

Upward and Onward with the Arts

JOHN HUMMEL

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A serious proposal for a joint city-county effort to renovate the Civic Auditorium was brought up, too—an idea first mentioned in the Cultural Action Plan some two years ago. It is likely that the first steps towards initiating such a partnership will be taken when the Commission holds its next regular meeting, on November 12, says Commission Chairman Tom Karwin. The Commission is also eyeing the old County Jail on Front Street as a future home for the Commission itself, the Cultural Council (it needs to be more "visible," the Commissioners agreed), and, eventually, for the County Museum of Art.

When the building, or renovating, of major structures is discussed, the question of dollars is never far behind. Prospects for future funding took up a good deal of time, and the fact that Santa Cruz occupies a peculiarly privileged position with the California Arts Council in Sacramento became very clear indeed. Pat Litkey, the CAC's Director of its State-Local Partnership Program, suggested that, while in some instances traditional sources of funding have been cut (the National Endowment for the Arts, for example, which spent some \$12 million this year, has been chopped back to \$6 million for 1982), the arts still retain a favored position in this state. The California Cultural Council, and the Arts Council, are the only two state agencies whose budgets have been increased in the face of Jerry Brown's born-again enthusiasm for fiscal austerity, Litkey said.



The County Arts Commissioners: (left to right) Eloise Smith, Tom Karwin, Michael Wright, and Mary K. Hubbard.

Litkey also commented on the idea of separating the County Arts Commission from the Department of Parks and Recreation—an idea which, increasingly, has been privately discussed in the corridors of power (wherever they may be), while tension between the Commission and the Department's Director, Larry Norris, continues to simmer. "Some other counties are doing this," Litkey said, pointing out that the administrative problems—and temptations—are obvious: "Supervisors and Department Heads tend to pirate funds from the arts for other needs." Litkey also remarked that, in Sacramento, the Governor was also talking about a Cabinet-level Secretary of Cultural Affairs.

The Commission's urge towards secession finally came out in the open when Commissioner Eloise Smith proposed the formation of a Cultural Affairs Division as an independent entity of its own. The idea is one which the other three Commissioners are willing to consider, at least; some, like artist Michael Wright, are wholeheartedly behind it. "I've been advocating the separation ever since I've been on the Council," Wright says. "I'm glad Eloise brought it up." Mary K. Hubbard, who sees some arguments in favor of the change, is nevertheless more cautious, as is Tom Karwin. "Changing the structure like that might be difficult to do," Ms. Hubbard suggests, and Karwin says that, while the idea is "worth a good look," Parks and Recreation "may be the most expedient home for it."

All the Commissioners expressed satisfaction with the workshop meeting itself; all said they felt it was something which should be done again, and soon. Beverly Grova, the Cultural Council's Associate Director (and head of the Council's showpiece, the Spectra Program of artists in the schools) agrees: "There were certainly lots of good ideas,"

Ms. Grova said. "Some of them are not really new; some are actually in the Cultural Action Plan, and just haven't been implemented yet. But clearly people are wanting more and more to happen, and that's wonderful."

Some of the artists who were there were not that enthusiastic about the direction the Commission and its Council are taking. Joel Eis, the resident designer for the Bear Republic Theater, complained of what he called "reverse tourism"—"There are people here in Santa Cruz," Eis said, "who can give you exact directions for finding ACT in San Francisco, but don't know where the Bear Republic is." The policy at the new County Art Museum of emphasizing travelling shows, and bringing the work of outside artists to the area was cited as an example of the neglect of artists here: "Local artists are being ignored," said Rafael DeSoto, a charge that was echoed by others who were there.

Ms. Grova concedes that, in its first year, the Cultural Commission has put its emphasis on the artists in the schools program, and on the grant-giving function. "We have not done a lot to address the individual artist's concerns, except by hiring them in the Spectra Program," she said. "But we're planning a lot of workshops now, especially in marketing, to help local artists sell their work."

So, in some ways, Jerry Kamstra's appeal came to symbolize both the progress that has been made in the arts here, and the problems that remain. That Kamstra really expected the Commissioners to write him a check on Wednesday, there in the Octagon, is doubtful. That individual artists are not always attuned to the politics and the procedures of grantsmanship and bureaucracies is certainly true ("The artist doesn't come out of a computer," Kamstra said). But the structures, the energy, and the money are there, and a lot is going on. Certainly there is, increasingly, an atmosphere here in which the arts can take off on their own. ■



Jerry Kamstra advances the claims of poetry, to no avail.