

Public help needed to revive ailing art legislation

By CORINNE ABATT

It's a safe bet that if the "for Art" legislation proposed by State Rep. Ruth McNamee (R-Birmingham) ever comes out of committee and on to the floor of the house, it will be by public pressure.

Mrs. McNamee's proposed legislation, HB 429, outlines a policy for integrating art into state buildings with provisions for a state fund that can receive bequests, donations and grants and the organization of a commission to administer the program.

Also included in the bill is a plan for the acquisition of art for display in public buildings as well as the establishment of a state art fund. "The art may be an integral part of, or attached to, or detached within or outside a building," according to the bill.

The amount of money for art in new buildings costing \$250,000 or more shall not exceed one per cent of the total appropriations for construction when included within the amount of the project.

An amendment specifies that work of Michigan artists will be given priority in the selection process.

THE BILL WAS introduced in March and referred to the Committee on Appropriations. Mrs. McNamee asked that it be referred to a committee that would hear testimony. It was then referred to the Committee on State Affairs.

It was actually presented twice to the Committee on State Affairs with Chairman Rep. John Kelsey. Testimony in favor of the legislation was given by artists, artists groups, architects plus a letter from Donald W. Thalacker, director of the Art-in-Architecture Program of the U.S. General Services Administration.

Thalacker said he hoped Michigan lawmakers would lead the nationwide movement among state governments to enact "for Art" legislation.

He mentioned that in addition to contributing to a cultural heritage, "Quality works of art increase in monetary value at a rate greater than nearly any other commodity."

HE CITED A Louis Harris nationwide poll which indicated that 64 per cent of the American people will be willing to pay an extra \$5 in taxes—if the money went exclusively for cultural efforts such as visual arts.

Adding that public-sponsored and placed art can help to rejuvenate a city (he was quoting former President Gerald Ford) as the Calder sculpture did in Grand Rapids, Thalacker urged the legislators to support the bill.

In spite of strong support, the bill hasn't come out of the Committee of Appropriations to which it was referred. It wasn't tabled, but it wasn't voted out of committee either.

Concerning the bill's future, Mrs. McNamee said, "It's very tenuous. It's still hanging on by a string, alive, but terribly ill."

It would take 10 votes to move it out of the committee, and while the needed number is within one or two, it is still in limbo because it lacks support.

In the meantime, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners has passed a proclamation which sets a county policy for displaying art in public buildings and supporting similar action at the national and state level.

The impetus for the county policy came from Marjorie Belanger, chairwoman of the Oakland County Cultural Council.

MRS. BELANGER SAID, "We are the first county in the state to adopt such a policy. There was no policy before even to accepting works donated."

Not only does the county policy contain a provision for the inclusion of art works in remodeled or new county facilities, it states that new buildings will contain a provision for use of art

in the construction specifications. This first step toward the goal of establishing art in public buildings was immediately followed by a second which, hopefully, will have even broader ramifications.

Mrs. Belanger wrote letters to all of the county arts councils and groups urging them to actively support HB 429 by writing letters and making their feelings known to state legislators.

The implications of the county's new policy are going to be noticeable soon. A traveling exhibit of art from Puerto Rico will be on exhibit in the county complex from Feb. 19 through March.

There will be a slide show and lecture, and possibly some actual art, from the Matisse show at the Detroit Institute of Arts, in the county complex on Jan. 22.

Mrs. Belanger has already arranged to have a number of shows from the Smithsonian Institution in the county buildings later on in the spring and through next year.

"We're not trying to compete with anyone with the Smithsonian exhibits," Mrs. Belanger explained. "These will be on things like black history, environment, literature and political history—things that will be of interest to the broad community."

In addition to being free to accept works on loan in a variety of ways, the policy provides for the acquisition of art.

"We can go before the Oakland County Board of Commissioners and ask for an allocation for a specific

project," Mrs. Belanger said.

LAST SEPTEMBER, sculptor John Chaffee made a presentation to county representatives proposing a large sculpture for the mall on the south side of the courthouse. The proposal is being studied.

In her goal to make the Oakland County Cultural Council the "catalyst of art activity," Mrs. Belanger has initiated many other special services connected with the arts.

A registry of Oakland County artists is due for publication shortly. In mid-January there will be a regional meeting for all arts organizations in the county along with a workshop of grantsmanship.

This is one of Mrs. Belanger's special topics because she thinks most people don't know the ins and outs of applying for grants.

In addition, the county council has held an emblem contest, developed a newsletter and a speakers bureau and of special activities such as the Day at Meadow Brook for young people.

Another proposed project is art for confined audiences such as Childrens Village, hospitals, prisons and other institutions. This could be either art to touch or see or an actual working art experience.

The county council also has a number of books dealing with arts, management and organization that are available on loan.

Legislators to contact

When Rep. Ruth McNamee (R-Birmingham) canvassed the 18 members of the Appropriations Committee she found out which ones planned to vote yes and which would vote no.

Those who sided there were in favor of the "for Art" are: Regs. Dominic Jacobetti (D-Ngaunee); Raymond C. Keiras (D-Monroe); Joseph F. Young (D-Detroit); Richard Young (D-DeARBorn Heights); Louis K. Cranton (R-Midland); Melvin De Stigter (R-Allendale); William L. Jowett (R-Park Huron); Peter Kok (R-Grand Rapids); Melvin L. Larsen (R-Oxford); and Thomas G. Sharpe (R-Howell).

Those opposed are: Regs. Warren N. Goemaere (D-Roseville); Russell Helman (D-Dollar Bay); James E. O'Neill, Jr. (D-Saginaw); Joyce Symons (D-Allen Park); Edward E. Makulak (D-Romulus); and Gary Owen (D-Ypsilanti). Rep. Morris Hood, Jr. (D-Detroit) is undecided.

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