection, Leeper said, in respect to perishable works, "An object of art has to last; that's one of the requirements." Nonetheless, he also expressed some participation in temporary projects, installations, and artists' events. In conclusion, he believed that it was a matter of personal and professional discretion as to what was significant and therefore appropriate for the museum.

Tyler

The Tyler Museum of Art has continued a policy of working closely with the artists whose works are exhibited there. Although aware of the continuing debates over artist/museum relationships, Director Ron Gleason described the importance of a "talking relationship." He stated, "In ten years I've developed some extensive relationships with artists. . . . It helps to have an accumulation of mutual trust." Most important, he felt
that extended relationships helped him "to make judgments on consistency and quality," since "knowing the artist gives me a great deal of access to the artist's work."

In mutual consideration of the artist's work and the museum's standpoint, Gleason described the sometimes difficult process of exhibiting and protecting often fragile or perishable works without lessening the artist's purpose or aesthetic idea. Furthermore, temporary installations and works which are soon disassembled suggest different concerns for the museum. Artists' drawings, models, photographs, and catalogues may offer a number of potential documentations of works which may validate their continuation as works in collections and exhibitions. More important, Gleason felt that it was a question of individual judgment on the part of museum staffs to decide whether temporary works are significant in themselves. Simply, he felt that some of these works are important investments for the museum.

He continued to point out, however, that the "question of ownership" often becomes a complex issue. Personally and professionally, he noted, it was not. In a rough approximation of one example, he explained that in grant-making, or assisting artists in executing their works, the Texas State Commission on the Arts was concerned in that "anything tangible has to revert to ownership."

In some cases where typical objects and equipment are
initially needed and used to create a work, they are later disassembled and consequently become "no longer art."
The discrepancies are obvious.

Question Five

The Selection of Contemporary Works
What are the set guidelines in determining the purchase of contemporary works? Their inclusion in exhibitions? Consider economic, political, philosophical, and moral influences. For example, what influence do trustees, supporters, the board of directors, public response, aesthetic and stylistic trends have? Does the museum receive coverage and feedback from newspapers, periodicals, radio, television?

Generalization

During the interviews, the staffs repeatedly emphasized the sense of quality as the key criterion and influence on their judgments and selections of contemporary art. Judgments were, for the most part, substantiated and seen as the product of the cumulative and continuing process of professional and personal experiences in the field. In large established institutions the long complex channel of decision-making rests on a large body of participants in the museum. Furthermore, the museum's evaluation and selection of contemporary works are influenced by and seen within the context of other critical sources in the community. Of the museums surveyed, decisions on selected works often rest on a few. This is particularly evident in the exhibiting museums of smaller communities where limited numbers of staff members
assumed more responsibilities in their collaborative
effort to run the museum.

**Amarillo**

Unequivocally, the staff believed that the quality factor was the basis of selection, largely unhindered by popular influences and pressures outside the museum. Director Livesay noted the staff's abstinence from directing its concerns and direction to publicized trends and issues in the arts, notably the much discussed New York-California circuits.

The cooperation and distribution of responsibilities among the immediate staff of director, curator, and education curator are the prevailing source of decision-making in selecting and organizing works for exhibitions. On the topic of the collection and the overall direction of the museum, Curator Jerry Daviee stated, "We're a public trust. The members of our board are the people who actually make the decisions. It's their museum. We're hired professionals. They rely on our expertise." According to Livesay, an open channel of communication exists between the two. The board is viewed as an advisory source in a compatible arrangement and delegation of responsibilities.

Concerning the process of selection, Livesay stated, "It's a question of quality always." Touching on the ambiguity of that element, he characterized it as such:
"It's how your past experiences relate to the objects that ultimately affects your judgments of quality."
As often is the case, those judgments are largely assessed through contact with the artist and his work. As Livesay stated, "It helps to consider his motives."

Livesay and Daviee felt that coverage and feedback were satisfactory within Amarillo but only "occasionally" received from other areas in Texas. Similarly, the director emphasized the "noticeable lack of criticism" stemming from within Texas and its eminent importance in the continuing development of the arts in this state. At one point, he candidly contended that the museum's continual activities in contemporary art, and particularly its involvement with regional artists, were ineffective if "no one knows about it."

Austin

Since many of the regional museums are lacking a community-supported structure of dealers, collectors, and critics, museum staffs are left with multiple responsibilities ranging from interpretation to validation. Director Miller noted that the museum's lack of surrounding feedback can potentially be "dangerous." For example, he stated, "We don't want to be a marketing tool for an artist." He described the museum in more neutral terms. Through the museum's "credibility within the
community," the staff's selections provide works with "an initial validation" and introduction based on their relative significance. That element is then consciously and purposely left open to individual evaluation.

As a regional museum, Miller characterized a "non-formalized draft system" whereby smaller museums often take "bigger risks" in selecting quality exhibitions outside the realm of larger financially better endowed museums which often retain the option of first choice. At one point, selections are contingent on availability and economics. Yet given the complexity and quantity of proposed works and the museum's growing critical role, he felt that the arts "do in fact need to become more elitist and selective and less vanity oriented."

The director described the favorable tensions of the "ongoing dialogue between the director and curator" in selecting quality works. Curator Annette Carlozzi stated that the two positions acted as an "information clearing house" in which the individual "quality element" filtered out additional "input from artists, curators, and pressure groups." In effect, selections of contemporary art ultimately rest on an intuitive sense of quality coupled with professional judgments in the field.

Carlozzi felt that the local coverage, such as radio and television, was improving. Both the director and curator claimed, "Criticism is totally lacking." Miller
proposed that more critical resources would take "some of
that validation weight off of us."

Corpus Christi

Reflecting on the inclusion of contemporary works
within a broad exhibition program, Director Cathleen
Gallander stated, "It's important to see contemporary art
because it's contemporary and will never have the same
impact." For example, she cited the inevitable changing
perspective accompanying older works where they become
"historical documents" as opposed to their original state
as "contemporary statements." She continued to explain
that although it is important to "report what's happening,
there has to be some sort of judgment. It's the responsi-
bility of the museum profession to select the best." She
recognized that, in retrospect, judgments on quality were
subject to change given the changing perspectives through-
out time. In light of that, she believed that audiences
were often unaware of the museum's standpoint and the
impetus behind its selection of contemporary works.
Rather than projecting the permanent validation of works
in the historical sense, museums can only provide rela-
tive, if only temporary, evaluations of select works, which
has validity in itself.

Concerning potential controversial influences on the
selection of contemporary work, Gallander saw few problems,
since "we would not go with experimental exhibitions or artists." The staff has largely maintained a mainstream pattern in line with more well-known, documented selections of the contemporary period. Although emphasis is presently on exhibitions, Gallander noted one asset of building a collection. "It's very important for people to have a sense of knowing a work and living with it." Selections in that area would comprise a "survey of the movements of the twentieth century. It could even go back to the nineteenth century."

Gallander noted that the museum has "received good criticism everywhere but here." Not only is it limited, but more important, "it's rather negative. It's one of our biggest problems." She discussed one example, in which the local newspaper engages an artist as their critic. She cited the "conflict of interests there" which has affected the credibility of the criticism. Furthermore, due to restrained finances and limited media facilities in Corpus Christi, the staff has been inhibited in organizing adequate coverage of its activities.

Dallas
Director Harry Parker stated that selections of contemporary art for the collection are not subjected to "popular democratic judgments." Rather, they are made by people who have a "known interest and experience in
contemporary art." Since there are "so few objective standards," he felt that the professional experience and vantage point were particularly important in discerning the relative quality of different works. The selection process is left to a relatively few, the staff and acquisitions committee. The latter was described as a body with substantial knowledge and interest in the arts. It reflects the more recent positive reappraisal of boards in general.

In respect to the process of selection and negotiation in acquiring works, Parker explained the "usual pattern." With a limited acquisitions endowment, "the work of art is found, the excitement about buying it is generated, and then the money is found." In a sense, the process suggests more internal control of the initial selections than if the process was reversed. Curator Sue Graze noted that the museum is still in the process of deciding what "we want to emphasize." At present, she did suggest that the museum would like to acquire more works by artists presently in the collection, "giving it more depth."

In general, Parker felt that Dallas was "cool to contemporary art" with the significant exception of an active and sophisticated specialized group. Furthermore, he saw the museum's contributions in the contemporary area in a larger context of institutions in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. On that level, the director felt that
the collaborative efforts and activities in the contemporary area were more than adequate and generally well received. In conclusion, he noted that the contributions of four critics in the city, who generally submit "constructive criticism," and an audience "supportive of its institutions" reflected ample coverage and enthusiasm in the arts.

**Fort Worth**

In response to the proposed question on the selection of works and the influences on that process, Curator Marge Goldwater said, "It's just such a large issue. . . . We haven't been involved actively in acquisitions for the past two years because there has been a change of directors. . . . I don't think it would be productive to answer that question."

On the topic of coverage and criticism, she described the museum's involvement with newspapers, magazines, radio spots, and interviews through the media, when "appropriate." In general, she believed that the quality of criticism in the area and throughout Texas was "getting much better."

**Houston Contemporary Arts Museum**

Curator Marti Mayo discussed the staff's "sensitivity" to external influences surrounding the selection of contemporary works for exhibitions, but "not in the way that would determine or not determine what would be exhibited."
She firmly stated that decisions on selected exhibitions "absolutely" rested on the director and herself. The board of trustees was seen as "supportive and cooperative."

In respect to the variety of contemporary works and the controversial implications of some, Mayo felt, "You don't want to put up things that alienate the community from the museum. There are things as good to put up that are not offensive."

The most interesting facet of the selection process witnessed in the Contemporary Arts Museum, as in many of the others, is the conscious attempt to select a more comprehensive view of contemporary trends and works. Staffs deliberately avoid a regional and critical separation of artists and works. For example, lesser established artists and regional artists exist alongside national and more established ones. As Marti Mayo stated, "To set Texas art aside from national art is making it a step-child." Hence, the Contemporary Arts Museum, like several others, has established a "perspective gallery" where select works of younger artists are introduced in an overall context including more mature established ones. The common denominator is quality.

Mayo discussed the satisfactory newspaper coverage in the city. She noted that each exhibition had been reviewed. Yet she also added, "I'm talking about press coverage, not critical quality." Speaking from her past
experience in Washington as opposed to her recent arrival at the Contemporary Arts Museum, she described the situation as such. With two major newspapers and two major art reviewers, "everyone I ever talked to said there is no criticism in Washington. It leads one to believe that (a) the artists never like what the newspapers say, or (b) criticism only exists in New York. . . . In general, there is, in most regions, a lack of quantity of good critical writing."

More important, she felt that "people who want to know what's going on will find out." In discussing the state's network of museums and internal feedback, she stated, "It's physically harder in Texas to get museum people together than it is in Washington, D.C., but on the other hand, there's a body, the Texas Museum Association, which is apparently an active one."

Houston Museum of Fine Arts

Curator Judith Rooney discussed the necessity and importance of discretion in selecting quality works without the infringement of extra-art influences. During the interview, the museum's standpoint was discussed in respect to the controversial social and political implications of various works. The curator felt that there should be no misunderstanding that, in any given circumstances, the "political and social significance of a
work is secondary to what it is as a work of art." She characterized the 1968 Metropolitan Museum's *Haarlem on My Mind* show as perhaps a "valid social statement" but out of context in an art museum. On the other hand, she believed that it was a question of judgment as to whether a work of art met the respective standards of quality and was valid in the museum.

Although she has only been at the museum for a short period, she recalled and knew of no outstanding pressure groups or external influences which had instilled major effects on the selection or non-selection of any particular work. At one point, she suggested, "Either there aren't any or there are so many. . . . At least there are none that make any difference." In respect to the selected works for the collection, she described the largely unhindered and effective proceedings of the acquisition committee. A subset of the board of trustees, they were seen as adequately qualified to make such decisions since, by and large, the members revealed a professional and personal commitment to the arts.

**San Antonio**

Decisions on the selection of works for exhibition and the collection essentially rest with the director, John Leeper. He stated, "I take full responsibility and make any final decisions, although I'm very receptive to
suggestions." Although he recognized his own developing and sometimes changing evaluations of artists and works, he candidly remarked, "I have firm ideas as to what art is and what it isn't." Emphasizing the overwhelming sense of quality in selecting works, Leeper cited three important related factors: the originality of the work, the significance of its statement, and how well made it is. With established guidelines, the process of selection rests on comparative personal and professional decisions.

Although the staff has recognized the availability of quality regional works in the exhibition program, the director said, "We don't deal very much with the unknown artist." In respect to experimental or vanguard works, he stated, "There's good experimental art and bad experimental art." Assuming the quality element was evident, Leeper stated, "If I were hesitant about it, if I felt it were beyond my grasp, I would show it. If I felt that I still had something to learn from it, then I would lean over backward to include it, if it was provocative and well made."

Leeper expressed the absence of any overbearing influences on the acquisition or exhibition of works. It should be noted that he has served as director of the museum for twenty-six years. With that in mind, he remarked, "You become effective the longer you're in a
community." Overall, he recognized no major conflicts or pressures related to the museum's policies.

On the question of media coverage, the director found the local media "totally uncooperative." In fact, he said, criticism is "non-existent." At one point he said, "If they would simply report facts, that would be the greatest step in that direction." In contrast to the local situation, he described the sufficient outside publicity and coverage achieved through the recognition of the collection.

Tyler

Director Ron Gleason expressed the staff's responsibility to the board of trustees for "the general milieu of exhibitions." Yet assuming that the director and staff are hired for their professional expertise, it is their "almost absolute function to determine the exhibition content." As Gleason said, "I'm here to exercise my judgment." With the staff's selections initially contingent on the quality of particular works, Gleason did discuss the responsibility to the audience which occasionally conflicted with the curatorial process of selecting works. One prime example would be the museum's precarious standpoint on the controversial moral implications accompanying some works.
Gleason discussed the unfortunate experience of a museum in New Mexico whereby an artist, participating in a group show, had included a work specifically dealing with obscenity. Selections had been left to the artists, and the curator had been somewhat unaware of the artists' previous works and their overall context. Following extensive preparation for the show, the staff only realized at the time of installation the overt implications of the artist's work. He was asked to alter the work, which he refused to do. Consequently, he was removed from the show. From that point, the roused anger of other artists and general mayhem led to the cancellation of the entire exhibition, which in turn had negative effects on all the participants. The criticism that the New Mexico museum received for its handling of the situation was particularly unfavorable. Gleason felt that, ultimately, the line is drawn where "whatever I think I can defend successfully." Considering the museum's dual commitment to art works and the public, it can be a difficult situation.

Tyler does receive some local coverage, predominantly in the form of public service. More important, Gleason noted, "We look to outside sources for critical response to the exhibitions." In general, he agreed with most of the others interviewed that the "open challenging dialogue" synonymous with criticism is missing in museums of this state. Perhaps even more important, "it's missing in the
artist's studio." The staff has attempted to facilitate that growing dialogue. For example, during a past exhibition, a critic from outside the state was hired to join in a visit around the state to help stimulate a critical exchange. Reflecting on the vastness of the state, Gleason noted that critics working within Texas had largely developed smaller domains of interest in their respective areas, particularly those working in the larger metroplex areas.

Question Six

On Contemporary Exhibitions

In the past five years, what major contemporary exhibitions has the museum organized: national shows, regional, state, traveling shows, one-man shows? Overall, is there a means of determining public response to the museum's presentation of contemporary works? Consider attendance. Are there specific means through which the public can communicate their criticisms?

Many of the staffs could not or did not provide sufficient material or information pertaining to this question. Several reasons are cited:

1. It is suggested that due to changes in policies, staffs, or the direction of the museum coupled with the youthfulness of many of these institutions, some directors and curators have been left unfamiliar, or little concerned, with past policies and records of the museum.
2. Publications are very limited in the majority of the museums. For example, four of the nine museums do not publish annual reports which usually provide the context of yearly exhibitions. Furthermore, very often only a sporadic collection of catalogues and handouts accompanying contemporary exhibitions was available.

3. Many of those interviewed believed that distinguishing "major contemporary exhibitions" can only be a relative subjective assessment. They felt that their assessment of a major show could simply differ from someone else's. In effect, museum personnel often claimed that there was too much disagreement as to what signified a major exhibition.

Sufficient information was provided for determining the extent of each museum's involvement in the contemporary area. This information was received through available material and the staffs' own approximations provided during the interviews. It was also determined that the contemporary area is significantly represented through regional artists, smaller group shows, and one-man shows. This is in contrast to more established international and national exhibitions.

Art museums in Texas reveal substantial activity in the contemporary area, whether it be through exhibiting or
collecting. The Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston is the only museum of its kind in the state. By policy, the staff only exhibits the works of living artists, with occasional exceptions. The Laguna Gloria Art Museum in Austin is a twentieth-century American art museum where the staff has become increasingly active in showing contemporary works. Director Laurence Miller noted that the staff primarily shows post-World War II works with only 15 to 25 per cent prior to that point. Further information on this museum, compiled by Curator Annette Carlozzi, revealed that since 1975 "90 per cent of our exhibitions are, in fact, contemporary. We've only begun to balance that recently with an occasional historical exhibition."

The Fort Worth Art Museum is also a twentieth-century museum which began collecting in the modern and contemporary areas in 1968 under the former direction of Henry Hopkins. Although the present collection is a small one, the museum has shown a continual emphasis on contemporary works in the exhibitions. According to Curator Marge Goldwater, approximately 50 per cent of the exhibitions are contemporary. Through the interviews, available reports, catalogues, and calendars, it has been roughly estimated that the Amarillo Art Center, the Tyler Museum of Art, the McNay Art Institute in San Antonio, and the Museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi average between 30 to 40 per cent contemporary exhibitions, with Tyler ranging the
highest in that bracket. The Houston Museum of Fine Arts reveals approximately 20 to 25 per cent contemporary exhibitions, with the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts exhibiting closer to 25 to 30 per cent in that area. Any remaining exhibitions in the museums surveyed seemingly balance or parallel the emphasis given to contemporary issues.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUDING QUESTION AND RESPONSE ON THE
ART MUSEUM AND THE PUBLIC

The following question is largely an accumulation of the major concerns and issues raised in the previous questions. In essence, the major role of the museum is seen in terms of its aesthetic commitment as contrasted with and seen within its relationship with the general public.

Question Eight

The Role of the Art Museum and Its Public

Ultimately, what is the major role of the art museum? What relationship should it have with the public or community? Consider the development of the museum; its future role.

Generalization

In respect to art museums, the much discussed issue of elitism versus populism is often illustrated through Sherman Lee, Director of the Cleveland Art Museum and Thomas Hoving, former Director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. This particular contrast was raised in order to assess the prevailing attitude of the staffs on one of the most discussed and debated issues pertaining to the museum. Elitism represents, foremost, an internal
commitment to the intrinsic qualities of art works. Populism represents a strong commitment and desire to facilitate the general public's interest and understanding of art. In the negative extreme, elitism and populism respectively characterize (a) a strict, uncompromising focus on the art object and (b) a strong external focus on achieving public recognition. Very often a scholarly orientation beginning and ending with the art object is seen next to an increasingly outwardly motivated educational orientation as seen in the recent past. It is with these considerations that the staff offered their concepts and policies behind the museum's function.

Amarillo

Reflecting on the traditional association of museums with collecting, Director Tom Livesay noted that the Amarillo Art Center was originally organized without the "desire to collect." Essentially, it was hoped that the museum would provide an active forum through temporary exhibitions and programs as opposed to merely providing a sanctuary for art works. However, as Livesay suggested, people are invariably going to make contributions, and "in effect, like it or not, we'll end up as a museum." Although collecting was viewed as a desirable asset, the staff continually stressed the importance of the educational aspect of the museum. The director characterized
the predominant function of the museum as one of "educational aesthetics, or teaching people how to look at things." Curator Jerry Daviee summed up the respective order of concerns--exhibition and then education.

Considering the museum's remote location and lack of a permanent collection, Daviee saw the institution as an ideal "outreach place for the museum." He felt that art centers could provide an "extension" of larger collecting museums whereby the overflow of works could effectively be exhibited. Part of the latter's essential value rests on their continuation as living works, to be seen and experienced again and again.

Livesay and Daviee leaned more towards an elitist attitude in their interpretations of the museum's functions. At one point, Daviee recognized the crucial responsibility that collecting museums carry as "preservers of culture." At one extreme, the availability and exhibition of works become secondary. Considering the fragility of many works and the care needed to preserve them, he felt that if such institutions "never showed works to anyone except scholars, they would be serving a valuable function."

Although Livesay emphasized the professional commitment to works of art, he felt that the museum--"being the only game in town"--had to fluctuate between both an elitist and populist viewpoint. For example, the staff, responsible for upholding the quality factor in their
selection of works, represented an elitist focus. The board, interested in the museum's potential effectiveness in the community in attaining public response and support, represented the populist concerns. In effect, the unresolved dilemma of quality versus quantity continues and perhaps becomes a more poignant issue as museums seek more public support and financial assistance.

Educational Curator David Turner leaned more towards the populist pole, but with "caution." He felt that the responsibility of the museum had changed somewhat as it has had to look more to the public for support, in contrast to the past popular availability of patrons. Furthermore, with conscious emphasis on education and participatory programs, he saw the very positive effects that museums can have on the general public's aesthetic sensibility, a quality beneficial in any number of other areas.

For the most part, Daviee felt that the Amarillo Art Center was at a crossroads. Although the museum has begun a small collection in the contemporary area, he discussed the unresolved matter as to whether the center would move directly towards the collecting interests of the traditional museum or continue as an exhibiting institution. If the museum moves toward expanding its collection, and therefore limiting some of its present activities, Livesay felt that the natural evolution of alternative spaces,
galleries, or other similar sources would spring up to meet the needs presently fulfilled by the Art Center.

**Austin**

As in Amarillo, the Laguna Gloria's function and related philosophy fluctuate between the elitist and populist poles. The former takes precedent in maintaining the museum's professional standards which are contingent on the relative quality of exhibitions. Yet on the most fundamental level, Curator Annette Carlozzi stated, "The museum is a learning center for the arts. It's not a repository." Although the staff supports an identity active on a national scale, the museum is still a "community institution." The staff is consciously responsive to community interest, but at the same time it is "trying to introduce the public to more stimulating things."

Directly related to that, Carlozzi said, "The purpose of a museum is to show enough kinds of things so that people will eventually open themselves to seeing something that they didn't expect. That goes along very much with the tone and tenor of contemporary art, which is to confront and change your perceptions. More than anything that's what has come out of the sixties and seventies."

Partially due to the institution's small size and staff, and partially due to personal philosophy, Carlozzi emphasized the interrelation of exhibitions and education.
In fact, she stated, "The two can't be separated. I don't ever want the art object to become so removed from the basic questions that can be asked about art to a point where it would be very hard to mediate between the two. They always have to come together." Hence, she noted, "We're a populist institution because we're actively trying to educate the community, but at the same time we're trying to do it with quality art." In relation to that she discussed efforts to incorporate "easier popular shows with more difficult ones."

Corpus Christi

In discussing the museum's role in light of the elitist versus populist issue, Director Cathleen Gallander stated that the maintaining of quality was the "bottom line," although she continued to say, "We would not be doing our whole duty" in exclusive pursuit of that goal. In effect, she felt that the museum's function is surely an interpretive one as well. "If these objects can enrich lives so, then we would be very derelict if we did not try to go out and reach the populist group and educate them. On the other hand, it would be foolish to believe that everybody is going to respond to it. . . . There are people whom it could really affect. Those are the people we need to reach."
Gallander pointed to one crucial problem in juxta-
posing the essential aesthetic concern for quality with
the inevitable concern for a consistent high number in
attendance. In respect to that, she said, "One of our
biggest problems right now that we need to address our-
selves to is how to evaluate quality, how to quantify
quality." As often is the case, "attendance on some of
your best shows is the lowest. . . . The important thing
is not how many people pass through your doors." A more
eminent question is "What happens to that person after
he comes in? Was it a quality experience? It's elusive
and so difficult, and yet that's what museums are all
about." In light of the economic pressures confronting
museums, quality versus quantity may become an even more
crucial issue. For example, boards of trustees, often
business oriented, are naturally concerned when attendance
drops. They are, in the director's words, "looking at a
product" from a standpoint of dealing with either a
"profit or a loss."

Assuming there will be a continuation of economic
pressures on the museum, the director believed that edu-
cation, which has "become a greater source of emphasis,"
will continue to be a major concern. Education's wide
appeal is important in developing and maintaining public
involvement and support for the museum. She also suggested
that "you may see more emphasis on regional artists." The
difficulty of acquiring and transporting works may lead museums more and more towards a regional orientation. Subsequently, it may be a "difficult problem" as pressure groups and sources of conflicting interests may gain easier access to the museum. Hence, as she earlier expressed, it becomes important for the museum to thoroughly establish its standards in the community. Aside from the former changing conditions, she concluded, "I suspect it's going to be a long time before any real major change comes on."

Dallas

Director Harry Parker described the museum's changing character over the past two decades in respect to the social conditions surrounding it. He stated, "Art museums were very complacent in the fifties," for the most part, "without reference to the larger society . . . In the sixties, they were forced to relate to the primary intellectual issues of the day--access, relevancy, social importance, utility, and so forth. . . . Now the trend is to swing back a bit."

He continued to say, "What sixties thinking led to was that there is no authority; there is only anarchy." In respect to the swing back to a more conservative atmosphere, one recognizes that "there is such a thing as authority." Hence, in light of the professional
expertise associated with the museum, Parker felt that although we are all equally capable of response, "in terms of relevant appraisal of the importance of something, there are different levels." Consequently, the museum represents a knowledgeable source which, hopefully, maintains a high level of aesthetic discrimination in contrast to a more democratic or arbitrary assessment.

The director stressed, however, that "Levels of quality are still, to me, a secondary concern relative to the initial response level. . . . Art museums would not exist as institutions if the whole game was to distinguish levels of quality and understand intellectual works of art. Art museums essentially exist because works of art have a capability of appealing and posing a response in people. Then you get into the subtleties of the game." Hence, he reiterated the museum's inherent responsibility to both the art object and the viewer, to allow the potential experience between the two to develop on its own. He continued to say, "Educational services are supportive to that experience, but you've got to believe first and foremost in that experience." On that most fundamental level, elitism and populism may be reconciled.

Fort Worth

Reflecting on the elitist-populist concerns in respect to the museum's role, Curator Marge Goldwater said, "It's
an issue I think a great deal about. . . . I'm not in favor of circuses and I don't like to think I'm involved exclusively in the entertainment business. I think our profession is doing itself in by promulgating these blockbuster exhibitions. I think we're really backing ourselves into a corner. Very little happens, in fact, when an individual goes through an exhibition with hoards of people on either side. I think there's very little change that goes on, very little thought. . . . You're likely to walk out in the middle of the exhibition, because you're not interested. . . . You stood in line five hours to buy a ticket. It's a disappointing direction. On rare occasions an exhibition of blockbuster dimensions and publicity is warranted. The Cézanne show is a good example of that."

With equal respect, she said, "It's certainly not of interest to me to be some enclave tucked away somewhere. I'm dealing with contemporary art. We have to be involved with the public and contemporary artists, but involved in a sensitive and intelligent way."

Many museums have diminished the potential overload of imagery found in large exhibitions in favor of greater emphasis on "focus series." Generally, they are comprised of smaller group or one-man shows. But they simultaneously reflect a growing context of artists to be found in the museum. For example, Goldwater stated, "In the focus series, we show artists from this area in the
national context. I think we make an important statement."
Like many of the smaller regional museums in this survey, the Fort Worth Art Museum has assumed a stronger and more independent critical role in evaluating selections of lesser established and regional artists. On that issue, Goldwater said, "I think it's a waste of everybody's time to do these big juried shows with hired guns from out of town. You put your curatorial judgment on the line. . . . Why when it comes to knowing the area of the country that I know best do I bring someone else in? That's ridiculous." In conclusion she said, I'd rather show four or five people that I know are doing the best work."

Houston Contemporary Arts Museum

During the interview with Curator Marti Mayo, the issue of populism versus elitism was raised, as it was in the others, in light of Thomas Hoving and Sherman E. Lee, respectively. She responded with, "I probably fall more in the Sherman Lee camp. I'm not sure what function you're serving when you bring masses and masses of people to what is not a circus." Yet she also clarified that the "museum as educator continues to grow. Museum education is a field in itself now." That aspect of the museum's role is certainly more derivative of and concerned with accommodating the general populace.
As to changes in the future, the curator described a similarly felt concern: "A lot of it has to do with money and what funds are available to what institutions." Furthermore, she felt, "The media are probably going to make an increasing impact on the arts, both performing and visual." Reflecting further on the future of museums, she said, "Hopefully, private support won't be so oriented to large blockbuster exhibitions as to eclipse not-so-popular valid kinds of things. I hope, being in my field, that museums increasingly continue to show the art of our time since that would seem logical." In conclusion, she reiterated, "Funding is really an issue. What happens in the next ten years is going to depend a lot on that."

Houston Museum of Fine Arts

Curator Judith Rooney provided the most concise and direct appraisal of the museum's function. "The major role of a museum is to acquire important, quality works of art, to take care of them, and to show them." Enthusiastically, she explained, "I go with Sherman E. Lee all the way." In that way, "The staff is not diverted and overtaxed by things that have nothing to do with art. Everything is geared towards and focused towards quality and taking care of it." She noted that the most "important responsibility" of museums is to "preserve and conserve." Ultimately, she felt that the museum "exists as an entity unto itself."
By doing that, it fulfills its responsibilities much better. You can't do everything and be all things to all people."

San Antonio

Director John Leeper described the museum's unique function in light of the conflicts accompanying its involvement with contemporary art. He discussed the traditional gap that has existed between museums and working artists. He stated, "It's probably necessary. I think that artists do not understand the function of the museum and probably museums are confused in their own actions."

Focusing on the major role of the museum, he said, "A museum is, first of all, a repository of material, and it should be a kind of living criterion of what quality is. It is the business of museums to select from among many what it owns and what it shows. . . . It is our business to try to determine what we think is the highest quality in any area, what is going to be the most eloquent and the most absolutely typical, the quintessential expression. And you show that at the exclusion of the peers of that artist."

On the issue of elitism versus populism, he firmly stated, "I side totally with Sherman Lee." In respect to Hoving's and Lee's perception of the museum, he said, "There's a great deal of difference between the two." He
noted Hoving's overwhelming concern for the public factor and its response above the museum's inherent responsibility to art works. From an elitist perspective of the museum, he challenged the popular misconception of its discriminatory purpose. "Elitist is not an ugly word. . . . The museum is not like a public library that has to be all-inclusive. . . . The opposite of elitism is indiscriminateness."

Given the museum's internal commitment to art works, he believed that the mausoleum image of the museum "has changed" as museums have striven to establish themselves in their communities. He stated, "You only become effective when the community knows you and what you stand for, when you contribute to their enlightenment and betterment." Hence, in light of the general public, it is the museum's responsibility "to make the arts more intelligible, available, and to bring a great deal of pleasure. . . . We are not universities. If you can stimulate the curiosity and pleasure, that's education enough." It is the museum's provision of works of art that forms a basis for those kinds of experiences. "Their presence is educational."

As to the future role of the museum Leeper said, "I don't think the role of the art museum is going to change, but I think we're going to find more and more big art centers coming into existence." He felt that the growing demands accompanying increasing public participation would
lead institutions to include more facilities, more classes, meetings, and the performing arts, to name a few. Although he recognized the obvious benefits provided by art centers of that kind, he distinguished them from the different and exclusive role of the traditional museum where the "impetus is entirely on collecting."

Tyler

Reflecting on the philosophies of Hoving and Lee in respect to the museum's role, Director Ron Gleason said, "I vote for Sherman Lee, because his instincts are still of the connoisseur. He makes his judgments on his best intellectual and intuitive abilities and then tries to facilitate the public's understanding."

Gleason did, however, recognize the alluring qualities associated with exhibitions built around popular topics or interests. He saw the blockbuster exhibition "as a very seductive kind of exhibition to do because it satisfies two great longings of every museum director: (1) the board likes him for a change, and (2) the public likes him as reflected in the measurable success in the quantity of people that come through." Most important, he noted that the museum's credibility was most apt to be firmly established and publicly felt through a recognized consistency of quality endeavors. He said, "If people are ever going to think that they ought to be here at
the museum, it's because they think it's good." Furthermore, he felt that they "look for signals." For example, critical response found in various sources "filters down" and acquaints the general audience with the museum. Gleason described a situation in which an article about the museum in a popular magazine "probably had more real impact on Tyler's attitude towards the museum" because it "was a magazine they all got... Having the museum in that context was reaffirming to them so they came with a new curiosity." Essentially, he felt that it takes a variety of endeavors to make things work in favor of the museum. But, most important, the museum's professional and public image rests on the fact that its "integrity remains intact." And, as Gleason noted, that can only be achieved through a firm commitment to the art work.
CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A final view of the relationship between Texas museums and contemporary art is provided through reflection on the responses to the questionnaire and related information pertaining to the museums gathered during the survey. These conclusions are arranged in the same fashion as the contents of Chapters IV, V, and VI--philosophical concerns, practical concerns, and the museum and its public. Because question six was not adequately answered by many of those interviewed, it is not included in the conclusions.

On the Philosophical Aspects of the Museum and Contemporary Art Relationship

Included here is a discussion on the major issues raised in questions one, four, and seven, as shown on pages 26-28.

The Juxtaposition of Past and Present Art in the Museum

Although the museum has traditionally been characterized as a keeper and preserved of the art of the past, there is undoubtedly a growing presence of contemporary art works and issues in the museum. On one level, past and present art are united in the museum out of the
necessity imposed by limited funds. Economic restraints and the availability of often less expensive contemporary exhibitions have certainly led to a more flexible varied context of works. In many ways, contemporary art has become an important facet of the museum.

The greatest common denominator proposed by those interviewed as qualifying and uniting a varied historical context of art, including contemporary art, is quality. With quality as a criterion for a work's inclusion in the museum, contemporary art was seen as a valid participant. It was perceived as a particularly relevant and important contribution to the museum. Directors and curators supported a broad view of art history which includes the recent works of the seventies. At the same time, they encouraged a stronger individual focus. The usual emphasis on identifying the complex chronological progression of art has been superseded by an emphasis on understanding the individual works within it.

In effect, the attitude towards the art historical survey, so often associated with the museum, appears to be a changing one. More often than not, staffs upheld that they were not necessarily validating the most recent works in an authoritarian manner. Rather, those interviewed stressed the importance and benefits of exhibiting works for their own intrinsic merits. The majority of directors and curators expressed their foremost intention
was to provide and to stimulate an aesthetic understanding of art while still maintaining an art historical sensibility. Such an approach was preferred over simply providing an art historical retrospect or standard survey.

In such a manner, the audience is led to focus on individual works through which related developments and works can be perceived more effectively. Repeated exposure and verbalization are the museum's prime assets in enhancing the audience's understanding of individual works and developments in the arts. In effect, one hopes that an understanding of concepts may exceed a more superficial visual familiarity with classified images and objects.

The most recognizable contrast in handling an historical context exists between the collecting and exhibiting museums. Generally, the younger exhibiting museums with limited resources maintain a changing context through temporary exhibitions in contrast to the general overview provided in permanent collections. Although a variety of works is seen in the singular format of the museum, they are not permanently nor necessarily juxtaposed in implicit relationships. In the exhibiting museums, the contemporary area usually receives more attention than in collecting museums. Furthermore, the contemporary area is often represented by lesser established artists and works deviating from the mainstream.
In the general museums, collections represent an overview of the major developments of art history. Significant points and trends along the mainstream progression are emphasized. For example, a 1974 article described William Agee's plans to develop Houston's post-1945 collection, which, up to that point, had a strong formlist orientation (1, p. 52). In light of more recent works, the art historical perspective already includes a number of established artists and works of this decade. Interestingly, one can now recall the "old masters" of the recent Pop School in the sixties. Their works have found a place in numerous collections in this country. The process from studio to museum may be even more expedient in the seventies. As often noted, numerous works of the seventies offer a continuation or revival of concepts and styles which relate easily to earlier established movements in art. In the two general museums, recognition of such tendencies was often emphasized and further verified in the collections and exhibitions. For example, Curator Judith Rooney of the Houston Museum of Fine Arts reaffirmed the intellectual and aesthetic accessibility of many contemporary works. She cited the Paintings of the 80's show which clearly revealed the popular return to traditional painterly concerns.

In these kinds of museums, selection is the most important step towards building an historically comprehensive
collection accompanied by the continuing commentaries of temporary exhibitions. Ideally, the two compliment each other. Realistically, they may suggest a conflict of interests. Richard Oldenburg, Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, has stated that, seen together, "you often get a confusion in people's minds between enshrined art and the art you're trying to present for interest and edification" (3, p. 37). Does the quest for a reputable collection interfere with the museum's potential to represent effectively the most recent issues in art? Marcia Tucker, Director of the New Museum in New York, has stressed, "Those of us who deal with contemporary art have a responsibility to show what is being done, not just to say what is going to last. The scene is more pluralistic" (2).

Within that pluralism exist a number of vanguard works which have confronted the museum establishment and pressured it to move into a different realm. The vanguard has continued to break down barriers between the museum and the social, political, and technological entities that once influenced it from afar. Controversy has accompanied the diversity of proposed works considered appropriate for the museum. Simply, many works have challenged the museum's aesthetic sensibility and its ability to maintain a clear art historical perspective. On the national scene, the growing pains of many museums have been perpetuated by
their own increasingly vanguard approach to art. At present, Texas museums have shown restraint in the discriminating process and revealed a desire to maintain very close ties with an art historical sensibility.

The Viewer and Contemporary Art

Exposure to contemporary art works is still a relatively new experience for the general Texas audience. However, the average visitor's alienation from contemporary art was most often seen as part of a common situation, certainly not unique to Texas. In light of that, staffs generally agreed that museums have been subjected to a major misconception, that being the responsibility to instill a widespread appreciation and understanding of the arts. The democratic persuasion to which all areas of society were subjected in the sixties has certainly been re-evaluated in the past few years. In effect, museum staffs reiterated that the arts ultimately included a particular body of interested or potentially interested individuals. The museum, in its accessibility and extended efforts, represented a sound opportunity for explorations into the arts. It was most often felt that exposure, and repeated exposure, to works of art was the key factor in establishing audience awareness and understanding. Museums largely fulfilled their part by making available that experience and supplementing it with educational programs.
The alienation of the viewer from contemporary art works is best viewed as the result of a lack of exposure to the fundamentals behind the creative process. During the interview with Annette Carlozzi, Curator of the Laguna Gloria in Austin, she briefly recalled one assessment of the historical progression of art forms that people have traditionally accepted--(1) literature, (2) painting, and (3) sculpture, "a distant third." When considering such forms as video and participatory works, one wonders how far down they list they fall. Fortunately, education of the superficial qualities of works is presently being supplemented with more extensive explorations into the working concepts shared by all the arts. This is evident as many of the museums have given new attention to children's programs, which now reflect a more sophisticated approach to art education at an early age. Photography, film, dance, and other new media have been included with more traditional ones. Together, they have contributed to more thorough investigations of the creative process. Furthermore, teams of artists and educators have provided a positive changing image of the art teacher. Finally, it appears that the arts have increasingly been seen within the larger context of other social and historical developments. For example, associations with music, literature, and the humanities in general have
been used to strengthen the viewer's understanding of the visual arts as they relate to more familiar areas.

Yet, the ultimate effectiveness of museums must be seen on a larger scale. The state of Texas includes a large number of museums showing contemporary art. However, geographically, the emphasis is weakened by the vastness of the state and the physical separation of the museums. As earlier mentioned, the need for additional feedback within the communities and throughout the state was often recognized. Curator Carozzi stated, "The art system works on an interlocking pattern." In specific, she felt that criticism provided through a number of sources contributed to the necessary tensions on which art thrives. Museums represent one important source of critical feedback. A number of other areas are equally important. Several factors were discussed during the interviews which would activate an audience response of greater depth and quality. In Texas, the continual development of additional critical sources was seen as necessary in maintaining and stimulating involvement in the contemporary arts. Furthermore, the progression of art and vanguard direction within has always been contingent on the momentum and controversies resulting from a variety of participatory sources.

Several factors, raised during the interviews, are cited. All are certainly not unique to Texas. They do reflect the present concerns and proposed components
necessary to sustain a continuing development of contemporary art in this state.

1. Art periodicals originating in this region.
2. The continuation and development of art coverage in other accessible non-art periodicals.
3. The continuation of educational media, e.g., public television.
4. Encouragement of galleries, alternative spaces, dealers, and collectors.
5. Encouragement of public art and new patrons, e.g., corporate buyers.
6. The need for contributions in critical writing and, to some extent, reportage.
7. The continued integration of regional and national artists.
8. The encouragement, development, and sustenance of art programs in schools.

Contemporary Art and the Art Historical Mainstream

Although contemporary art holds a substantial place in the museums surveyed, many of the institutions cannot be strictly paralleled to institutions of art history. The exhibition of contemporary art may not be intended to represent or establish the next link in the continuing chain of events in art history. For example, most of the museums do not maintain an art historical collection. Most important, as established earlier, the emphasis on recognizing the chronological development of art history has shifted to greater emphasis on the intricacies of individual works and concepts. Therefore, in the aesthetic sense, contemporary works are just as valid in the museum as older, more established works. In terms of the art historical perspective, speculation is professionally
inevitable and expected. However, given the immediacy of contemporary art, the museum's perception of seventies art should hopefully be presented and recognized as a professional critical assessment, but not as a final one.

One problem surfaces with this particular issue. It is the museum's questionable means and manner of communicating to a general audience its intentions in exhibiting contemporary art. For example, there are different implications behind reporting art, collecting art, and exhibiting quality contemporary works. The first suggests an arbitrary objective, random, or collective presentation of works which can be associated with art galleries. The second affirms the select recognition of adequately established aesthetic or historical, and thereby economically valuable, works of art. The third is somewhat more ambiguous to define due to its dependence on individual discretion. It is subject to more controversy in its implications. Nonetheless, it is the most widely practiced and upheld in the museums surveyed.

Quality is evaluated in the midst of artistic creation. Select works are deemed significant at this point in time. They are not necessarily established in terms of their lasting value. Evaluations and judgments remain susceptible to change. Unfortunately, the proposed relevance of contemporary works in the museum can be a difficult adjustment for the viewer. The museum is still popularly
viewed by the general public as a sanction for historically valuable works. Furthermore, selections are made in which the objective/subjective means of justifying the presence of particular works ultimately rest on the critical assessments of a few. In effect, the museum represents one source of criticism or speculation. Given the above considerations, it was perceived from the responses and programs of the museums that the growing popular placement of contemporary art upon the historical foundation of the museum has created new concerns. One of the most important is a recognizable need and desire to communicate with the audience firsthand. Explicitly, that means inviting their participation and consciously challenging their own aesthetic and critical sense. In respect to contemporary art, the museum is not the end statement. Rather, it provides an initial reputable means of distinguishing proposed significant works of art.

On the Practical Aspects of the Museum and Contemporary Art Relationship

Included here is a discussion on the major issues raised in questions two, three, and five, as shown on pages 27-28.

Museum Programs

The large number and widespread distribution of museums in Texas make the art museum readily available to
the general public in this state. The majority of the museums visited are located outside of large urban areas. These institutions usually have limited resources and small or non-existent collections. Hence, many have risen out of situations contrary to the traditional environment associated with the birth of museums. Apparently, audiences and supporters have shown sufficient desire to house a museum in their respective communities. These institutions, along with larger, more established museums, have sought a high level of professionalism in their programs. The fundamental basis of the programs was found to be the selection and continued availability of quality works. That process was seen as the best means of performing a public service and attracting an audience.

With quality as the foremost commitment, these staffs recognized their potential value in introducing a vast breadth of interests to their local audiences. At the same time, these professionals wish to develop credibility in the field on a regional and national level. Although occasional concerns were raised over the abundance of museums in this state, it appears that the quantity of museums has not affected the overall quality of their efforts. For example, the community art museum is certainly no longer synonymous with the weekend arts and crafts class. Given the size of the state and youthful
tradition of the arts in Texas, the number and broad distribution of museums are an asset.

The activities usually generated by other sources—such as dealers, galleries, alternative spaces, and critics—are substantially limited in Texas. Consequently, museums have, to a varied extent, represented the major stimulus of interaction and criticism in the contemporary area. That has occurred both inside and outside of the museum. Directors have attempted to stimulate criticism among the museums, within their communities, and throughout the state. Although the staffs often described the satisfying and challenging aspect of their own critical involvement, they also noted some of the problems. At one extreme, their selections of particular contemporary works may be perceived as a final form of validation. That is an appraisal not altogether intended or desired by some of the museum staffs.

Internal programs of an educational and participatory nature have been emphasized in order to develop an understanding of the fundamental elements and concepts of art, not just for contemporary art but for all the arts. And yet education has been perceived and directed from a contemporary standpoint. Most important, education in the arts has moved away from the classroom and into the gallery. For example, the interaction of artists and museum education departments has led to a closer affinity with
concepts, techniques, and the creative process itself. Very often, working artists, curators, teachers, and other professionals work together with the public in classes, lectures, and informal discussions accompanying exhibitions.

Many of the museums have organized outreach programs designed to benefit special groups and others with little access to the museum. However, limited resources and staffs have certainly curtailed activities outside the museum door. Most staffs maintained that the restraint was less of a problem and somewhat beneficial. The social upheaval of the sixties challenged and diverted, in the opinion of some, the very basic internal concerns of the museum. In light of the populist trends of the sixties, the majority of those interviewed expressed a more conservative approach in attracting and accommodating public interest. Essentially, programs are cautiously organized in order not to divert from the original commitment to the collection and/or exhibition of art works. In fact, education and exhibitions were most often seen as an inseparable combination.

The extent to which museum programs represent the many facets of contemporary art has been carefully assessed by their staffs. For one, contemporary art cannot be the sustaining element of most museums that are committed to a broader historical scope. Second, contemporary art is
still establishing its roots in Texas; the audience is still a relatively small one. In general, there is a continuing conservative tendency in the kinds of conservative works to be found in the museums. The overall situation has not precipitated the rise of performance works or other audience oriented works by artists. Similarly, politically and socially oriented art works, reflecting and commenting on controversial issues of public interest, have had little if any substantial interplay in museum programs. For example, the recent exhibitions reflecting the women's movement were carefully scrutinized by those interviewed. Socially or politically based works were viewed as less significant compared to more obviously aesthetic and historical exhibitions.

The sensationalism often associated with large blockbuster shows representing popular trendy issues was seen as a negative direction for the museum, both in respect to the art object and the general audience. Consequently, staffs expressed caution in attracting such potentially controversial exhibitions. Yet, they also expressed the same caution against randomly supporting contemporary artists' interests and related self-interests. Most important, the majority continue to perceive contemporary art with a keen sensitivity to the historical and aesthetic panorama. The kinds of exhibitions have been carefully chosen in their appropriateness for the museum.
Accommodating Contemporary Works and the Artist in the Museum

In general, the museum staffs expressed few specific difficulties in accommodating selected contemporary works for exhibition in the museum. It is significant to note, however, that works are initially selected in light of the available facilities, resources, and the staff's critical eye. For example, in the contemporary area, two-dimensional works—such as painting, drawing, print-making, photography, and "works on paper"—continue to comprise a large part of exhibitions programs. This is due to the availability and the lower cost of shipping and handling these works inside the museum. On one hand, the organization or importation of costly and demanding exhibitions which may require extensive changes in museum facilities and additional equipment is limited. On the other hand, the recognition of regional artists, smaller exhibitions, and one-man shows in the museum has allowed staffs to mount a variety of in-depth exhibitions at reasonable expense.

Installation pieces and other perishable works have found a place in the museum as temporary exhibitions and/or investments. However, perishable works generally remain a poor commodity in terms of museum collections. Some staffs expressed support for and occasional participation in artists' perishable projects. Directors usually
preferred such works with some sort of documentation. Therefore, the museum was provided with a tangible product. Previous exhibitions in the museums surveyed suggested that selected perishable works, installations, or artist projects usually reflect visual and conceptual images more in keeping with overtly benevolent aesthetic concerns. This is in contrast to more disruptive and controversial attitudes also associated with contemporary aesthetics. For example, one cannot help wondering what are the status and influence of Joseph Beuys or the moral controversies accompanying much of Vito Acconci's performance works.

Given the abundance of often conflicting criticism surrounding contemporary art, more staffs agreed that their own professional and personal associations with artists allowed for the most direct and objective access to their works. Works could then be seen in their larger context and further enhanced by the artists' own interpretations. In one way or another, artists have found their way into the museum. Either they provide an essential source of criticism accompanying works or they may play an integral role in the work.

Given the diverse and potentially controversial directions pursued by some in the arts, it may become more necessary for curators to establish close contact with artists and scrutiny of their directions. Sometimes the museum has been the conscious focus for a radical confrontation
of its standards and values. In Texas, the lack of additional exhibition spaces for working artists may result in more pressure on some museums. In some cases, they may represent the only source to accommodate the artist and his needs. However, those interviewed did not view their institution as a popular vehicle for working artists and their works.

This can be a difficult standard to uphold. At one extreme, the artist's dialogue is welcomed in the museum and perpetuated by it. Coupled with the museum's own critical involvement, it may promote some confusion. Specifically, it may be difficult to discern the museum's purpose, position, and effectiveness beyond that of an arbitrary exhibition space.

The Selection of Contemporary Works

Unequivocally, the staffs cited their professional and personal assessments of quality as the ultimate guiding factor in selecting works. It was frequently suggested that the artist, seen within the context of his work, provided the surest and most immediate means of evaluating and selecting quality works. The process of selection was largely felt to be uninhibited by any significant pressures or outside influences. Interestingly, even the larger collecting museums related few pressures or conflicting interests or major concern. For example, the
working relationship between boards of trustees and staffs was usually seen as a relatively cooperative one, with responsibilities clearly delegated and maintained. Furthermore, boards were often characterized as sufficiently knowledgeable and active in the arts. That is in sharp contrast to the traditional alienated boards of lawyers and bankers traditionally thought to be connected with museums.

Other than the aesthetic and intellectual considerations, the selection process is certainly influenced by availability and economics. As most of the museums have limited resources, directors have increasingly examined the art of regional artists with more selections coming from that area. Certainly economics and availability may even become more influential in the future.

Yet aside from the economic pressures, staffs have shown an independence and a desire to look beyond the established popular mainstream for a more encompassing representative selection of art works. Only recently has the growing provision of a national and international context of art over regional divisions created a more comprehensive perception of art. Supporting that perspective, Texas museums have integrated regional and less well-known works into a national context. Consequently, staffs made it very clear that they were not condescending to Texas artists.
Museum staffs exercise considerable professional freedom. Some of these staffs consisted of only two or three people. One must understand the precarious nature of the situation. On one hand, it may result in the ability to make professional decisions without any outside bureaucratic or unrelated art influences. On the other hand, it may breed the perpetuation of self-interests.

While museum staffs seemingly enjoy greater freedom and independence in selecting appropriate works for the museum, that freedom may well be the consequence of their relative youthfulness. Their continual growth and visible presence in the community may ultimately produce new complications which often confront more mature established institutions. Those potential complications may well include a more bureaucratic decision-making process and the emphasized influence of specialized pressure groups.

The Role of the Art Museum and the Public

The purpose of the art museum--"educational or aesthetic"--as defined on page 15, may also be phrased, in respect to Texas museums, as "aesthetic and educational," in that order. On one hand, the initial aesthetic concern somewhat represents the elitist attitude paralleling the professional commitment to the art object and the collection and exhibition of quality art works. On the other hand, the educational concern represents the
populist attitude paralleling the responsibility and desire to reach and educate the viewer. It should be noted that the historical foundation of the museum has not necessarily changed. The perspective of some of the staffs has. All have, to some extent, made efforts to compromise the ideological extremes that elitism and populism represent in light of the museum and its purpose and goals.

Of the collecting museums, curators and directors interviewed at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts and the McNay Art Institute in San Antonio maintained the most conservative and strongest allegiance to the traditional role of the museum. Ultimately, works of art representing aesthetic and cultural developments are preserved for posterity. The essential focus is on aesthetics, or the art object. This is reflected in the staffs' commitment to acquiring and maintaining quality works in the manner of the collector, connoisseur, and art historian.

Assuming that the process of evaluating, selecting, researching, illuminating, and preserving is of first priority, art works are then made available to the public. In their popular accessibility and illuminated state, education is implicitly provided. Hence, as the staff maintains its professional responsibility to the art work, its essential responsibility to the public is also served. The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts differs somewhat from its collecting counterparts in that it has an organized
education department that appears to have direct interplay with the collection, exhibitions, and related programs. The director, Harry Parker, also expressed a noticeably greater interest in addressing both sides of the populist-elitist issue. That may be related to the fact that the museum is the only one in the immediate area of Dallas.

A more explicit educational quality is seen in the exhibiting museums which generally share two commonalities: (a) small or non-existent collections and (b) either specializing in contemporary art or being significantly involved with it. A third consideration is that many are located outside of major urban areas in which audiences have had less consistent access to the arts. These museums often described their exhibiting function in terms of educational aesthetics. For example, Amarillo and Corpus Christi are the two most geographically isolated museums in the study. Consequently, they consistently provide the greatest variety of historical and cultural exhibitions outside their selected focus.

The strong educational concern found in the exhibiting museums and evident in the interviews did not, however, imply a dramatic populist notion. The purpose of their educational efforts is varied and influenced by their location, economics, area of focus, and, most important, the staff’s educational philosophies. These museums have
carefully controlled the extent to and manner in which they have appealed to their audiences.

With small staffs, limited funds, and without the responsibility of a permanent collection, efforts by these museum staffs have predominantly been devoted to stimulating and maintaining a dialogue within the gallery. Since these museums are generally more involved with contemporary art, the often mutual presence of the artist and the audience has provided a vital means of education in itself. Most important, education and the exhibition of the art object have been interrelated as inseparable entities—on a most immediate level, through verbalization. Due to the limited quantity of scholarly and educational publications offered by these museums, the quality of verbal communication becomes a very important factor in introducing and clarifying the contents of exhibitions.

Undoubtedly, the more involved museums become in the contemporary area, the more they move from the traditional framework of the museum. For instance, Amarillo's growing involvement in the contemporary area aligns it with the more progressive institutions such as the Tyler Museum of Art, the Laguna Gloria Art Museum, the Fort Worth Art Museum, and the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston. These museums have also maintained a select art historical framework or sensibility as witnessed in their exhibitions and programs. But their extensive interest and activities
in the contemporary area plus their contemporary viewpoint of the historical perspective reflect a stronger verbal involvement in the critical sense as opposed to a more controlled introspective art historical one.

At present, Texas museums exhibit various levels of development and interests. Aside from the institutions which already maintain substantial collections, the remaining ones showed a strong interest or tendency in that direction. The process of collecting or exhibiting art works that represent the traditional chronological view of art history suggests a fundamentally different concern from the perceived relevance of contemporary art as an appropriate starting point in art history. Given the extreme of one or the other, these views are simply apt to be found separated, such as the case with the Houston Fine Arts Museum and the Contemporary Arts Museum next door.

Economic restraints were found to be the most potential influential force on the museum's future. Strained finances certainly have influenced the growing number of contemporary works in exhibitions and collections. Yet, that presence is also somewhat justified as more staffs have endeavored to open the art historical perspective in order to allow works of art, both past and present, to speak for themselves as a continuing context of ideas in the museum. In fact, those interviewed were more concerned with illuminating the aesthetic qualities of works
than simply generalizing about their place and significance in art history. Much of the art of the seventies was often seen as an accumulation of concepts and styles, particularly relevant to that of preceding decades. Therefore, contemporary works would seemingly serve as an appropriate catalyst in unfolding the full historical and aesthetic perspective.
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