

MIDCONTINENT PERSPECTIVES

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Art and Art Museums in the 1990s: Tougher Than Usual Times Ahead

Thank you. I am honored by the invitation from Dr. Kimball to speak. Despite the many friendly faces I see, I am daunted by the challenge of sharing with you my thoughts on a subject so complex as the state of the art world and the Nelson in the '90s. I think that in talking about the future we cannot help but make reference to the achievements of the past and the current capabilities of the institution. By current capabilities, I mean the strategic and tactical positioning of the institution with regard to its goals internally set, as well as to the demands placed upon it by its constituencies.

The framework of these remarks will shift from the microcosmic intramural concerns of the institution to macro structural changes that involve what I see as the immense cultural, political, and social changes which I believe our nation will witness in the '90s, a decade, by-the-way, which I think will be fairly stormy. I have begun to think about it even more so in this way, since I had quite a stormy session last night with about 400 art students at the Art Institute. I have begun to think of the next decade as a prolonged earthquake in which we are going to see periodic shaking, cracking, and even tumbling of our current institutions, and by that I mean our political, social, and cultural institutions, as the tectonic plates shift in response to the pent up pressures for new systems of underpinning for a new society.

Now, in seeking some way to bring some order into this problematic and certainly complex material, I want you to think about the Nelson as having two major aspects. The first centers on its artistic resources, on the permanent collections of sculptures, paintings, ceramics, prints, and drawings that are here day in and day out and available to us all and whose presence we often overlook as more glamorous activities take stage front. The second aspect of the institution is very broad, encompassing the mandate which, in the American context as opposed to a European or Asian context, is pretty explicit and distinctive: such institutions exist to serve and benefit their communities, hometowns, regions, and in some cases even the nation.

Turning now to the first major aspect, the permanent collections, we are in a very fortunate position in comparison with other institutions. We are not of the scale of the Metropolitan Museum of Art nor should we be. The Metropolitan is a museum of record that every nation needs. We are an institution devoted to the idea of representation rather than to a definitive account. We embrace the idea of masterful quality and the validity of works that speak to all times, all people, and all places. I think we have an obligation to remain general, and I think the wisdom of that will be borne out in the '90s. There are no other specialty museums in

Asian or African art nearby. We will soon see a museum of contemporary art in Kansas City, but it will focus on American culture and not reflect the kind of international pluralism that the '90s will demand as America and the definition of our society changes to become more pluralistic.

The path we have chosen rests in the belief that great art speaks to the experienced and to the novice. I truly believe, and this is a belief much under attack, that a great work of art has about it a universal voice that bridges time, place, and the idiosyncrasies of the personality that created it. From the beginning in the 1930s, when the trustees acquired the first works of art in the collection, we have taken this universalistic view of mankind's artistic production. I think it is significant and good that the Nelson's largest and most important collection is its renowned collection of Chinese art. It is also significant that the collections of native American art were largely formed in the '30s. We have inherited this tradition, and it brings to us, at least in respect to works of art, natural pluralism and a different perspective from institutions which have been more thoroughly Euro-oriented.

What have we achieved in the decade – which brings us to look into the '90s? I think first and foremost we pushed our financial resources to the limit in the early '80s. There was, to be sure, some squeaking and resistance to this, but now we all are grateful, in view of the art market of the '80s, that we did so. We did so with the idea of specifically achieving a better balanced museum. By strengthening European, American, and contemporary collections we balanced what was a slightly lopsided supremacy of the Asian collections. We also worked on contemporary art with the belief that the community must be kept abreast of new developments and new currents in the world of the art of our own time.

One of the strategic factors limiting art museums and public support of them is the gap between the general public, the person with an ordinary education, and modern art. The public lacks the tools or experience to give accessibility to what modern art is about, what it is doing, and what it is up to. This gap has grown to the point that it engenders a kind of bewilderment, and in some cases anger, when condescension or confrontation is imagined in the mind of the viewer. It is, in a sense, a distant world growing further and further away and seeming to be ever more impenetrable. This is a fault of the art community, including art museums, galleries, and artists who have not done a particularly good job in communicating what they are about to the rest of the citizenry.

By the end of the past decade, that is to say, right now, the complexion of the Nelson collections has changed dramatically. We have a different institution because of the change in this balance. As we look to the '90s, it is also important to understand the art market of the '80s and look at what happened. There is very little we can do about it in strategic terms. We actually took advantage of it, I think, very, very well. It was clear by the end of the decade that macro changes in the global economy had left far reaching consequences for art museums in the United States and certainly for the Nelson. We were largely excluded from areas that previously had been the preserve of institutions like the Nelson and of a small number of collectors who, although private, were still closely identified with these institutions.

When did prices begin to rise – actually in the beginning of the '80s. At first price increases were led by Old Master paintings and Impressionist works. But quickly followed American paintings, antiquities and, largely unnoticed except for a few specialists, the domestic art market in Japan for Japanese art. The accumulation of wealth was now world wide. We were simply one player instead of the dominant player.

What kinds of works led the way? Those compatible with the aesthetic preferences of a culturally diverse globe led. Works that were culturally specific were often dissonant. That is, Impressionist landscape painting, but not Impressionist portraits, found greatest reception in cultures dramatically different from the one that created them, Japan, for instance. Counter reformation paintings, which often depict a kind of ecstasy of agony, were not so widely sought because of cultural dissonance. It is not compatible with Japanese taste, or even our own domestic taste, to have a large bloodied saint hanging on the dining room wall – it does not work. So these markets remained the province of institutions, and great value could be bought, which was exactly what we went after. Think of Rivera's, *St. Bartholomew*, where he is about ready to be flayed – he is just about ready to be skinned alive, literally. Actually, it is very appropriate that Rivera's *St. Lawrence* ended up in Kansas City, because they grilled him on a bed of coals.

Back to globalization. What it did was raise the entire market through a trickle-down process, forcing dealers and collectors who had been active in one segment of the market into another segment that had been unmined and untapped. Dealers and other collectors, museums particularly, were forced into a pattern of seeking out or discovering, if you will, those neglected and undervalued areas. I think the most conspicuous example of fashion joining together with an abundance of disposable wealth to influence prices is found in contemporary art. This is confined to certain masters, and the excesses are well known: Jasper Johns and William de Kooning, just to name two. It is also important to recognize that the middle and lower segments of the market were drawn up to levels that did not reflect at all the traditional, relative valuations of the art market or reflect in my view, or the view of the staff, their historical and aesthetic importance. They were overpriced.

How did we approach the market? Once having chosen an area to engage in, we evaluated an area according to the quality we felt was available, the predictability of that quality being offered by the market, and the price range. We then attached a rough priority to this and went into the market as value or asset managers, to use financial world terms, looking for art of historical importance and aesthetic presence that in our terms was undervalued. We have been spectacularly successful with that approach.

What happened? Well, generally, we bought works of art just at the instant that the pressure from the market began to raise prices for that kind of art. It was not uncommon for works of art we purchased in the early '80s to see a 300 percent increase in three years. That happened over and over again. I have argued with the trustees, partially tongue-in-cheek, partially not, that we were the best investors in town at that time.

We also adopted a strategy of aggressive disposal of works of art that we did not need. We sold art that was superfluous, redundant, of poor quality, or superseded in some other way and took advantage of the super-heated art market and its warps and anomalies. There is no better example of this than in the work by Gustave Caillebotte (see [Figure 1](#)) for which we traded a Pissarro and a Degas. The Pissarro was, at best, a fifth rate Pissarro, and the Degas was in poor condition. We took advantage of an anomaly in the market which saw, for a bubble of time, the Japanese paying extraordinary prices for Pissarros of a certain kind: those which were diffuse, fuzzily painted, brightly colored, and having scenes of peasants. This was exactly what we had. With brightly colored scenes of barns, an old farm lady, a farmer, a farm hand, and two chickens, you could get a quarter of a million dollars for each extra chicken.

In any event, we put that Pissarro together with the poor Degas, and went into the market and bought. In one year the Pissarro was worth \$265,000; the next year it was worth \$2.2 million, which was all out of proportion with its historical importance. We then bought the picture you see in Figure 1, Gustave Caillebotte's Portrait of *Richard Gallo*. Caillebotte is an artist vastly underrated in the United States because he is not well-known. He is not one of the names pushed by the dealers since the 1870s.

So what do I see coming in the '90s? We have exhausted our financial resources, as have most institutions; we have gone through a supply of art work currency, such as the Pissarro and Degas we talked about; and our nation is not competitive economically. Europe and Japan remain sound. The art markets remain brisk there, but America has the voice of Cassandra. The supply of good art, the kind of art we would like to have, is finite; it is not going to increase. Japan and Europe remain wealthy. Prices for the very best art remain stable. We have seen the middle markets drop, and, I must say this with some pleasure, as it is driving out the speculators. This is not good news for bankers. For art is not all that liquid, especially in a time of recession and especially if it is middle market art. So I see tough times ahead in the '90s. I see us moving more into African and native American art and into certain sectors of the Oriental market where again we will continue to be value managers in approaching these markets. Without further funds, we can no longer compete in markets where we were successful just ten years ago.

A very important factor will be the loyalty of collectors who have built their collections over the years and who would like to see them come to the Nelson. Their loyalty will be severely tested by the temptation to sell. There will be economic uncertainties about the needs of their heirs and the erosion of economic incentives to give.

Now in connection with this latter point, I would like to talk about government. Obviously, what Washington does has a great deal of impact on the support available to us from many different sectors. I am not optimistic about Washington. The nation faces problems of debilitating debt, the cost of the S&L bailout, the prospect of war in the Middle East and, I think almost assuredly, recession, if not now then next year.

Congress seems unable to discipline itself in spending or to lead the nation in visionary ways, preferring instead to bend to issue politics in unprincipled ways. We have seen the erosion of tax incentives to support charitable institutions; the Tax Reform Act of 1986 was a disaster for museums.

At the Nelson we have seen a drop of 74 percent in the gifts of works of art. This is directly attributable to the Reform Act and to lowering the marginal rate. We have a respite this year, so I counsel every one of you that 1991 is the year to give your collections to the Nelson. Thanks to Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the gifts of appreciated tangible property are no longer considered tax preferences in the alternative minimum tax. All that means is, generally speaking, that you can give it to the Nelson and take a deduction, subject to other percentage limitations, for the full fair market value of that work of art. So, I would welcome your Monets and Caravaggios, and so forth, with open arms.

I think another thing you will see coming as the government, with its lack of discipline and inability to deal with debt and spending, goes after more money will be for it to go after our endowments. Those of you who are involved with other organizations, watch out. But museums are politically the weakest among the education, health, and religious sectors, and the IRS will go after us first. We do not look for any increase from the Missouri state government. There will be

an increase in federal funding, thanks to the reauthorization of the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA). We do not yet know how it will be distributed from the NEA, but I have not heard good news. I see no prospect for changes in the awards process for the Missouri Arts Council. A bright note here, which has received some publicity, is that one-percent-for-art for public buildings will provide works of art to sweeten the environment. The establishment of the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art will help enrich the stew, and I hope quicken the pace.

Where are we? In respect to our strategic position locally, I think we have several advantages. We have an excellent track record of accomplishment in our artist product. We have superb accountability and stability. If you decide to invest with the Nelson, you can be sure that your dollar will be well managed with excellent short-term budgeting and long-range planning. We, by the way, have become a model used throughout the nation and promoted by the National Arts Stabilization Fund, particularly for our monthly reporting to the trustees and our budgeting process, which is excruciatingly detailed and has excellent accountability procedures. All this translates into confidence from the community.

Some other things I see on the horizon locally are the growth of foundations, new ones such as the W.T. Kemper Foundation; the growth of others, such as the Hall Family Foundations, with its victory in their struggle with the government; the Kauffman Foundations; and others. As Bill Hall said to you several months ago from this very podium, we do see tremendous competing needs in the Kansas City area. I think his figure was something like a staggering \$400 million to be raised in the community over the next few years.

What are some of the disadvantages? Lackluster growth and performance on the part of this city generally in competing with other cities for economic growth. I think there are leadership problems that are well known to all of us. They are written about ad nauseam in the newspapers. I think market size is a problem in competing for the kinds of special exhibitions that we would like to bring to you. We do not have a population of 17 million; we have 1.5 million and, unfortunately, the marketing mentality is very much in the driver's seat. We have done everything we can to try to overcome that, and I think the record since 1985 has been very good.

I would like to turn briefly to the second aspect of the Nelson, public service. The museum and the collection in the American context needs to be put to use. Despite the many ways we benefit the community, and we have made exceptional gains in the '80s in coping with social change, the fact is that mothers are no longer at home to bring their kids to the Nelson for the classes. They all go to day care centers. So we have revised our strategies and work much more closely with the schools, concentrating on teachers, teacher certification, workshops integrating the institution into the educational fabric of the entire region. We have worked throughout the '80s on research and scholarly publication or on what I call user enhancement, such as the restaurant, the bookstore, and on development and membership.

In the '90s, there will be a concern of substantial force that will color almost every consideration involved with what I call our responsibility to the public. This responsibility is to become ever more integrated into the fabric and the life of the community in so many different ways than before. The buzz words for this are multi-culturalism or cultural diversity. The forces are present now. Those groups who have not participated as fully in the political, social, educational, and economic life of the community are now asserting their rights to do that; and I think, on the whole, this is very good.

We do need to come to a new configuration and a new sharing in the shaping of the nation and in the shaping of the institutions of our nation, including our art museums. These pressures will be a constant in our lives and affect every single aspect of our public institutions. I think it could effect the governance of the Nelson. A more elaborate form of trustee structure would be a possibility. This would represent the Nelson's need to engage the community more fully. Those constituencies would become better identified to themselves and, through their assertiveness, to the world around them. I envision educational programming that takes into account new views of this new configuration of the American population and society. There will be more input into educational programming from the community generally. But in every programming phase, there will be conflict. Conflict that is not unsolvable, but more in the nature of tension between intramural goals and the demands placed upon institutions by extramural presences.

There needs to be a new alliance between the constituencies, as represented by the board of trustees, and professional goals to make sure that they are all served. We bear on the one hand a leadership role to bring things new to the community, to expand horizons with new ideas and new art, and to bring the best possible educational programming with the best possible technological underpinning we can. That is our leadership role. On the other hand, we also bear a responsibility to respond to the needs we hear from you and from others whose voices have not yet been heard.

We will see ever more sophisticated marketing in the future that will likely involve special exhibitions. I would like to continue the momentum of the '80s with a more sophisticated and tailored approach to showing the works of minority groups. There are a number of very good minority artists producing good works. We have a duty to generate knowledge as well as to diffuse it. The '90s will see the fruit of elaborate schemes of publication that will be in quality the equal of those anywhere else.

In the realm of membership, we have accomplished a great deal with the establishment of the Business Council, which now has 142 members. The Friends of Art is the second leg of the integrated membership "tripod." Its membership doubled in 18 months in 1986-87 and is now approximately 13,000. We can take it to 17,000, which would be the best performance in the nation on a per capita basis, but there are some constraints. You will see a more elaborate administration to go along with the more elaborate structure of governance.

Our commitment to the community will be reflected in the establishment of an arts resource center. We now have a library, which most of you do not even know exists. It is the bedrock certainly of our research and of our intellectual credibility, and it could be in time a really wonderful public resource. When it is in order, I hope we will be able to turn on the money spigot, so to speak, and make it an aggressively public facility with the very latest electronic technology, joining familiar technology from the past.

There will be more sophisticated marketing in development and funding. I think all of you realize that the future demands a very keen partnership among the public sector, represented by local, state government and even the federal government, businesses, and private individuals. Making the institution an integral part of the whole community will be a component of that effort.

I have talked about the strategic concerns. What are the constraints? Believe it or not, they are operational. It is not a matter of ideas. I do not think it is a matter of vision. We can

attain a membership list of 17,000 people, and there are many good reasons for having a membership of 17,000, quite apart from the additional income. We must consider the importance of the additional political force, the additional representation, the additional ears and voices telling us what the community of users would like us to do to improve the institution. Space, the lack thereof, is the obstacle to this dream. We have even converted one men's restroom to the slide library, and another may become a dark room.

I would like to conclude with a look at other possibilities for the future. How, if space is truly a constraint, and believe me it is, can we find a solution? Obviously, the answer is to expand. In [Figure 2](#), there is an aerial view of a proposed expansion. This plan is the seventh scheme for expansion. It is brilliant. It would add 170,000 square feet of gallery, support, storage, conservation, preparation, exhibition, and educational space.

For example, the whole wing on the first floor east would be for expanded educational facilities. Today there are the facilities for the kids just to hang their coats. Why can't they stay all day instead of having to go home – because they have no place to have lunch. They have no place to bring a brown bag. They have no canteen for the sorts of foods which I imagine 11-year-olds eat these days. We have no orientation areas for children. We want facilities specifically designed to bring together families and teachers with children. This is very important to us and to our pedagogical approach to the future.

We hope to have 25,000 square feet for special exhibitions. We can not have big “blockbuster” exhibitions now. Every time I have a huge exhibition I have to build into Kirkwood Hall, which I dread. If I do so, I will receive complaints for spoiling the beauty of Kirkwood Hall. And yet I have to weigh the benefit to the community against the complaints. The model pictured in [Figure 3](#) shows parking for 556 cars in an underground structure. This leads to the best possible expansion of the building without totally reorienting it. There will be an outdoor restaurant, and the sculpture garden will expand to include our plans for a sculptural triennial.

All these facilities will have better educational opportunities, and I hope a better collection. These programs will help us contribute to the economy, to tourism, to education, and the community better and more fully than ever before. This is clearly an ambitious goal, but I would like for you all to recall walking into Kirkwood Hall for the first time and seeing those columns and capitals. Think about the people who decided to build that building. They had extraordinary ambitions and hopes for its success, and it has been a successful institution. If it is going to be successful in the '90s, and beyond into the next century, it will only be because this community wants to have an institution of this kind and is willing to develop the partnerships that in the future will be necessary to carry out such an ambitious program. Thank you very much.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

QUESTION: Were you satisfied with the results of your first blockbuster organized by the Nelson, the recent Impressionist exhibition and would you do something similar again?

ANSWER: I thought its advantages far outweighed the disadvantages. First, what I liked was the idea of leveraging resources, which we did. We are a medium-sized museum, and we do not have the resources to behave like the National Gallery or the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

We need to find ways to extend our resources, leverage them, multiply them, and to bring exhibitions, and I would add programs, to the area.

We already run these wonderful cooperative programs with UMKC that leverage our resources. We believe in that kind of thing. Organizational matters do become more difficult with the consortium. In this case we had five institutions each with their own tradition of doing things in a different way. In the end, I think it worked.

We already are talking about another consortium effort in the future that might involve different institutions. The consortium model is a better way to secure funding, too. The Ford Motor Company thought it was a wonderful idea and liked the idea of cooperation. Despite its difficulties, the consortium model made each of us a little more expert, because we saw how other people worked. I thought that was of value to us. So, yes, I would do that again.

QUESTION: What about the Mapplethorpe trial?

ANSWER: Well, the judge and the prosecutor won it for the defense. We did not think we were going to win during the last two days, as we felt that the jury was against us. The jury, as it was impaneled, had only three members of the eight who had ever been in a museum.

We also had heard horror stories about Hamilton County, which is quite conservative and has a long tradition of tolerating law enforcement agencies that essentially bully. Any good law officer knows that bullying works. Once you have been bullied about something, you think twice about doing the same thing again. So we were not very optimistic.

In fact, the judge seemed prejudiced against the defense. He appeared to do everything he could to prohibit the defense from developing its case fully. The prosecutor was just as arrogant and smug as he could be. But that good old American sense of fairness began to take over and those postures antagonized the jury. The jury was out only for two and one-half hours, and it was a resounding defeat. The defense was excellent by the way. They were not condescending to the jury; they were well prepared.

But, these kinds of struggles are not going to go away. This issue is going to become more complicated, because it is not just one issue. I see the impulse toward totalitarian thinking growing and spreading across the nation from the left to right and from non-political groups, the ones who are oriented according to different causes. Their claims are based on the assertion of superior truth, whether it is with regard to abortion or to whatever it might be. I remind you of the horrifying specter of Brown and Dartmouth campus cases, which are just the flip side of what went on in Cincinnati in my view. It is the same mentality pervading the nation, and I find it really scary. It is part of the insidious tyranny of the ethics of political correctives.

QUESTION: You alluded earlier to inflation in the art world. I recently read an article in the Wall Street Journal which in effect said that inflation is now behind us and Sotheby's and Christie's have found themselves with numerous unsold paintings not meeting their minimal expectations. The question is, if in fact that is the case, do you foresee another window of opportunity that an organization such as the Nelson could capitalize on in terms of new acquisitions?

ANSWER: The answer is "yes" in a strangely anomalous way. First, let me talk about the high end of the market that is stable, not declining. As I said earlier, there is enough wealth globally, perhaps not in America, but enough wealth globally to take care of that very slim and narrow supply. The middle market is dropping fast because it is not selling.

Another phenomenon is that people are losing confidence in the auction houses. They have not done well recently. They commanded the field, directed the industry, took it away from the dealers, but now we see the dealers getting some of the action back. The dealers can work with their private clients to get more. We are shifting our strategy in response to these changes. Now is the time to buy if you have some money. If you can buy at the high end of the line, you can cut a better deal. It is extraordinary what is in the American art market right now. There are more good paintings at the high level, and even at the \$300,000-\$400,000 level, than there have been at any time in the last ten years. It is a good time to have cash and be able to get into that market because you will be able to do well. The dealers are discounting deeply, and they are scared, particularly in New York, but not so much in Europe.

QUESTION: How much will all of this expansion of the Nelson Gallery cost?

ANSWER: To take it in stages, first we need a certain amount of money to relieve the operations. The programs have grown across the board. Let me give two statistics to illustrate growth. In 1980, Ted Coe, my immediate predecessor wrote to the trustees in a gloomy report annual report complaining that he had no money. He said the place was falling apart and that his budget of \$1.2 million was woefully inadequate. Add a zero to that figure to get our operating budget today. That gives you some idea of the growth of the Nelson. Look at the departments that have been created or expanded; look at the size of the staff; look at the educational programs. There was no development department previously. We have grown dramatically, and right now our first and most pressing need is for major capital funding to catch up to that growth. That adds up to \$27 million in endowment terms, with the income therefrom figured at six percent.

In a later phase we would hope to have a partnership with the good citizens of Kansas City for expanding the building. I feel ultimately that building would belong to them as their capital asset. We need to continue the kind of partnership whereby the private and business sectors develop the endowments that would then operate that expanded facility. If we are going to add art into the equation, we have to come up with a \$100 million endowment that would yield \$5 to \$6 million to spend. We can do well if you have \$5 million to \$6 million to spend annually, and if we concentrate our funds. We would not, I hope, fall into the trap of competing with the people who are not looking at value, but are looking simply at market fashionability and buying inflated works. So what is the total of all types of new programs, \$120 million.

QUESTION: What difference would this endowment make to the community?

ANSWER: I would like to see the museum become more involved with the community, more integrated into the fabric of all the community, and that takes money. It does not come for free. I would like to see the museum become a more potent resource for the community in providing art services. This community needs a lot of art services – it is amazing how many, whether it is in the graphic design world, printing world, even computer software design. I think we can do that with one segment of the art resource center. A new segment of it will be an electronic image and information retention center based on electronic transmission to the client.

A third element would be an archive and learning center for traditional visual images, which would also be a circulating center so that the public could actually remove materials from the premises. What we have now is essentially print oriented with a collection of approximately 150,000 titles, which would approximate 200,000 volumes. It would be the largest art resource center between Chicago and the West Coast. I think that is one thing this community can do,

because we can build it ourselves and it could be of solid quality. We do not need to try to build a mountain range or a bridge over a non-existent bay. I think we should really concentrate on building resources that come back to nurture human resources in the community. I think that is what we really need to work on. I hope the Nelson can play a very important role in furthering the human resources of this community.

QUESTION: You talked about cultural pluralism, and maybe I am wrong, but I don't see much in the way of expanding multiculturalism, particularly Hispanic art.

ANSWER: There is not a lot of Hispanic art coming from Kansas Citians of Hispanic or Mexican ancestry. There are a few, but actually there are many more black Kansas Citians actively making art than Hispanics. Nationwide that is not true. Nationwide the most active minority group is Asian, and there are a lot of good Asian Americans producing art today. The second most prolific is the Hispanic group in national terms. The third major minority group comprises black artists, again in national terms. Of course, there are some superb artists in each and every one of these groups. I think Martin Puryear is just fabulous. He is a very prominent black artist, who prefers to be known as an artist first, who happens to be black.

QUESTION: How much is the auditorium used and would you retain it?

ANSWER: It is used a great deal. It was used last night; it will be used tonight; it will be used Saturday; it will be used Sunday. It is not in constant use from morning to night, but it is used very frequently. I am pleased to say that recently, thanks I think to a better selection of programs and better promotion, we have managed to fill it pretty regularly.

What we are missing is an intermediate-sized lecture room for 100-120 people. So, yes, we do need it, and we also need specialized facilities. But we are not an art center in the way the new Johnson Country center is. We do not need recital halls unless we plan, in fact, to take on yet another dimension and become a community center and present recitals and things of that sort.

QUESTION: Do we rent the auditorium out?

ANSWER: Under certain circumstances we do, but we do not want to be an alternate facility that is in competition with other houses for hire such as the Folly, for example. One of the problems with using our facility is that we have a high-security facility. We have engineers on duty to run the plant in case there is an emergency. We have to have a switchboard operator, which is another expense, and security requires us to have five guards with some relief for those guards. Before you even talk about the cost of your program, whatever that might be, a lecture or musical program, you are loaded up with front end costs that sometimes are not bearable by many organizations.

We do try to alleviate the problems by co-sponsoring certain kinds of events that are well within our mission. We will co-sponsor programs, for example, like the architects association, the AIA. We stipulate that if we co-sponsor the event, it must be free and open to the public, which sometimes deters people who want to charge and only want it to be for their group exclusively. So, if it is co-sponsored, we insist on public availability.

QUESTION: What is the attendance profile – its strengths, weaknesses, and how does regional attendance figure in that profile?

ANSWER: I am not going to be able to give you as good an answer as I would like, because I do not think we have done as much marketing and research on the audience profile as we should and will do, but I can still give you a pretty good answer. We know our audience by zip codes, and we know that we are missing, unfortunately, the east side of Kansas City, Missouri. We are not doing as much with north of the river as we should. We are a midtown, south, near Johnson County, institution. Not quite a third, but more than 30 percent, of the attendance comes from outside the greater Kansas City area and would be considered tourism, which is very good. I think we do contribute to the tourism, as well as to the quality of life and educational fabric of the community.

The Nelson is definitely a tourist draw, but the profile, the complexion of the tourist draw, has changed thanks to the presence of the sculpture garden. Everyone knew that the Nelson was a nice museum, but the sculpture garden pushed us to a new plateau. We now see requests from other museums because of its growth, is now in a period of strain and limitations. We are now at the limit. We are constrained because of our building and by other simple operational matters.

We need, and are instituting, different styles of management and communication internally as administrative initiatives to the needs imposed by the tremendous growth that this last decade has witnessed. In 1981, our bi-weekly payroll was for 89 checks, part-time and full-time. That number is now over 250, with a regular active payroll active roster of 364 and an active and inactive roster of 450. The very fact that we have three people in the personnel department, which did not exist at all in 1980, is a sign of the growth of the '80s. Development did not exist. We had the Fellows only and that was it as far as membership.

I think one of the greatest gains has been in the area of membership, particularly in the sophistication of direct mail marketing and telemarketing. We have really done a wonderful job in membership acquisition and retention. We have instituted all kinds of new campaigns over the last couple of years. For example, we have had the annual campaigns for businesses who are not part of the Business Council. These are the kinds of things with which we have had good success and at a very high level of quality. Also, in the case of telemarketing, we have developed sensitivity to the person who picks up the phone and hears a pitch from the Nelson about why they should give or join.

The library is one of the most exciting things to come in the future, but I do not want it to be thought of as just a library. As the art market presents its difficulties, perhaps the library is the place to direct more of our energies – although I am a firm believer that the ultimate measure of the museum is the art collection. What you do with it is largely of local interest. New York does not care if we have an Altman film festival on four successive Tuesdays. Neither does Paris, but we care locally. These are the things we will be coping with in the future. The '90s are going to be stormy, not bad, just stormy.

QUESTION: What did you do with the furniture out of Oak Hall and is it ever going to be exhibited again?

ANSWER: It will come back probably used in a membership room or a dining room. As a memorial to Nelson, I suppose, it was a fine idea. As a piece of architecture representing distinguished accomplishment in architecture, it was not such a good idea. It gave people the wrong idea, I think, about quality.

Of the objects that were on display in Oak Hall, only a handful were Nelson's. The tapestries came from his house, Oak Hall. They have been carefully cleaned, and every stick of lumber has been carefully numbered, mapped, and stored in the best cave storage in Kansas City. They were all carefully photographed by specialists in dismantling these things, and we will bring them back when we expand, but in what form I do not know. There will be different furnishings there, that is certainly true, but the room will have some of the same environment.

QUESTION: What was the budget for the last five years?

ANSWER: It has grown pretty steadily at around \$500,000 a year, and now the base operating budget is around \$9,000,000. If you gross it up with certain capital expenditures and architectural installation projects, it is about \$11.5 million this year. The gross budget is actually down this year from the previous year, which was about \$12 million. Just to award employees a cost of living adjustment based on inflation here in Kansas City, adds a minimum of \$150,000.

The expansion of the staff has largely stopped. We are in a period of fine tuning now as we have hit a ceiling. We really cannot go on to the next plateau because of the constraints. The real problems we have are those experienced by everyone in the industry, namely health care costs which quite frankly are killing us. Unfortunately employees never realize this; all they look at is their wage. They do not see that we have not factored the medical costs out of the consumers' index, so they get a bonus there. They have increased compensation because of the value of the medical benefits they are receiving. Those are substantial benefits at substantial cost.

We are trying to stabilize costs, but since we have gone from spending \$200,000 a year in special exhibitions to \$2 million in response to community demands, that puts a lot of pressure on us. I think it is important to understand where this money comes from. Of the roughly \$9 million, between \$3.7 and \$4.1 will be investment income. The balance has to be raised or earned. That is the importance of the Fellows memberships, the Business Council, the Friends, and their subsidiary support organizations, such as the Print Society, the Spencer Library Associates, and others who help in individual areas. Membership income is now almost \$2 million – that is pretty good for an institution of our size.

One thing we are good at is raising money. We like to raise money because we think we have a product everyone can believe in. We certainly believe in it, and we think you do.

We have a good track record, so that is why I also want to push the Friends from the current level to 17,000, which would bring in a net, excluding space costs, of roughly \$100,000 more. It can be done over a 3-year period.

It is not just the \$100,000 that counts. What is important is the impact on use of the museum because those people will use their membership privileges, and they will come more often. Increasing the membership will have an impact on our standing in the community, especially if we are able to get non-traditional audiences in the door more often and position the institution better for a day when we will have to call upon the public for support in realizing these very ambitious plans for the building. So there are lots of good reasons to increase the Friends, and I like the idea of more voices from the community represented through the membership.

MARC F. WILSON. A recognized authority on Oriental art, Mr. Wilson has served as Director of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art since 1982. He came to the Nelson in 1973 as Curator of Chinese Art after serving for nearly two years in the Department of Calligraphy and Painting at Taiwan's National Palace Museum.

Mr. Wilson is a leading spokesman for art museum personnel on issues of censorship and recently was involved in the controversies about the reauthorization of National Endowment for the Arts and the Robert Mapplethorpe trial in Cincinnati. He has served on numerous government commissions and panels, and has been a trustee and officer of the Association of Art Museum Directors and an active promoter of museum exchanges. He has published numerous works on Chinese art.

Originally from Ohio, Mr. Wilson received a degrees in Asian Art History and Chinese Studies from Yale University. At the University of Kansas, he worked with Laurence Sickman, dean of Chinese art studies in the United States.



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MIDCONTINENT PERSPECTIVES was a lecture series sponsored by the [Midwest Research Institute](#) as a public service to the midcontinent region. Its purpose was to present new viewpoints on economic, political, social, and scientific issues that affect the Midwest and the nation.

Midcontinent Perspectives was financed by the Kimball Fund, named for Charles N. Kimball, President of MRI from 1950 to 1975, Chairman of its Board of Trustees from 1975 to 1979, and President Emeritus until his death in 1994. Initiated in 1970, the Fund has been supported by annual contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations. Today it is the primary source of endowment income for MRI. It provides "front-end" money to start high-quality projects that might generate future research contracts of importance. It also funds public-interest projects focusing on civic or regional matters of interest.

Initiated in 1974 and continuing until 1994, the sessions of the Midcontinent Perspectives were arranged and convened by Dr. Kimball at four- to six-week intervals. Attendance was by invitation, and the audience consisted of leaders in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The lectures, in monograph form, were later distributed to several thousand individuals and institutions throughout the country who were interested in MRI and in the topics addressed.

The [Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City](#), in cooperation with MRI, has reissued the Midcontinent Perspectives Lectures in electronic format in order to make the valuable information which they contain newly accessible and to honor the creator of the series, Dr. Charles N. Kimball.